Hasten Slowly, and Soon You Will Arrive

The mysterious presence of the student housing cooperatives in North America

by Jim Jones

“In the far future, it is possible to see tremendous benefits coming to the educational system in this country through the development of a strong, well-integrated national organization of campus cooperatives.”

From “Where We Stand Today; Analysis of the Campus Cooperative Movement,” a report from the Education Department of the Cooperative League of the USA, 1946

Chapter 3:

The Four Corners of Cooperation: The first independent student housing cooperatives

"You must represent…what shall I say… the underfinanced portion of the student body… Why can't conditions be improved for hundreds of students like yourselves… by throwing you resources together. Living together! Eating together! Working together! Buying on a mass basis . . ."

-- Harry Kingman, University YMCA, Berkeley, California, 1933

1932 and 1933 were amazing years. The yeast of an idea was building up for the emergence of a new kind of student co-op – an *independent* student *housing* co-op. Starting in the fall of 1932 and continuing through the fall of 1933, a number of co-ops were started in widely separated parts of the country. Some used a single-house model, never expending beyond one location, while others seemed to have a messianic zeal to expand.

Of those co-ops started during these early years, four were extremely influential in the development of co-ops in other places. They are the real heroes of our revolution, and in the following pages are their founding stories.

1932: Student Cooperatives at Texas A&M, College Station, Texas

-- Bertram Fowler, Survey Graphic, June, 1939

Where the present movement began is almost impossible to determine. Why and how it made its appearance is easy to guess. It must have come out of some such group as those boys at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas..., of the same desperate compulsion that forced these boys to drastic action in that lean year of the depression. 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 – find, intelligent, willing boys, turning their backs on the college as their slim resources melted to the vanishing point.

The professor believed that there should be some way for these boys to continue their studies. He knew something of recent cooperative experiments at other colleges. The belief was so strong that it gave him an idea when he looked at the haunted house. He started to round up some boys who might see the idea as he did.

In no time he found twelve boys who had fears alongside of which spooks and haunts were warm and companionable things. The twelve were determined to stay in college. Yet, to stay they had to have a place to sleep; and a bed, even in a haunted house, was a bed any way you looked at it. Also, they had to eat, and these boys had an idea that no spooks could harm the appetites they possessed.

The owner of the house was easy to handle. His building was slowly falling apart. There was no plumbing, no wiring. The landlord furnished the material for repairs and renovations and the boys supplied the man power. What they didn't know about the job they could learn while doing it.

With the help of a few friends and relatives, the boys made a frontal attack on the haunted house. When the repairs and renovations were completed and the house was furnished with odds and ends, they found a woman who was willing to work in exchange for her board and lodging and $1 per student per month. She was to be cook as well as housemother. All the rest of the work – was to be done by the boys on fixed schedules that allowed for no shirking and piled no burdens on the more willing ones. All costs were borne equally. Some boys contributed their share in the form of meats and vegetables from their farmhouses.

From its inception the plan was an unqualified success. In 1933, 130 students were housed in ten of these units. In 1934 the number of houses had jumped to twenty with nearly 250 students. By 1936 there were 700 students organized in cooperatives and every available house within reach of the campus was occupied by these young business men.

With more students looking for non-existent houses the college raised a fund of $100,000 to build fourteen model houses, each with a capacity of thirty-two students. Each has its own student manager who keeps the accounts and runs it as a separate unit. Today over 1,000 students are feeding and housing themselves cooperatively. And the majority of these boys have no more money than did 250 students who were obliged to leave college during the year prior to the organization of the first cooperative.

1932: Michigan Socialist House at the University of Michigan

- Jim Jones, "Michigan House History," 1997

And in the beginning…There was Charles Orr. As of the fall of 1997, we are still in touch with this fascinating man, who was one of our most important Godfathers. From his home in France, he has written us of his memories from the early days of the Great Depression:

> *As a co-founder of the Michigan Socialist Club (Fall 1930)...and as a kind of godfather to the Michigan Socialist House (1932), I can recall the early days of these pioneer institutions.*
>
> *It started with the Round Table Club. I recall that during my first years on the campus, from 1925 to 1928, there was such a club which invited students... to discuss some topic of the day. I may have attended once. I think that the discussion was preceded by a short introduction or formal presentation. At the end of my junior year, I left to see the world. I returned to Ann Arbor in October 1930 -- just*

too late to enroll for the fall semester... This left me with time on my hands, and I attended a meeting of the Round Table Club...

I had been working in the League of Nations in Geneva along side an Italian Swiss socialist, who "worked on" converting me. He lent me a copy of George Bernard Shaw's Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism. My attraction to the moral case for socialism was confirmed when, in the summer of 1930, I visited Germany, where many friends were socialist sympathizers.

[Leonard] Kimball [another member of the Round Table Club] and I decided that what students needed was not a discussion club, but an active association which could help solve their urgent bread-and-butter problems. The great depression was starting to bite hard, especially in the automotive heartland, which was hit harder than anywhere else in the world... Ann Arbor was flooded with hundreds of unemployed would-be students. There were not enough jobs even to earn one's board.

Our first decision -- about November 1930 -- was to change the name of the Round Table Club to the Michigan Socialist Club, with the aim to promote activities to help poor students. I believe that the idea to set up a cooperative rooming and boarding house was already expressed by Kimbal or me. In any event it was implicit in our plans and was discussed at an early meeting of the Socialist Club... The idea of a cooperative rooming house was an immediate hit and brought us a number of eager members. But that was necessarily a long-term perspective.[1]

Starting an independent cooperative house was not a simple matter, even though there had been University related women's cooperatives for over a decade in Ann Arbor. The idea itself was logical, however, since from the perspective of a landlord it was easier to rent an entire house to a group than to let out rooms to individual students who may or may not be responsible tenants. It was also logical that Charles Orr should be an originator of the idea, since he lived in a student rooming house owned and operated by his mother on South University . . .

But from the University's viewpoint, the idea of an organized group renting a house gave them the shakes. Even though all of the first members were male graduate students, the administration feared a loss of control and insisted that there be a housemother for the "boys." The problem was solved in an unusual manner:

Ruth Buchanen, librarian of the university's Labadie Radical Literature Collection, came to the club's rescue by offering to serve as the landlady for the house free of charge. The Socialist Club was able to reach a compromise with the university that allowed Buchanan to keep charge of the house while not actually living on the premises. [2]

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[1] *Socialism at the University of Michigan -- The Early 1930s,* a paper by Charles Orr, January 1933, from the author.

[2] *In Our Own Hands: A history of the student housing cooperatives at the University of Michigan.* Published by the Inter-Cooperative Council at the University of Michigan, 1994. Pages 11-12.

This was accomplished by devoting a room on the first floor for Buchanan's use during her frequent visits. In addition, we know that Buchanan kept the accounts of the cooperative…

Because of that ledger, we know that there were 26 members living in the rented house at 335 E. Ann Street by October of 1932. Today, as a fairly typical single family dwelling, that same house is allowed to hold only six residents. But in 1932, no one was counting.

1933: The Student Cooperative Association, Seattle, Washington

-- Co-ops on Campus, Vol. 8, NO. 9 June 1947.

The Students' Cooperative Association at the University of Washington was started in the depths of the depression in the fall of 1933.

Walter Honderich, an engineering student who became interested in the cooperative movement, saw the need for inexpensive housing which provided the advantages of group living. Using money he had earned doing odd jobs, he contacted a number of interested students, and by September he had 27 signed. Each put up $10 in deposits to finance the purchase of food and the renting of the first co-op house, which is now Macgregor.

The organization was run on a strictly cost sharing basis, with assessments made each month to cover estimated expenditures. As the group proved itself capable, more and more authority was passed from the manager (Honderich) to the members until today, the SCA is run by a student Board of Directors which determines the policies and makes final decisions on the operation. It hires our four non-student employees, the manager, the food supervisor and assistant and a part-time dietitian.

In the second year of operation, the SCA received so many applications for membership that it was necessary to expand into seven houses to prevent a number of small cooperatives from springing up all over the campus. In June, 1935, the SCA was incorporated under the state cooperative act and adopted the Rochdale plan of operation. In 1936, the Neitro Sanitarium was purchased for $6,000 and an additional $4,000 was spent in modernizing and converting it into the Brooklyn unit. During this summer, the Central Kitchen was built at its present location at 1114 East 45th Ave.

A student engineer, Paul Sherwood, designed a steam table which forces steam into the metal food containers keeping them warm during transit to the various houses . . .

The most critical period in the history of the SCA occurred in 1938-39 when the results of the rapid expansion were most keenly felt. So much of the operating capital was tied up in property and equipment that it was difficult to keep on a liquid basis, especially after our wholesaler went bankrupt. An improved publicity campaign and an expanded orientation program were successful in maintaining full occupancy in the five SCA units for the next year; this plus the careful managerial control exercised by Ernest Conrad, carried the organization through this period. The membership continued to grow until a peak of 325 members this year.

Another trying period was the war years when most of the male members were lost to the services. This was also the period of food and material shortages which handicapped efficient operations, but the present manager, Nettie Jean Ross, through the exercise of ingenuity and extensive planning, was able to resolve most of the difficulties. During the war years the

University asked the SCA to provide food service for eight of their residence houses which was done in addition to feeding five domestic units.

With the increased enrollment under the GI Bill, it was necessary to acquire additional housing. Two houses with a capacity of fifty men were purchased in the fall of 1946, which alleviated the existing demand. No other expansion appears necessary in the immediate future, although architect's plans have been prepared for a co-educational dormitory to be built as soon as construction costs stabilize at a normal figure.

1933: the University Students' Cooperative Association, Berkeley, California

-- Excerpt from "Cheap Place to Live, A Biography of the University Students' Cooperative Association 1932-1971," by Guy H. Lillian III, pp 1-5.

It began where a lot begins, in Berkeley, California. But its beginning came when much was ending, in the 1930's. It always was a different sort of thing. The collegiate generation of the early 1930-'s was faced with unique problems. As with practically every other group of Americans, the Depression of those times had severely cramped the economic viability of its members . . .

The 16,000 students attending Berkeley. . . had more resources to draw on than many private institutions. It had its own YMCA, for example, which itself had a resource no other institution could claim…its director, Harry Kingman, an unduplicatable man of many accomplishments . . .

Kingman, in 1933, was in his second year as general secretary of Stiles Hall, the University of California Young Men's Christian Association, as well as coach of the Cal Freshman Baseball Team; in 1931 the death of the then-general secretary had elevated Kingman to the directorship of the campus organization, a position to which he brought an activism suited to the problems of his constituency. In recognition of that activism Robert Gordon Sproul, the President of the University, appointed Kingman to a committee with three other faculty members, designed to "assist and befriend" incoming freshmen in 1932 .

Most Cal students didn't have uncles living in town who were willing to pay for tuition and supply room and board. Most lived in cubbyholes at rooming houses and, as said before, scrounged for meals. Loans and scholarships and jobs were all very well, but they could only aid individual students, one at a time, and did nothing to alleviate the general conditions: life, for the UC student, was still one of extreme privation. With his freshmen, Kingman began to seek out something different. He gathered students together into meetings with Professor Ben Mallory, of the Vocational Education Department, an authority on co-operatives. Kingman had had an idea, which he passed onto the students. Fourteen students gathered one evening in the house owned by Harry and Ruth Kingman in February of 1933.

This gathering was dramatized in 1938 as an episode in KFRC's "pageant of Life" radio series. As reconstructed by the scriptwriter, Kingman's pitch tot he students went thusly:

"Now! You must represent…what shall I say… the <u>underfinanced</u> portion of the student body… Why can't conditions be improved for hundreds of students like yourselves… by throwing your resources together. Living together! Eating together! Working together! Buying on a mass basis."[2]

A co-operative endeavor, in other words, was suggested, and the 14 freshmen agreed that it was worth trying. Among them were Bill Spangle, Willis Hershey, and Addison James, each of whom assumed leadership in what rapidly became a major project – not only for them, but for the University YMCA. Kingman appointed one of his staff, Francis A. Smart, to half-time activity aiding Spangle and the others in setting up their co-operative.

[2] THE PAGEANT OF LIVE #7, Tuesday, September 20, 1938, Station KFRC.

Forward

The Mysterious Presence of Student Cooperatives

In the spring of 1977, Bob Russell and I were walking down toward the "Drag" in Austin. Bob and I had worked together for several years at the College House co-ops, and a few months earlier we had conceived of and organized a national conference that we called "The Wind Through the Pines Symposium." We'd called it that in utter desperation, after weeks of trying to find a more descriptive title. The conference was about motivation in co-ops – the "why" of involvement – a concept that Bob, as a former English professor, had finally called "ineffable." It seemed proper, we thought, that an ineffable topic deserved an inscrutable but poetic title, and Wind Through the Pines seemed fitting.

The conference had been a small but resounding success as some of the top thinkers in North America came together to talk ideas. Jerry Voorhis, Emil Sekerak and Morrie Lippman came from California; Ole Turnbull from Co-op College in Saskatoon and Bonnie Rose from Toronto; Jack McLanahan and Luther Buchele form Michigan; and Jim Wyker from the hills of Kentucky. Seventy five participants paid only $5 each to take part in a significant event. And it was all organized on a volunteer basis by the members and staff of the student co-ops in Austin.

As Bob and I walked, we were in a mood to reflect on the strange nature of student cooperatives. What was it that made these transient groups work at all, we asked ourselves, much less capable of sponsoring an event of significance for the entire cooperative movement?

Finally Bob wrestled his way to an answer.

"It seems to me," he said, "that there's a mysterious presence in the co-ops that keeps them going year after year. For example, did you know that the members in the Ark still call the area near the door 'the Poseidon area?' That mural of Poseidon's been painted over for two years, but they still call it that. Almost no one there now ever saw the mural, but they still call it that. It's like there's a mysterious presence still there, and Poseidon's still striding through the waves.

"Or take another example: the members who set the tables have been called 'Alices' for years, and people don't even know why. The fact that there was once a cook named Alice and the table setters were 'Alice's Helpers' is irrelevant now. The people who set tables are just called 'Alices,' and it doesn't really matter why.

"It seems to me that there's a 'mysterious presence' that makes the co-ops work even though the members consistently change. It's a powerful thing, there's no doubt about that."

I agreed, and added a few examples form my own experience: the co-op that voted to spend $7,000 for a new roof that the current members would never see; the use since 1936 of the word "guff" by the co-ops at the University of Michigan to mean snack food; the way that members considered a group to be totally new and without history just because of a change in name; the sacrifices that members would make to purchase a new house to expand their group. The co-ops develop personalities, habits and even language that give them a reality separate from their transient members. And the members, in turn, nurture and protect their cooperatives, often sacrificing for a future they will never see.

"You know," I said, "this mysterious presence of yours is very similar to the motivational ideas we were talking about at the conference, but different. It's like a cultural context that makes the motivation possible. Even when there's a big turnover of membership, it's passed on to the new members. It's like the history and the future, all wrapped into one, so that the members feel they're part of something bigger than themselves. It's what keeps the co-op going."

Then a thought struck me. "Someday," I said, "we ought to write a book..."

Introduction:

Pieces of history, spliced with time

In the fall of 1971, a large conference was held in Toronto to talk about the student cooperative movement. Organized as the last of a series of conferences by the embryonic North American Student Cooperative Organization, the conference had as its symbol a smiling turtle surrounded by the phrase, "Hasten Slowly and Soon You Shall Arrive."

1971 was a high tide for the "Counter Culture" of the baby boom years, a time marked by expectations of quick and radical change. Food cooperatives were bursting forth almost as if by spontaneous combustion all over North America, and federal funding in both the U.S. and Canada had fueled a major expansion of student housing cooperatives. In places like Madison, Austin, and Champaign-Urbana, students and those who had "dropped out" were starting auto co-ops, bike co-ops, craft co-ops, educational co-ops, bookstore co-ops and a host of other efforts based on self-help and mutual aid. "Hasten slowly" seemed, at the time, like a strange way to portray a movement bursting with energy.

Few of those at the conference were aware of the history of student cooperatives since the Depression, and none at all knew of the even earlier efforts. Everything seemed new in 1971, and "Soon you will arrive" seemed to suggest the coming of a new age. After all, you may remember that this time was the "dawning of the Age of Aquarius."

Now, many years later, I look back to that time with a certain sense of awe. We really did accomplish a great deal with very few resources. But could we really have believed that we were changing the world? It was later, when I met founders of the co-ops from the 1930's, that I found they believed the same thing. No generation has a monopoly on idealism, particularly among students.

However, in the real world of multi-national corporations, racial and ethnic divisions, capital requirements and governmental regulation, that change comes all too slowly. We hasten slowly, from the 1800's to the present, even forgetting where we began as we struggle toward an uncertain future. What we know for sure is that others have gone before, because they have left to us the concrete reality of brick and mortar, wood frame and shingles that we call our homes, our cooperatives.

As each generation adds a few new buildings and a few new members, we hasten slowly. We strive toward a distant light where we will be strong enough to have a meaning in larger terms, where we will have more power to control our lives and our communities, and where we will be more than a marginalized, minority voice. But at times that light seems so distant and the distance to go so far that it becomes difficult to believe that we'll

ever arrive. Surely the phrase "Soon you shall arrive" is misleading at best, and a cruel deception at its worst.

Then again, it's also reality that change is relative. By what yardstick do we measure? Who is to say if we are hastening quickly or slowly, unless we know where we started and where we are going?

This history is written in hopes of giving us all more perspective on these questions, so that as we proceed we can better judge our progress. Our crystal balls are cloudy when it comes to questions of the future, and even our best laid plans seem to founder on the shoals of member turnover, changing values and more immediate operational problems. Yet the past is there to be remembered. It constitutes our heritage and also a measuring stick by which we may judge our progress – and how far we have yet to go.

As we search the past, we learn that we are but a small part in an ongoing flow. Since the Great Depression, we have brought a new dimension to our cooperatives through the purchase of millions of dollars in property. We have become "real" to our universities, our cities and our business communities, and we are continuing to grow. But how far have we come, really?

In the late 1980s, I attended a meeting at Nakamura House in Ann Arbor with Jerry Reese, a former president of the Inter-Cooperative Council. In 1948, he had been responsible for the purchase of Nakamura house, and we were there to talk a little about that history. At one point, a member asked Jerry what he thought of the co-ops today. "Well," he responded, "when we bought this house we had dreams of exponential expansion, of taking over the housing market in Ann Arbor. I guess I'm a little disappointed that you have so much equity now and haven't done more with it." It may be that a yardstick looks much different from the beginning than from the middle.

For each generation, this race is just beginning. As the saying goes, the past is prologue. When our members return 50 years from now, what will they think of our progress? Surely we will never truly "arrive," but how far toward our mysterious and changing goal will we have traveled?

I'm reminded of a letter left to the incoming members of the co-ops in Ann Arbor. It tells us all we can ever know about the founders of our past – and of every generation: their struggles, their hopes for the future, and their sense of the "mysterious presence" which might somehow keep our movement hastening slowly on its way. Dick Shuey, an early co-op president, spoke for many of those who founded the early co-ops when he said:

> *Like a democracy, the co-ops will exist as long as their members retain an active interest in their government and welfare. With the passage of the class of 1942, the last of that group that founded the ICC and the greater cooperative movement leaves the campus. They leave to the present members a great heritage. We hope that they realize with what difficulty and sacrifice*

it must be maintained. It is the duty of every co-op member to see that it is continued. It is his or her duty to be willing to spend more than the six hours washing dishes per week. He or she must be willing to take some of the responsibility and leadership without credit.

If there is a dedication for this history, it should be for all of those who have understood these words, and who have worked for the future.

Jim Jones

Part I: The First Century

of a Mysterious Presence in North America

Whether we like it or not, this is not just a house we live in while at school, this is part of an ordered existence that was built for us by people we don't know, and which we are continuing to build for more people we don't know.

-- Lou Cote, Michigan House, 1946-48
Ann Arbor, Michigan

What is history? As Napoleon famously said, "History is the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon." I think it's a little more than that, in the sense that we've agreed to not intentionally invent the past, but rather to set it down as best we can after the fact, and then try to make sense of it.

I remember talking to Lou Cote, who was Treasurer of the Inter-Cooperative Council at the University of Michigan in the mid-1940s, who told me a fascinating story. He related his trip to the City Hall in Ann Arbor on some personal business. While standing at the counter, he overheard a conversation about a co-op house that hadn't paid its taxes. The house was Stevens House, the first building to be owned by a co-op in Ann Arbor, which he said had been purchased by the group in it, rather than by the ICC.

To his great alarm, he heard talk about foreclosing and seizing the property. He immediately went back to his house and wrote a check from the ICC checkbook for the taxes. The title of that house was then transferred to the ICC, and that was the beginning of property ownership by the umbrella organization.

It was a great story, but as I researched the history of the Ann Arbor co-ops, I realized that it wasn't even vaguely true. The purchase of Stevens House was indeed a landmark occasion, but it happened in a totally different way. So what was Lou remembering? It was such a clear memory that *something* important must have happened. But after more than 20 years of investigation, I still have no idea what it was.

There were other examples of strange memories that didn't seem to fit the facts, such as the former member who claimed to be the founder of the Ann Arbor co-ops in 1932, except that he gave us the wrong address, and he wasn't on the membership list that was still in our office. There are also inconvenient facts that don't seem to fit our preconceptions, such as the independent co-ops, that without staff or even contact with other cooperatives manage to survive and prosper for fifty years and more.

To deal with these problems, I've had to simplify and over-generalize, smoothing out the anomalies and sometimes choosing among conflicting versions of what really happened. To try to compensate for faulty memories, I've often quoted from primary sources, although I know that even stories written at the time of an event can include serious errors of fact. What's a poor boy to do? Ya gotta start somewhere.

I want to encourage the reader to look into the history of your own co-op, and store what you find in a central location. Paper files are critical, but the computer can help to compile information over time and from many sources. Set up a wiki, where people can add their memories and understandings of what happened. Find your founders before they die or lose their memories. And always, write it down, write it down.

As you read about the first century of student co-ops, keep in mind how little we really know, and how poorly our forebears were at recording their stories. In the future, we may learn much more about what really happened, and perhaps this history can be expanded and revised. But for now, we have a history based on what we know, or as Napoleon would have it, a "version of past events that people have decided to agree upon."

Jim Jones

Chapter 1:
Birth of a Movement

"The Adventist college, at Battle Creek, opened with 221 pupils, and 121 of them have formed a cooperative club, which reduces their expenses, individually, to $1.10 per week. The bill of fare is not given."

-- Ann Arbor Register, September 26, 1877

America, 1870. Just five years after the Civil War, and the wounds were still fresh. This was the year that Georgia, Texas, Mississippi and Virginia were readmitted to the Union, after a long period of military occupation. In this year the YMCA was founded, work was started on the Brooklyn Bridge, and Christmas was declared a national holiday.

In Europe, Napoleon III was defeated by the Prussians and deposed; Italy was finally unified, with Rome as the capital; Vladimir Lenin was born, and Charles Dickens died. In New Zealand, the game of rugby was played for the first time.

It was a time of turmoil and change. Only a year earlier, Wyoming Territory became the first jurisdiction in the United States to allow women to vote, although the country as a whole would not follow this early lead for another fifty years. Women were exploring the world in ways that had been denied to them in the past. The Industrial Revolution helped many women to break free of household chores, which once bound them to the hearth, while for many others it meant a life of work in the mills and factories of the day.

This was about the same time that cooperatives were first becoming significant in America, and a woman named Melusina Fay Peirce sought to bring cooperative effort to the fore of the women's movement through "cooperative housekeeping." Susan Stanfield of Kansas State University wrote of this effort in a paper called "Theory vs. Practice: Co-operative Housekeeping Comes to the Small Town:"

> *The public discussion about co-operative housekeeping in the United States began in November 1868 when the Atlantic Monthly ran a series of articles by Melusina Fay Peirce that removed the idea of co-operation from the realm of the utopian community and tried to firmly place it within the typical middle-class household. For Peirce, co-operative housekeeping would be a true co-operative, much like the co-operative stores that were beginning to spring up throughout the nation. She envisioned groups of women (from a dozen to fifty) joining in both an economic and labor corporation, which would allow for the provision of all basic household services on a larger scale. Lisette Nadine Gibson explained: "Participants would make capital investments for their families in the bulk purchases of commonly needed goods. In addition to increasing the collective's power as purchasing agent for its members, this would reduce household chores.*

A core group of members working at the site of the cooperative would provide the principal meals for member families, along with basic sewing and laundry services."[3]

The cooperative housekeeping movement found many adherents in the 1870s and later, and they would form one part of the mosaic from which college housing cooperatives would be formed.

Perhaps not coincidentally, student dining clubs and cooperatives seem to have been common about this same time, and to meet some of the same needs. Orion Ulrey, godfather of the Michigan State cooperatives, tells us that dining co-ops began there in 1880[4], and that clearly was not an isolated endeavor. Deborah Altus, my "history buddy" in Kansas, sites other examples of early dining clubs:

In 1886, Mary Livermore, a feminist and strong advocate of cooperative housekeeping, wrote that cooperative dining clubs were operating for students at the University of Michigan and in Berea, Ohio (Livermore, 1886). 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' (p. 39). At the cooperative club in Berea she added that 'meals are furnished to each cooperator, excellent in quality, and abundant, for nine cents a meal' (p. 398). In 1903, Mary Hinman Abel, another cooperative housekeeping advocate, noted that the students' cooperative boarding club 'is a recognized feature in college towns' (p. 365).

To understand why dining cooperatives would appear on college campuses in the late 1800s, it's important to remember that women began attending colleges and universities only a little earlier. While Oberlin College was the first to admit women in 1833, eleven years before the Rochdale Weavers opened their store on Toad Lane, it was not until after the Civil War that women began to attend colleges and universities in large numbers.

The war left unprecedented numbers of women with the need to support themselves, and at the same time it left a shortage of men. By 1872, ninety-seven colleges and universities had decided to admit women.[5] *The influx of women students was partially fueled by a need for teachers, since both money and male teachers became scare during the years of the Civil War, and women teachers were seen as a low-cost labor pool. Many "normal schools" for training women teachers were started during this period.*

But once women were accepted to a college or university, their problems were not over. With the exception of the prestigious Eastern women's colleges, schools rarely provided housing for women. Most were forced to look for housing in the boarding houses off

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[3] Paper published by University o fIllinois Graduate Symposium on Women's and Gender History, 2003. Cited reference for thissection: Lisette Nadine Gibson, "A Homely Business: Melusina Fay Peirce and Late-Nineteenth-Centuray Cooperative Housekeeping." In Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature 1830-1930, edited by Monika M. Elbert (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), pg. 184.

[4] "Student and Employees Cooperatives at MAC, MSC and MSU" by Orion Ulrey, 1975.

[5] Rosalind Rosenberg, "The Limits of Access: The History Of Coeducation in America"

campus, though here the problems continued.[6] The University of Michigan, for example accepted its first group of 34 women in 1870. An article on the problems encountered in Ann Arbor by these early women students is enlightening:

> *These women encountered not only the prejudices of faculty, students, and citizens opposed to educating the so-called 'weaker sex,' but also the reluctance of rooming house owners to lease to female renters. Often they were accepted only when male roomers were not available, and living conditions were notoriously poor. Bedrooms were poorly furnished and heated, bathroom facilities were inadequate, and the lack of a sitting room restricted social life.*[7]

What was a poor girl to do? If the colleges wouldn't help, who would? It often fell to the women of the community to find answers. So it was that in1872 the wealthy women of Evanston, Illinois became concerned about where girls attending a teacher training college would live, and this is where our story begins.

* * *

It was a quiet Sunday in December of 2000 when I received an email message from Jacob Kramer, a member of Mosaic Cooperative at Northwestern University. As an afterthought, he added a p.s. to his note:

> *The Women's Educational Aid Association bought a house at Orrington and Clark in 1872 and opened it as "College Cottage," a cooperative for girls looked after by a resident matron and teacher…*

I was flabbergasted. I knew of a few university owned co-ops in the early 1900s, but this was a good thirty years earlier! On my next visit to Mosaic, I took time for a side-trip to visit the Northwestern archives. A helpful librarian brought me several boxes of ancient materials, which confirmed Jacob's incredible tale.

An institution called the North-Western Female College was founded in 1855, changing its name to the Evanston College for Ladies in 1871. A year later, in 1872, the Women's Education Aid Association (WEAA) purchased a house for the students, calling it College Cottage (later changed to Pearson Hall). This house, to be run on a "cooperative plan," is the first known example of what came to be called a student housing co-op. In 1873, the women's college was merged with nearby Northwestern University, but the co-op, under various incarnations, remained in operation for over a hundred years.[8]

It isn't clear whether other co-ops similar to the College Cottage were started this early. Even today, colleges and universities keep few records of cooperative efforts – unless they are sponsored by the schools themselves. There could be many other similar efforts that we will never know of, or which will come to light over time.

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[6] Ibid, page 3.

[7] "Traditions Followed, Traditions Broken," from the *Michigan Alumnus* magazine of September, 1982.

[8] Notes from files in the archives of Northwestern University.

However, we do know of similar groups started in the early 1900s. A very early survey of co-ops for women, conducted in 1921 by the Kansas State Normal School, listed replies from six colleges and universities with cooperative housing. The house at Northwestern was listed, along with one each at the University of Michigan, the University of Missouri, the University of Kansas, the State Normal College in Ypsilanti, Michigan (now Eastern Michigan University), and the Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan. [9]

From other sources, we know of cooperatives at the University of Wisconsin dating back to 1915. We have one detailed account of start of the first group at UW:

> *When the World War was draining the resources of the country and the cost of living was steadily mounting, young women everywhere were struggling for college educations in the face of great financial difficulties. Men in similar positions could help themselves and even earn all their expenses by working while going to school. For women such a course then was impossible.*
>
> *To help the Wisconsin co-eds solve their economic problems, the establishment of a co-operative house was urged by the dean of women at the University, Mrs. M.B. Rosenberry. With the aid of the Chicago Alumni Club, Mortar Board House, the first co-operative house on the campus, was started in the fall of 1915.*
>
> *By managing the house themselves, sharing the work, and employing as little outside labor as possible, these pioneers in co-operative living realized a substantial financial saving and enjoyed homelike living. So successful was the enterprise that during the next two years two more such houses were opened, Blue Dragon House was started by girls in the class of 1916, while the Association of Collegiate Alumni, graduates of various colleges in this country who were then residents of Madison, established the A. C. A. cottage.*[10]

Yet another report of an early co-op comes from Smith College:

> *While cooperative living as a common measure of reducing student expenses has reached its present development as a result of the years of financial stringency, the idea is not new… Smith College, Northampton, Mass., has had cooperative houses for its self-help students since the academic year 1912-13. In that year two houses furnished inexpensive living quarters to students who assisted in the housework. These houses are still in operation...*[11]

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9 "Cooperative Housing for women," Miss Hazel Stiebeling, Head of Home Economics Department, Kansas State Normal Schoo, Emporia, Kansas, July, 1921. With the exception of the co-op at Northwestern, those responding were four years old or less.

10 "Making dollars S-t-r-e-t-c-h," Elenor Kratzer, *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, March, 1933. Pg. 166.

11 From an article called "College Projects for Aiding Students." The title of the publication is unknown. Date also unknown, but based on the text is probably 1937.

By the end of World War I, the idea of "cooperative" group housing was well established. In some cases, houses were donated to the University for cooperative living. In other cases, a group of alumni would incorporate and own the house. However most, if not all of these early efforts were University sponsored in some way, and the word "cooperative" meant shared work rather than user control. A surprisingly large number of these houses still exist around the United States. Membership is often based on need, and the term "scholarship hall" is now sometimes used interchangeably with "cooperative."

In most cases, however, these clearly were not *independent* student housing co-ops as we would recognize one today. At the Northwestern co-op, for example, a matron, who received a salary and was not a student planned the work, while a board of 15 women from the community worked with the matron to formulate the house rules. There was a Student Self Government Association, but it isn't clear how much they could control.[12]

Some of the college related cooperatives were more independent than others, however. The Kansas Normal School survey reported that all the cooperatives responding used member labor for dish washing and food serving, but the Michigan State Normal College and the University of Kansas left nearly all duties to the students, including "business management." The report includes a long letter from the University of Kansas on how their two year old co-op operated, and the officer descriptions sound very similar to those of many co-ops today:

> *The duty of the house president is to see that the rules are observed. The steward checks up all shirkers of duties and responsibilities. The business manager collects from the girls, pays all bills, and renders an account at the end of each month.*
>
> *The plan works only through cooperation. The advantages are that:*
> *a. The girls are provided with homes, and surround themselves with a home atmosphere. Even girls who do not need the help it affords desire to live in these houses.*
> *b. The girls learn to cooperate, to maintain a democratic spirit, and to practice thrift and economy. Experience teaches the value of labor, and the girls solve through the principle of self-help the problem of the high cost of living.*
> *c. The girls take pride in the academic standing of their group, and are loyal to the best interests of the University.*

All of these early co-ops apparently were for women. At some point, however, the powers that be seemed to realized that this model of affordable housing could assist men as well as women, and in many places men's co-ops were established on the same "cooperative" pattern.

This was particularly true during the Depression years, when some universities expanded their self-help housing opportunities in keeping with the problems of the times. The Stadium Dormitory cooperative at Ohio State (actually located inside the football stadium) was a classic example of this kind of university owned scholarship housing.

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[12] "Cooperative Housing for Women," a questionnaire prepared at Kansas State Normal School, Emporia, Kansas in July, 1921 by Miss Hazel Stiebeling, Head of Home Economics Dept.

Another example was described in the *Intercollegian and New Horizons* magazine in February, 1937:

> *The Co-operative boarding houses for girls at Southwest Texas State Teachers College, San Marcos, were started in 1933. Now there are five houses meeting the boarding and rooming needs of 115 girls. They are supervised by housemothers, but sharing the work equally. Costs are pro-rated at the end of the month. The college charges a reasonable sum for room, gas, lights, and water, and the total per month for room and board rarely exceeds $15.50.*
>
> *The men's co-ops are being started there this year, and eighty students are being provided for in them. At each house the housemother is given room and board plus a salary to do the buying and cooking...*

Most of these co-ops were very successful, and in some cases they are still in operation. However, it soon became clear that using the term "cooperative" to describe very different kinds of operating systems could lead to a great deal of confusion. In 1941, the U.S. Department of Labor looked at the burgeoning student cooperatives and noted major differences among cooperatives around the country:[13]

> *Organizations considerably more cooperative in nature and operation are found in some colleges where the students live in a building rented from the college and operate the enterprise under the general supervision of a college-appointed house mother. In these cases there is a student cooperative association with a board of directors, and all the practical details and problems connected with the house are settled either by the board or by the members in membership meeting. The college, however, has majority representation on the board and a deciding voice (where it chooses to exercise it) in the selection of the resident members. There is usually some subsidy by the college (such as payment of house mother's salary, etc.). These associations were classed as semi-cooperative and were included in the tabulation.*

Others were excluded from the Department of Labor study, because as the authors noted:

> *Their 'cooperative' activity consists of working together in the household tasks, thus earning at least part of their expenses. There may be an association of students in connection with the enterprise and it may have a certain leeway regarding household matters; however, final control on all points is vested in the college. In this survey all organizations of this type were discarded as not being genuinely cooperative.*

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13 "Student Cooperatives in the United States, 1941"; United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin No. 740, page 2, reprinted from the Monthly Labor Review, April, 1943, with additional data.

The Department of Labor study found and discarded 210 of these houses from their findings because the residents took part if the household duties but had no control over the actual management of the organization.

Still, regardless of their degree of independence, it's clear that these early groups are the operational models used for all later efforts. For those of us who have lived in more independent cooperatives, it is sometimes hard to admit that our groups are related to these early living arrangements. Perhaps it's like admitting the existence of cranky old Uncle George who lives in the attic, but these efforts truly are the "genetic" precursors for all that came later. Knowing their stories is vital to understanding our roots and history.

Chapter 2:
We'll do it ourselves!

The greatest thing about cooperative living is that if you don't like it, you can change it.

-Richard Shuey, "The Cooperator," Inter-Cooperative Council at the University of Michigan, March, 1938

While many schools were seeking to expand their affordable housing in this controlled, paternal manner, a new concept began to appear: user ownership.

During the Great Depression, students were not spared from the desperation of poverty. Conditions were difficult at best, and impossible at worst. There were stories of students staying in bed so that they would have the energy to attend classes. There were many who simply couldn't make ends meet and had to leave school. And then there were those who looked for a way, any way, to survive.

Co-ops of many kinds were seen as solutions to the problems of the times and as an alternative to both capitalism and communism. Consumer cooperatives in particular came into their own right during this period, but agricultural co-ops as well flourished as they sought to keep the family farm in business. Democratically controlled cooperatives, based on the Rochdale principles[14], suddenly seemed like a realistic alternative.

At the many universities where the idea of sharing work and expenses "cooperatively" to reduce costs was already an established concept, it was a relatively short step to the idea of consumer ownership embodied in the Rochdale concept. Student cooperatives organized independently by students began in widely scattered parts of the country: Texas A&M, the University of Florida, the University of Arkansas, and the University of Michigan in 1932; Berkeley and Seattle in 1933. In these same years, colleges such as the University of Idaho and the University of Iowa also established co-ops, but they were based on the older, college controlled model. The groups initiated by students rightly saw themselves as being different.

Laia Hanau, a student at the University of Michigan later wrote a fictional novel on the start of an early co-op, called "Two Dollar House." In the forward to her novel, she wrote:

[14] The "Rochdale Principles" were developed by the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, who in 1844 started a cooperative store on Toad Lane in Rochdale, England. These principles outlined the philosophical and operational principles that over time have guided the vast majority of successful cooperatives. Democratic governance and independence are among the most important in the modern version of these principles.

Some of the universities and colleges got behind us. In the Western States, in the Middle West, in California, Iowa, Oklahoma, Michigan, Ohio, they turned over unused buildings for conversion into co-operative dormitories; they built co-operative living quarters for us. We governed ourselves, we did our own cleaning, we bought our own food, we hired head chefs and worked under them, we established our own central eating kitchens. We put in four to six hours work a week; and we lived on fifteen to twenty dollars a month. Seven years ago we formed the National Committee on Student Co-operatives, and we became a branch of the Co-operative League of America.

Sixty-eight colleges and universities wanted us to stay, so they helped establish co-operative housing units for us. Twenty-one colleges and universities wanted us to go, so we established out own.[15]

These more independent co-ops sprang from a variety of roots. At Texas A&M, a professor in the agricultural department helped to organize a group and assisted with leasing a deserted farmhouse. At the University of Michigan, graduate students in the Socialist Club, including a former staff member of the League of Nations who had returned to school, formed a cooperative and leased a rooming house. In Berkeley, the head of the University Y suggested that students form a cooperative and then helped them to find a home. At the University of Arkansas, the idea originated at a meeting of the 4-H Club, when a group of girls realized that they wouldn't be able to return to school the next fall unless something was done to bring down the cost. At the University of Washington, an older student who had returned to school initiated the organizing. In nearly every case, someone with experience in the "broader world" brought the Rochdale approach to the situation.

Even God was on our side

Many of the early supporters of the cooperative approach were church related youth groups. The student Y's, which had developed a separate governing structure from the regular YMCA movement in the 1920's, became particularly interested in cooperative efforts of all kinds. As a group, the student Y's were known as the Student Christian Movement (SCM).

SCM was also related to a much older group, the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), which in turn was related to the Federal Council of Churches. Through these groups, the Y's made contacts with the Cooperative League of the USA. The Student Christian Movement was quite radical for the times, with clearly Christian socialist

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15 *Two Dollar House,* Laia Hanau, published by the Inter-Cooperative Council at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. pg. iii.

overtones, and was dedicated to social action to deal with the Depression. The cooperative approach to dealing with social problems was totally in line with SCM's basic ideals. The joint magazine of SVM and SCM, *The Intercollegian and Far Horizons,* became filled with stories about cooperative efforts.

In some parts of the country, there was a direct link between the student Y's and the early student initiated housing cooperatives. The most notable example was in Berkeley, where Harry Kingman, Director of the University Y, first suggested the self-help living arrangements that became the University Students Cooperative Association (USCA).

The Methodist Church also became heavily involved with cooperative study and organizing at this time. A study course through the Methodist student group, the Wesley Foundation, directly led to the founding of numerous cooperatives. Two co-ops, Lester and Stalker houses, were founded at the University of Michigan from this root. Another example is Campbell Club at the University of Oregon. One of the founders of Campbell Club, Howard Ohmart, remembers the genesis of the effort:

It was in the good, gray Methodist Church basement (on Williamett Street, above Eleventh) where the student co-op movement we initially conceived...

It was probably in 1934 that the Wesley Clubbers had undertaken the study of the Swedish co-op movement and particularly of the experience of impoverished weavers of Rochdale as they sought to mitigate their economic stress in the 1800's through cooperative enterprises. The self-help and mutual-help strategy was not only consistent with Christian doctrine, but had tremendous appeal in those depression-racked times. It provided a pro-active approach, and attempt to take command of one's own destiny. The co-op strategy launched by the Rochdale weavers had, of course, taken many forms in Europe, Canada, and the United States in the intervening half-century. but the co-op activity that appeared most appropriate for a group of student reformers was logically the co-op living organization.

There were other church-related efforts that were less interested in changing society than in benefiting those students in their own flock. These co-ops often restricted membership to

their own denomination or to those with a particular set of beliefs. While a number of these groups have continued even to the present, they were never accepted by the mainstream student cooperative movement because of their resistance to the principle of "open membership."

At the University of Michigan, for example, the groups from the Methodist church roots were quickly accepted to membership in the Inter-Cooperative Council, a coordinating and purchasing association for the burgeoning co-ops. However, when a Catholic co-op named Gabriel Richard applied for membership, they were only accepted into the Council as a "non-coop" because they restricted membership to Catholic students.

The involvement of the more progressive Christian organizations was extremely important in spreading cooperative ideas around the country, however, and eventually in bringing some organization to the scattered efforts.

Agricultural co-ops lend a hand

In the American heartland, the agricultural cooperatives surged ahead during the Depression, organizing both for joint purchasing and for marketing. The rural electric cooperatives were also established during this period and began to transform the countryside. Farmers gained a degree of hope from their own self-help efforts, and they wanted their children to benefit from the same cooperative ideas.

In our urban age, it's sometimes difficult to remember that in the 1930s we were still a largely rural country. Before the Depression and World War II changed the world, vast stretches of the United States were filled with small family farms. The young people had aspirations and often went to college to improve their lives, but financially they were stretched beyond belief.

In North Dakota, the Farmers Union chapters assisted with founding a student co-op in 1937. In Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois and other states, the 4-H clubs began cooperatives for their alumni to live in while away at college. But the greatest effort came from a farm group strangely named the Consumer Cooperative Association, based in Kansas City, which later became Farmland Industries. CCA became deeply involved with the student cooperatives in the central states, and particularly in Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri. They provided staff support for a regional association, and at one point hired a student co-op organizer.

Consumer co-ops bring assistance too

Student cooperatives were also assisted and promoted by consumer cooperatives in those parts of the country where they became stronger during the years of the Great

Depression. In the Upper Midwest for example, a federation called Midland Cooperatives serving both urban and rural communities with groceries, petroleum and other supplies featured numerous stories about student co-ops in their newspaper, *The Cooperative Builder*. Midland's General Counsel, a man named "Doc" Zeddies, also became a mentor to student organizers throughout the Twin Cities, a role which he continued long after his retirement.

Similarly, the Hyde Park Cooperative grocery store near the University of Chicago assisted with the early organizing of student cooperatives in that neighborhood, and their attorney, Leon Despres assisted every student co-op effort in Chicago for over sixty years!

Churches, farm and urban co-ops all found ways to help during this time of great need, and the movement grew by leaps and bounds. But for all the help from our friends, it was truly the students themselves who were the foundation for all that happened.

Chapter 3:

The Four Corners of Cooperation: The first independent student housing cooperatives

"You must represent…what shall I say… the underfinanced portion of the student body… Why can't conditions be improved for hundreds of students like yourselves… by throwing you resources together. Living together! Eating together! Working together! Buying on a mass basis…"

-- Harry Kingman, University YMCA, Berkeley, California, 1933

1932 and 1933 were amazing years. The yeast of an idea was building up for the emergence of a new kind of student co-op – an *independent* student *housing* co-op. Starting in the fall of 1932 and continuing through the fall of 1933, a number of co-ops were started in widely separated parts of the country. Some used a single-house model, never expending beyond one location, while others seemed to have a messianic zeal to expand.

Of those co-ops started during these early years, four that were based on expansion models were extremely influential in the development of co-ops in other places. They are the real heroes of our revolution, and in the following pages are their founding stories.

1932: Student Cooperatives at Texas A&M, College Station, Texas

-- Bertram Fowler, Survey Graphic, June, 1939

Where the present movement began is almost impossible to determine. Why and how it made its appearance is easy to guess. It must have come out of some such group as those boys at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas..., of the same desperate compulsion that forced these boys to drastic action in that lean year of the depression. 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 – find, intelligent, willing boys, turning their backs on the college as their slim resources melted to the vanishing point.

The professor believed that there should be some way for these boys to continue their studies. He knew something of recent cooperative experiments at other colleges. The belief was so strong that it gave him an idea when he looked at the haunted house. He started to round up some boys who might see the idea as he did.

In no time he found twelve boys who had fears alongside of which spooks and haunts were warm and companionable things. The twelve were determined to stay in college. Yet, to stay they had to have a place to sleep; and a bed, even in a haunted house, was a bed any way you looked at it. Also, they had to eat, and these boys had an idea that no spooks could harm the appetites they possessed.

The owner of the house was easy to handle. His building was slowly falling apart. There was no plumbing, no wiring. The landlord furnished the material for repairs and renovations and the boys supplied the man power. What they didn't know about the job they could learn while doing it.

With the help of a few friends and relatives, the boys made a frontal attack on the haunted house. When the repairs and renovations were completed and the house was furnished with odds and ends, they found a woman who was willing to work in exchange for her board and lodging and $1 per student per month. She was to be cook as well as housemother. All the rest of the work – was to be done by the boys on fixed schedules that allowed for no shirking and piled no burdens on the more willing ones. All costs were borne equally. Some boys contributed their share in the form of meats and vegetables from their farmhouses.

From its inception the plan was an unqualified success. In 1933, 130 students were housed in ten of these units. In 1934 the number of houses had jumped to twenty with nearly 250 students. By 1936 there were 700 students organized in cooperatives and every available house within reach of the campus was occupied by these young business men.

With more students looking for non-existent houses the college raised a fund of $100,000 to build fourteen model houses, each with a capacity of thirty-two students. Each has its own student manager who keeps the accounts and runs it as a separate unit. Today over 1,000 students are feeding and housing themselves cooperatively. And the majority of these boys have no more money than did 250 students who were obliged to leave college during the year prior to the organization of the first cooperative.

1932: Michigan Socialist House at the University of Michigan

- Jim Jones, "Michigan House History," 1997

And in the beginning… there was Charles Orr. As of the fall of 1997, we are still in touch with this fascinating man, who was one of our most important Godfathers. From his home in France, he has written us of his memories from the early days of the Great Depression:

As a co-founder of the Michigan Socialist Club (Fall 1930)...and as a kind of godfather to the Michigan Socialist House (1932), I can recall the early days of these pioneer institutions.

It started with the Round Table Club. I recall that during my first years on the campus, from 1925 to 1928, there was such a club which invited students... to discuss some topic of the day. I may have attended once. I think that the discussion was preceded by a short introduction or formal presentation. At the end of my junior year, I left to see the world. I returned to Ann Arbor in October 1930 -- just too late to enroll for the fall semester... This left me with time on my hands, and I attended a meeting of the Round Table Club...

I had been working in the League of Nations in Geneva along side an Italian Swiss socialist, who "worked on" converting me. He lent me a copy of George Bernard Shaw's Intelligent Women's

Guide to Socialism and Capitalism. *My attraction to the moral case for socialism was confirmed when, in the summer of 1930, I visited Germany, where many friends were socialist sympathizers.*

[Leonard] Kimball [another member of the Round Table Club] and I decided that what students needed was not a discussion club, but an active association which could help solve their urgent bread-and-butter problems. The great depression was starting to bite hard, especially in the automotive heartland, which was hit harder than anywhere else in the world... Ann Arbor was flooded with hundreds of unemployed would-be students. There were not enough jobs even to earn one's board.

Our first decision -- about November 1930 -- was to change the name of the Round Table Club to the Michigan Socialist Club, with the aim to promote activities to help poor students. I believe that the idea to set up a cooperative rooming and boarding house was already expressed by Kimbal or me. In any event it was implicit in our plans and was discussed at an early meeting of the Socialist Club... The idea of a cooperative rooming house was an immediate hit and brought us a number of eager members. But that was necessarily a long-term perspective.[16]

Starting an independent cooperative house was not a simple matter, even though there had been University related women's cooperatives for over a decade in Ann Arbor. The idea itself was logical, however, since from the perspective of a landlord it was easier to rent an entire house to a group than to let out rooms to individual students who may or may not be responsible tenants. It was also logical that Charles Orr should be an originator of the idea, since he lived in a student rooming house owned and operated by his mother on South University . . .

But from the University's viewpoint, the idea of an organized group renting a house gave them the shakes. Even though all of the first members were male graduate students, the administration feared a loss of control and insisted that there be a housemother for the "boys." The problem was solved in an unusual manner:

Ruth Buchanen, librarian of the university's Labadie Radical Literature Collection, came to the club's rescue by offering to serve as the landlady for the house free of charge. The Socialist Club was able to reach a compromise with the university that allowed Buchanan to keep charge of the house while not actually living on the premises. [2]

This was accomplished by devoting a room on the first floor for Buchanan's use during her frequent visits. In addition, we know that Buchanan kept the accounts of the cooperative…

Because of that ledger, we know that there were 26 members living in the rented house at 335 E. Ann Street by October of 1932. Today, as a fairly typical single family dwelling, that same house is allowed to hold only six residents. But in 1932, no one was counting.

1933: The Student Cooperative Association, Seattle, Washington

-- Co-ops on Campus, Vol. 8, NO. 9 June 1947.

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[16] *Socialism at the University of Michigan -- The Early 1930s,* a paper by Charles Orr, January 1933, from the author.

[2] *In Our Own Hands: A history of the student housing cooperatives at the University of Michigan.* Published by the Inter-Cooperative Council at the University of Michigan, 1994. Pages 11-12.

The Students' Cooperative Association at the University of Washington was started in the depths of the depression in the fall of 1933.

Walter Honderich, an engineering student who became interested in the cooperative movement, saw the need for inexpensive housing which provided the advantages of group living. Using money he had earned doing odd jobs, he contacted a number of interested students, and by September he had 27 signed. Each put up $10 in deposits to finance the purchase of food and the renting of the first co-op house, which is now Macgregor.

The organization was run on a strictly cost sharing basis, with assessments made each month to cover estimated expenditures. As the group proved itself capable, more and more authority was passed from the manager (Honderich) to the members until today, the SCA is run by a student Board of Directors which determines the policies and makes final decisions on the operation. It hires our four non-student employees, the manager, the food supervisor and assistant and a part-time dietitian.

In the second year of operation, the SCA received so many applications for membership that it was necessary to expand into seven houses to prevent a number of small cooperatives from springing up all over the campus. In June, 1935, the SCA was incorporated under the state cooperative act and adopted the Rochdale plan of operation. In 1936, the Neitro Sanitarium was purchased for $6,000 and an additional $4,000 was spent in modernizing and converting it into the Brooklyn unit. During this summer, the Central Kitchen was built at its present location at 1114 East 45th Ave.

A student engineer, Paul Sherwood, designed a steam table which forces steam into the metal food containers keeping them warm during transit to the various houses . . .

The most critical period in the history of the SCA occurred in 1938-39 when the results of the rapid expansion were most keenly felt. So much of the operating capital was tied up in property and equipment that it was difficult to keep on a liquid basis, especially after our wholesaler went bankrupt. An improved publicity campaign and an expanded orientation program were successful in maintaining full occupancy in the five SCA units for the next year; this plus the careful managerial control exercised by Ernest Conrad, carried the organization through this period. The membership continued to grow until a peak of 325 members this year.

Another trying period was the war years when most of the male members were lost to the services. This was also the period of food and material shortages which handicapped efficient operations, but the present manager, Nettie Jean Ross, through the exercise of ingenuity and extensive planning, was able to resolve most of the difficulties. During the war years the University asked the SCA to provide food service for eight of their residence houses which was done in addition to feeding five domestic units.

With the increased enrollment under the GI Bill, it was necessary to acquire additional housing. Two houses with a capacity of fifty men were purchased in the fall of 1946, which alleviated the existing demand. No other expansion appears necessary in the immediate future, although architect's plans have been prepared for a co-educational dormitory to be built as soon as construction costs stabilize at a normal figure.

1933: the University Students' Cooperative Association, Berkeley, California

-- Excerpt from "Cheap Place to Live, A Biography of the University Students' Cooperative Association 1932-1971," by Guy H. Lillian III, pp 1-5.

It began where a lot begins, in Berkeley, California. But its beginning came when much was ending, in the 1930's. It always was a different sort of thing. The collegiate generation of the early 1930-'s was faced with unique problems. As with practically every other group of Americans, the Depression of those times had severely cramped the economic viability of its members . . .

The 16,000 students attending Berkeley. . . had more resources to draw on than many private institutions. It had its own YMCA, for example, which itself had a resource no other institution could claim…its director, Harry Kingman, an unduplicatable man of many accomplishments . . .

Kingman, in 1933, was in his second year as general secretary of Stiles Hall, the University of California Young Men's Christian Association, as well as coach of the Cal Freshman Baseball Team; in 1931 the death of the then-general secretary had elevated Kingman to the directorship of the campus organization, a position to which he brought an activism suited to the problems of his constituency. In recognition of that activism Robert Gordon Sproul, the President of the University, appointed Kingman to a committee with three other faculty members, designed to "assist and befriend" incoming freshmen in 1932 . . .

Most Cal students didn't have uncles living in town who were willing to pay for tuition and supply room and board. Most lived in cubbyholes at rooming houses and, as said before, scrounged for meals. Loans and scholarships and jobs were all very well, but they could only aid individual students, one at a time, and did nothing to alleviate the general conditions: life, for the UC student, was still one of extreme privation. With his freshmen, Kingman began to seek out something different. He gathered students together into meetings with Professor Ben Mallory, of the Vocational Education Department, an authority on co-operatives. Kingman had had an idea, which he passed onto the students. Fourteen students gathered one evening in the house owned by Harry and Ruth Kingman in February of 1933.

This gathering was dramatized in 1938 as an episode in KFRC's "pageant of Life" radio series. As reconstructed by the scriptwriter, Kingman's pitch tot he students went thusly:

> *"Now! You must represent…what shall I say… the <u>underfinanced</u> portion of the student body… Why can't conditions be improved for hundreds of students like yourselves… by throwing your resources together. Living together! Eating together! Working together! Buying on a mass basis."*[17]

[17] THE PAGEANT OF LIVE #7, Tuesday, September 20, 1938, Station KFRC.

A co-operative endeavor, in other words, was suggested, and the 14 freshmen agreed that it was worth trying. Among them were Bill Spangle, Willis Hershey, and Addison James, each of whom assumed leadership in what rapidly became a major project – not only for them, but for the University YMCA. Kingman appointed one of his staff, Francis A . Smart, to half-time activity aiding Spangle and the others in setting up their co-operative.