

# Student Housing Cooperatives: Communitarianism among American Youth

DEBORAH ALTUS

---

SCHOLARS HAVE DESCRIBED the first half of this century as being nearly devoid of communitarian activity. As Arthur Bestor wrote, "For most American reformers in an industrialized age, communitarianism was a tool that had lost its edge, probably for ever".<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Edward Spann added that 1920 marked "... the end of a century long effort to recreate society along cooperative lines".<sup>2</sup> But as Timothy Miller's new bibliography of American communes from 1860 to 1960 shows, the convention of dismissing the communitarian activity of this period needs to be rethought.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in terms of cooperative living, this period saw the birth and exponential growth of the cooperative movement on college campuses from coast to coast. Certainly the student co-ops of the 1930's and 40's would be surprised to hear that this era was devoid of communitarian idealism, as their efforts during the depression and, subsequently, the war, were in large part motivated by a spirit of fellowship and egalitarianism.

Very little has been written on student co-op history although

I am indebted to Jim Jones and Luther Buchele for providing me with materials necessary to complete this manuscript. I am also grateful to Lyman Tower Sargent for introducing me to the literature on cooperative housekeeping. The research for this manuscript was funded in part by Commonwealth Terrace Co-op, Falcon Heights, Minnesota. The manuscript was prepared while the author was studying consumer cooperatives as a Mary Switzer Fellow, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

1. Arthur Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2nd Enlarged Edition, 1970), 252; originally published in 1950.

2. Edward K. Spann, *Brotherly Tomorrows* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), xiv.

3. Timothy Miller, *Bibliography of American Communes, 1860-1960* (New York: Garland, 1990).

## 2 COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

nearly untapped primary source material exists in several places.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, an examination of this subject provides a look at American culture that does not match the conventional picture of self-centered, materialistic American youth.

The first student cooperatives were bookstores and dining clubs that opened on college campuses around the end of the 19th century. The best known of these early ventures in student cooperation is the Harvard Coop (rhymes with *loop*), a cooperative bookstore that opened in 1882. The Coop is often referred to as the first student cooperative in the nation<sup>5</sup> However, Florence Parker, in her comprehensive history of the cooperative movement in the United States, *The First 125 Years* (1956), made note of a co-op bookstore at the University of Tennessee that opened in 1862.<sup>6</sup> A number of cooperative bookstores opened on college campuses around the country in the 1880's and 1890's, with a particularly successful example in 1896 at the University of Texas in Austin.<sup>7</sup> A 1906 article lists 15 colleges and universities with successful co-op stores.<sup>8</sup>

Student cooperative dining clubs date back to the same time period. In 1886, Mary Livermore, a feminist and advocate of cooperative housekeeping, wrote that cooperative dining clubs were operating for students at the University of Michigan and in Berea, Ohio.<sup>9</sup> At the cooperative clubs where she dined in Ann Arbor, Livermore noted that "... their food, excellent in quality, quantity, and variety, and well-cooked generally, costs each one from one dollar forty cents to one dollar seventy-five cents per week." At the cooperative club in Berea she added that "... meals are furnished to each co-operator, excellent in quality, and abundant, for nine cents a meal." In 1903, Mary Hinman Abel, another cooperative housekeeping advocate, noted that the

4. The Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan and the University archives at the University of Kansas, for example, have boxes of information on student housing cooperatives.

5. Mary Dooling, "Co-operatives on the Campus," in Leo R. Ward, ed., *United For Freedom: Co-operatives and Christian Democracy* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Bruce Publishing Company, 1945); Austin J. App, "Student Cooperatives," *Catholic Educational Review* 36 (February 1938): 99-107.

6. Florence E. Parker, *The First 125 Years: A History of Distributive and Service Cooperation in the United States, 1829-1954* (Superior, Wis: Cooperative Publishing Association, 1956).

7. "Shop Talk," *Publishers' Weekly* 150 (August 3, 1946): 483; "Texas Co-op Remodeled," *Publishers' Weekly* 144 (March 30, 1940): 1304-1305.

8. D. D. Smith, "College Cooperative Stores," (*The Cooperative Journal*, 6, September 22, 1906), p. 2.

9. Mary A. Livermore, "Co-operative Housekeeping," *The Chautauquan* 6 (April 1886): 398.

students' cooperative boarding club "... is a recognized feature in college towns."<sup>10</sup>

The beginnings of student *housing* cooperatives have not been clearly documented. According to the conventional history of the movement, student housing cooperatives began during, and as a result of, the Great Depression. Many authors give the Depression, and sometimes 1932 specifically, as the start date for the student housing cooperative movement.<sup>11</sup> Even Florence Parker's well-researched history of the cooperative movement states that "... it was not until the Great Depression that the student houses began to develop."<sup>12</sup>

That the Depression marked the beginning for student housing cooperatives is far from accurate. According to a survey of student housing cooperatives conducted in 1921, Northwestern University opened a co-op for women students in 1886.<sup>13</sup> Sources also refer to co-ops at Wellesley and Mount Holyoake before the turn of the century.<sup>14</sup> One source states that the earliest college co-op "... was founded by Cornell students at the close of the nineteenth century," adding that "the University of Washington 'co-op' dates back to 1900."<sup>15</sup> Yet another source mentions housing co-ops at Berkeley and Stanford around the turn of the century.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the exact start date, it is clear that student housing co-ops had their beginnings far before the Great Depression and likely before the turn of the century.

The first well-documented wave of student housing cooperatives began in the second decade of this century in the Midwestern

10. Mary Hinman Abel, "Co-operative Housekeeping," *The House Beautiful* 13 (April 1903): 365.

11. Emory S. Bogardus, "The Campus Cooperative Movement," *Sociology and Social Research* 28 (1944): 296-307; Art Danforth, *Student Cooperatives . . . A Way of life* (Washington, D.C.: Cooperative League of the USA, 1971); Mary Dooling, "Co-operatives on the Campus," in Leo R. Ward, ed., *United For Freedom: Co-operatives and Christian Democracy* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Bruce Publishing Company, 1945); Educational Facilities Laboratory, *Student Housing* (New York: New York, 1972); Bertram B. Fowler, "Co-ops on the Campus" *Survey Graphic* (June, 1939): 397-398, 406-408; "Cooperatives among Students in the United States, 1941," *Monthly Labor Review* 56 (April, 1943): 702-720.

12. Florence E. Parker, *op cit*, 294.

13. Hazel Stiebeling, *Cooperative Housing for Women* (Emporia, Kans.: Kansas State Normal School, July, 1921).

14. Arno Nowotny, "Student Co-operative Projects," *School Activities* 10 (1939): 371-372, 405; A. S. Wing and O. A. Fitzgerald, "Cooperative Living in Colleges," *Woman's Home Companion* 66 (October, 1939): 36, 38, 118.

15. Fred E. Luchs, "Co-ops Come to the Campus," *Frontiers of Democracy* 4 (1938): 218-219.

16. Personal communication, David Thompson, National Cooperative Business Association, October 31, 1990.

#### 4 COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

Universities of Wisconsin, Michigan and Kansas. The University of Wisconsin may have opened the first co-op in this wave in 1915.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of these early ventures in cooperative living was to offer good quality, inexpensive housing for self-supporting women students. At the time, housing options for women students were extremely limited. Before dormitory housing was built, women's choices consisted of sororities, boarding houses and family homes. Indeed the choices of women who were self-supporting were even more limited. Thus, the development of cooperative housing, where residents could lessen expenses by sharing resources and working together, met an important need for women students who might otherwise have been unable to attend college.

The University of Michigan opened its first cooperative for self-supporting women in 1917 and the University of Kansas in 1919. The University of Montana, Boston University, and Iowa State University followed suit in the 1920's.<sup>18</sup> In some cases, the Dean of Women played an active role in starting these early co-ops, as did several women's alumnae groups.<sup>19</sup> The idea was likely circulated at regional or national conferences of Deans' of Women, or perhaps through their publications. Where the original idea came from, however, is unclear. Unlike many of the student housing co-ops which opened in the 1930's, these early groups did not appear to be acquainted with the Rochdale Principles of cooperation,<sup>20</sup> nor did they seem to be modeling themselves after the consumer cooperatives of the day.

Alternatively, it is possible that these early women's cooperatives may have been inspired by the cooperative housekeeping literature. The movement to promote cooperative housekeeping began in the second half of the 19th century and was propelled into the 20th century by vocal activists who felt that cooperation was the only way to free

17. Winifred Brockhaus, "Cooperation," *The Wisconsin Alumnus* (May, 1950): 14-15.

18. Leslie Irish, "Organizing a Dream: The Establishment of Mary Bartron Henderson House," (unpublished manuscript; from the files of James Jones, General Manager, Inter-Cooperative Council, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; "Women's Co-operative Houses," *The Jayhawker*, University of Kansas (1920): 277; "Students Cooperative Houses," *The Survey* 43 (February 21, 1920): 602; Lucy Jenkins Franklin, "Co-operative Housing," *Journal of Higher Education* 2 (1931): 35-36; E. Jean Reis, "Cooperative Dormitories," *School and Society* 48 (1938): 343-344.

19. Brockhaus, *op cit.*; "Ever Wonder Who Lives in Old Brick House?" *The Ann Arbor News* (September 26, 1987); Irish, *op cit.*; "Women's Co-operative Houses," *op cit.*

20. For a description of the Rochdale Principles, see, for example, Emil Sekerak and Art Danforth, *Consumer Cooperation* (Santa Clara, CA: Consumers Cooperative Publishing Association, 1980).

women from a life of domestic drudgery.<sup>21</sup> Dolores Hayden referred to the cooperative housekeeping pioneers as "material feminists" because they "dared to define a grand domestic revolution" in the material conditions of women.<sup>22</sup> Most likely the Deans of Women who were involved in starting the early women's co-ops would have been exposed to tracts on cooperative housekeeping, as such writings had been circulated in mainstream publications including *Good Housekeeping*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Ladies Home Journal*.<sup>23</sup> For example, Alberta Corbin, dean of women and founder of the women's co-ops at the University of Kansas, may have been influenced by the material feminists. Corbin, who received her Ph.D. from Yale in 1902, was a suffragist and women's rights activist, who, as a college student, had spoken on a panel alongside Susan B. Anthony. She established a lecture series at the University of Kansas on women's issues, and brought to town speakers including Hull-House founder Jane Addams and feminist minister Anna Shaw.<sup>24</sup> Corbin was undoubtedly acquainted with the cooperative housekeeping literature, and it is possible that it was from this literature where she got the idea for opening co-ops for self-supporting women.

Regardless of where the idea came from, it is clear that the early women's co-ops were established to provide inexpensive housing for women who otherwise could not attend school. The social idealism prevalent among the second wave of student co-ops in the 1930's, who established co-ops to address social problems ranging from poverty to racial segregation, did not seem to be a part of the women's co-ops of the teens and twenties. Despite the financial motivation of the self-supporting women co-ops, saving money was clearly not the only advantage they reaped from cooperative living. Indeed, the

21. Abel, *op cit*; "Roswell Fisher, The Practical Side of Cooperative Housekeeping," *The Nineteenth Century* 7 (September, 1877): 282-291; Fannie E. Fuller, "Practical Co-operation," *Good Housekeeping* 11 (July, 1890): 125-126; Elizabeth Moss King, "Cooperative Housekeeping," *Contemporary Review* 23 (1873), 66-91; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (Urbana, 111.: University of Illinois Press, 1903); Mary A. Livermore, "Co-operative Housekeeping," *The Chautauquan* 6 (April, 1886): 396-399; Melusina Fay Peirce, "Co-operative Housekeeping," *Chamber's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art* (4th series) 273 (March 20, 1869): 177-179.

22. Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

23. Edward Bellamy, "A Vital Domestic Problem: Household Service Reform," *Good Housekeeping* 10, December 1889) 74-77; Fuller, *op cit*.; Zona Gale, "Shall the Kitchen in Our Home Go?" *Ladies' Home Journal* 36 (March 1919): 35, 50; A series of five articles by Melusina Fay Peirce on Co-operative Housekeeping was published by the *Atlantic Monthly* 22-23 (November, 1868 - March, 1869).

24. Paul Caviness, *Dr. Alberta Linton Corbin, 1870-1941*, (Lawrence, Kans.: Douglas County Historical Society).

women's co-ops at the University of Kansas were so meaningful to their residents that one group of members kept up a round-robin letter for sixty years.<sup>25</sup> The creation of a "homey" atmosphere was also very important to these women, many of whom had lived previously in rooming houses where access to much of the house was restricted. The bonds created by living and working with one's peers was also important to the women. As Helen Hanely wrote in 1920:

A cooperative house appeals to me a great deal because of the low expenses. It is an advantage to a Freshman girl, because she has the opportunity to become readily acquainted with a large group of girls. Besides lessening expenses, the girls produce a home atmosphere which to me means a great deal. We have access to the whole house; something that generally one does not have in most rooming houses. Each girl in the house must give and take as circumstances dictate, and in this way she learns the spirit of cooperation.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, at Iowa State College, more than half of the 119 students surveyed about their experiences in cooperatives gave reasons other than financial need for joining a co-op. Students mentioned "the sense of equality" among members, "closer friendships," and the "harmonious atmosphere" as reasons for living cooperatively.<sup>27</sup>

Articles on women's housing cooperatives began to appear in the home economics journals of the 1930's.<sup>28</sup> In the tradition pioneered in the mid-19th century by Catharine Beecher, who felt that domestic life was a subject worthy of critical scholarship,<sup>29</sup> the authors of these articles were studying housing cooperation from the vantage point of domestic science. For example, one article presented an analysis of the diets of women living in a co-op at the University of Nebraska, noting everything from their intake of vitamins and minerals to the cost of

25. "Graduate Donates \$100,000 to KU" *Lawrence Daily Journal World* (April, 29, 1992): 3B.

26. Helen Hanely, "As the Students Tell It," *The University of Kansas News Letter* 20 (1920): 1, 3.

27. Fern W. Gleiser, "The Management of College Co-operative Halls," *Journal of Home Economics* 32 (1940): 28-30.

28. Margaret S. Chaney and Elizabeth Rogge, "The First Year of a College Cooperative House," *Journal of Home Economics* 27 (1935): 166-168; Elizabeth C. Gibbs, "Democratic Living in a College Residence Hall," *Journal of Home Economics* 31 (1939): 365-368; Ella P. Gribskov, "Cooperative Dormitories at Iowa State College," *Journal of Home Economics* 25 (1933): 305-308; Irene Tolliver, "Cooperative Housekeeping in a College Dormitory," *Practical Home Economics* 9 (1931): 9, 27.

29. Catharine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (Boston: T. H. Webb & Co., 1843).

their food, which averaged 22.5 cents per person per day.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in 1935, the Kansas State College Bulletin published an entire issue on how to set up and run a cooperative residence hall, including everything from sample work schedules and management charts to architectural drawings of a cooperative kitchen.<sup>31</sup>

Although students were actively involved in the day-to-day work of running the co-ops, universities played a large role in funding and supervising the early women's co-ops of the teens and 20's. The role of the university as overseer is not surprising given the attitudes towards women in that era. In the 1930's, however, one saw the birth of a much different type of housing cooperative: the student owned and managed co-op. They were started by groups of men around 1932 at Texas A & M and the University of Washington. Women quickly followed suit and the movement took off like wildfire. By 1941, the number of students living in cooperatives had expanded to 50,000, and student co-ops did a business of over six million dollars in that year.<sup>32</sup> A number of student housing cooperative associations that started in the 1930's (e.g., at University of California, Berkeley; University of Michigan; University of Kansas; and University of Toronto) survive to the present day. Their more than half-century of survival is remarkable, especially when one considers the range of problems they have faced over the years, including everything from losing large numbers of members to military conscription in World War II to the drug busts and student uprisings of the 1960's and 70's.

As with the early women's co-ops, the Depression-era co-ops were started out of grave financial necessity. But once underway, financial savings became a secondary purpose for many of the students for whom the co-op became a springboard into socialist politics, anti-war activities, and civil rights protests. The popularity of the Depression-era co-op is reflected by the widespread press that the student housing cooperative movement began to receive by the mid-1930's. Reports of cooperative activity on campus were printed in popular, widely circulated magazines and newspapers including *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*.<sup>33</sup> Even the Federal Govern-

30. Thelma J. McMillan and Ruth M. Leverton, "The Self-Chosen Diets of College Girls in a Co-operative Dormitory," *Journal of Home Economics* 35 (1943): 514-518.

31. Bessie Brooks West, "Feeding College Students on a Co-operative Basis," *Kansas State College Bulletin* 19 (July 1, 1935): 5-44.

32. "Cooperatives among Students in the United States, 1941," *op cit*.

33. "College Co-ops," *Newsweek* 12 (September 19, 1938): 25-26; "Cooperatives band on 159 campuses," *New York Times* (March 7, 1937): 6N; Vernon Pope, "Life in a Campus Co-op," *Saturday Evening Post* 216 (November 27, 1943): 26-27, 72, 73.

## 8 COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

ment became interested, publishing reports in the *Monthly Labor Review* in 1939 and 1943, and in the *Bureau of Education Bulletin* in 1938.<sup>34</sup>

Particularly dramatic stories were told and retold about the student cooperative experiments that started at Texas A & M and the University of Washington around 1932. The co-ops at these schools are often listed as the models that were used by students on campuses from coast to coast to start co-ops during the '30's. The following story was written in 1939 about the founding of the Texas A & M co-ops:

There was a haunted house on the edge of the campus. There was also a man, Daniel Russell, professor of rural sociology, who felt a strange affinity for that haunted house. It was reputed to be the horrific hang-out of spooks who walked eerily in the dark of the moon. But Professor Russell knew of other spooks that stalked no less grimly and didn't even observe the phases of the moon. They were the living ghosts of flesh-and-blood boys, and all of them were packing their books to go home. Mr. Russell watched them depart in the depression year—fine, intelligent, willing boys, turning their backs on the college as their slim resources melted to the vanishing point.<sup>35</sup>

To make a long story short, Mr. Russell suggested to the boys that they fix up the haunted house. The boys did all the work to repair the house, brought milk and produce from their farms, and managed the house cheaply enough that they were able to remain in school. Indeed, they were so successful that others started following their model and in two years, the number of co-op houses at Texas A & M jumped to 20. By 1936, 700 Texas A & M students were housed in cooperatives and students at the University of Texas in Austin began to follow their model.

Student co-ops took off at the same time in Seattle, where University of Washington students not only opened co-op houses, but started a student-owned and managed central co-op kitchen that delivered hot meals in its own truck to co-ops around the campus.<sup>36</sup> In 1938, *Newsweek* reported that students at the University of Washington paid \$22.50 per month for room and board, about half the price of a fraternity and one-third the price of a dormitory.<sup>37</sup>

But as mentioned before, economic necessity was not the only reason students started housing cooperatives. For example, the desire

34. "Cooperative enterprises among college students" *Monthly Labor Review* 48 (1939): 850-852; "Cooperatives among Students in the United States, 1941," *op at*; Fred J. Kelly and Ella B. Ratcliffe, "College Projects for Aiding Students," *U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin* 9 (1938): 1-69.

35. Bertram B. Fowler, "Co-ops on the Campus" *Survey Graphic* (June, 1939): 397-398.

36. Fowler, *ibid*.

37. "College Co-ops," *op cit*.



to put Christian teachings into practice was expressed by some of the groups. The "Three Squares" co-op in Madison, Wisconsin, was described as "an attempt to place the teachings of Jesus in practical operation to meet some of the pressing needs of young people."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, some of the co-ops were founded with help from YMCA's and YWCA's,<sup>39</sup> and some were inspired by the visits from Japan of the Christian missionary, Toyohiko Kagawa, who taught that "a good Christian is one who goes out and starts a cooperative!"<sup>40</sup> Discussion groups held by religious leaders on campus often served as the springboard for starting campus co-ops.<sup>41</sup>

A Catholic Father called cooperation "the Catholic answer to communism,"<sup>42</sup> while another author stated that "in student cooperatives, through mutual self-help, students are learning the practical application of Christian principles."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America was instrumental in bringing together student co-ops from around the nation in 1935 for a three-day seminar. This seminar resulted in the formation of the National Committee on Student Cooperatives,<sup>44</sup> the predecessor of the North American Students Cooperative League and the present day North American Students of Cooperation, or NASCO.

Out of the desire to implement Christian teachings came the practice of many student co-ops to provide inter-racial housing on college campuses. A number of student housing cooperatives around the country became the first place on their respective campuses, and sometimes the first place in their towns, to provide integrated housing. For example, a women's co-op at the University of Kansas provided the first inter-racial housing for students at KU. The co-op included integrated room-sharing, which enraged many people, including the landlord of the building next door, who wrote a letter to the chancellor threatening to close his student apartment house if the inter-racial co-op was allowed to continue.<sup>45</sup>

38. App, *op cit.*, 103.

39. For example, the first co-op house at U.C. Berkeley, started in 1933, was sponsored by the YMCA; Henley House Cooperative at the University of Kansas, was rented from the YWCA in 1945. Bridget M. Cain, "Henley House Cooperative, 1945-1955," (unpublished manuscript, 1992); North American Students of Cooperation, *1994-1995 Guide to Campus Co-ops* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: NASCO, 1994); see also Bogardus, *op cit.*

40. Sekerak & Danforth, *op cit.*, 82.

41. Bogardus, *op cit.*

42. Father LaFarge, *Communism and the Catholic Answer*, as quoted in App, *op cit.*, 99.

43. Dooling, *op cit.*, 199.

44. Parker, *op cit.*, 295-296.

45. Cain, *op cit.*

## 10 COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

An inter-racial co-op at the Art Center School in Los Angeles was said to be a place where "Negro and white, Catholic and Jew, Italian and Chinese, live peaceably together..."<sup>46</sup> In 1937, the *New York Times* reported that a student cooperative dining club at the University of Illinois became the first place where Black students could get a meal on campus.<sup>47</sup> From their beginnings in the 1930's, the co-ops at the University of Michigan were racially diverse, despite the fact that "most of Ann Arbor as well as much of the nation, still practiced racial segregation."<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Watermargin Co-op at Cornell University provided the first racially integrated housing in Ithaca.<sup>49</sup> In 1946, *Ebony* magazine ran a piece on the FDR co-op in Cleveland, Ohio, where, according to the magazine, "... 23 youths- two Negroes, five Japanese, one Chinese, seven 'white gentiles', and eight Jews (as racists would list them). . ." live and work together. The co-op was described as "... a bold experiment in which the younger generation is showing their elders that democracy does work."<sup>50</sup> Students at the University of Kansas not only offered racially-integrated co-op housing, but worked to see that sporting events and campus hangouts became integrated as well. A group of co-op members staged a sit-in at a popular campus cafe in 1948 to protest the cafe's practice of serving only whites. The co-ops were thrown out of the cafe by the football team, but their efforts at integration were eventually successful.<sup>51</sup>

Political activity in the co-ops didn't stop at racial issues. Many student co-ops were actively involved in socialist politics, such as the students who started the Michigan Socialist Co-op House in 1932.<sup>52</sup> In a 1944 article in *Challenge*, America's Socialist youth publication, student housing cooperatives were described as the "socialist solution" for enabling students to attend college.<sup>53</sup> One of the women residents of

46. Kay Campbell, "Democracy at Work" *The American Home* (July, 1949): 10,13,15.

47. "Cooperatives Band on 159 Campuses," *op cit*.

48. Amy Mericle, Suzanne Wilson, and James Jones, *In Our Own Hands: A History of Student Housing Cooperatives at the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Inter-Cooperative Council, 1994), 59.

49. North American Students of Cooperation, *NASCO's 1994-1995 Guide to Campus Co-ops* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: NASCO, 1994), 41.

50. "Co-op House: Youths Live Yogether and Like It," *Ebony* 1 (March, 1946): 8,12.

51. Personal communication, Luther Buchele, co-op member at the University of Kansas in the 1940's; Kristine M. McCusker, "The Forgotten Years of America's Civil Rights Movement: The University of Kansas, 1939-1961," (paper presented at the Western Regional Social Science Conference, April 21,1993).

52. North American Students of Cooperation, *op cit*.

53. Annabelle Morrissett, "Campus Co-ops: A Glimpse of the Future," *Challenge* 2 (October, 1944): 3.

Muriel Lester co-op during the 1940's at the University of Michigan remembers being taunted by other students- even the men living in co-op houses- because of her leftist politics. She recalled that "there was a real division between the men in the men's (co-op) houses and the women in the women's houses in that the men were far more conservative and were calling us prostitutes and communists and all kinds of things."<sup>54</sup>

Cooperation was also described as a " 'middle way' between the extremes of Marxism and monopoly capitalism"<sup>55</sup> and many co-op members were eager to spread the word about cooperative democracy to the masses. Unlike the co-ops of the 1910's and 20's, the co-ops of the 1930's and 40's were politically energized. Their newsletters, pamphlets and brochures often referred to the Rochdale Principles and stressed the importance of economic and social cooperation for solving society's problems.<sup>56</sup> An example of the political sensitization of student housing co-op members is provided by novelist Marge Piercy, who lived cooperatively when she attended the University of Michigan:

It was cheaper and freer and I was a working class woman from Detroit without much money and with no particular liking for the very middle class rules of the dormitory.... It was more political; it was more left. It was more progressive, it was more interesting. There were bright people, politically engaged, which was very unusual at the time. I think it is historically important how political it was possible to be in the (co-ops) and how much more freedom for women there was than there was supposed to be, or than there was on the rest of the campus. It was possible to be a full functioning political woman there, as you couldn't be in the dorms.<sup>57</sup>

Student housing co-ops went through a dormant phase during the 1950's, then re-emerged in the late 1960's as a place where students could exert their autonomy during a period when autonomy was particularly prized. Students' desire to live cooperatively was helped

54. Lisa Davis, "Towards a Women's Perspective," *The Alumni Cooperator, University of Michigan Inter-Cooperative Council* 2 (1991): 11.

55. Danforth, *op cit*, 2.

56. Consumers Cooperative Association, *Answering Your Questions about Campus Co-ops*, (Kansas City, Mo.: Consumers Cooperative Association, undated, printed around 1940); Central League of Campus Co-ops, *Meet the Co-ops*, (Kansas City, MO: Central League of Campus Co-ops, undated, printed around 1948); North American Students Cooperative League, *Co-ops on Campus* (Chicago, IL: Cooperative League of the USA). Some early student housing co-op brochures and newsletters are held at the Art Danforth Library of the Inter-Cooperative Council at the University of Michigan and the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan.

57. Lisa Davis, "Marge Piercy on Cooperative Living," *Communities Journal of Cooperative Living* 82 (1994): 57.

## 12 COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

by a loan program started by HUD in 1968 that enabled many new co-ops to get off the ground. President Richard M. Nixon froze the funds for the program in 1973, but the cooperative movement had been revitalized and managed to remain active without federal assistance.

In 1946, Katharine Kumler predicted that "the number of campus cooperative houses will increase and that they will become an integral part of many college communities."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the Inter-Cooperative Council at the University of Michigan that started in 1937 with three houses now includes 19 houses and about 550 members.<sup>59</sup> In 1933, students at the University of California, Berkeley, rented a house to start a co-op that now serves some 1,200 members in 17 houses. The Oberlin Student Cooperative Association serves about 600 students while the University of Texas housing co-ops have a combined membership near 800.

Canada is also home to a large, active, and long-standing student cooperative movement. For example, Campus Cooperative Residence, Inc., in Toronto, Ontario, opened its doors in 1936 in a rented house and now serves some 310 students in 30 buildings. Science '44 Co-op in Kingston, Ontario, opened in 1941 with one house and now serves 168 students in 18 houses. In Waterloo, Ontario, the Waterloo Cooperative Residence, Inc., houses around 1,000 students from the University of Waterloo and Wilfred Laurier University.

The North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO) holds yearly cooperative institutes that attract student co-ops from all over the United States and Canada. NASCO, headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, opened a West Coast office in Santa Barbara, California, in 1991 and, in the late 1980's, started a development branch, the Campus Cooperative Development Corporation, that has helped students buy and renovate co-op houses on a number of different campuses around the country. NASCO is student governed and its operating funds come from its member co-ops.

NASCO's current level of activity suggests that the student housing cooperative movement continues today with a spirit of enthusiasm and idealism similar to that which fueled the movement in the 1930's. As with the Depression and war-era co-ops, today's student housing co-op members continue to show an interest in fully integrated housing. For example, recent NASCO Institutes have included classes and gatherings to discuss issues related to race, gender, sexual orienta-

58. Katharine W. Kumler, "Campus Co-operative Living," *Journal of Home Economics* 38 (1946): 330.

59. Information on the number of students living in co-ops was taken from the North American Students of Cooperation, op cit.

tion and disability, with a concern to ending discrimination and making co-ops accessible and welcoming to all students.<sup>60</sup>

Edward Spann pessimistically concluded his communal survey by noting that "... there was little in the times of depression and then of war to support the old hope that mankind could be persuaded to practice brotherly love and to pool its energies and talents for the common good."<sup>61</sup> This history of the student housing cooperative movement provides an argument to the contrary.

60. Information on courses offered at annual NASCO Institutes is available from NASCO, Box 7715, Ann Arbor, MI, 48107, (313) 663-0889.

61. Spann, *op cit.*, p. 282.

