

This article about Dandelion, Dragonfly and Morninglory appeared in The Citizen's Weekly from Ottawa on Oct. 15, 2000

"This isn't the sixties~ Nobody cares anymore." From the film, The Milagro Beanfield War, 1988.

Searching for Community

By Harry Rudolfs

Where have all the hippies gone? Where is the legion of hirsute, bespangled youths who trundled into the woods to build domes and start new lives? Thousands of them turned their backs on urban living and what they viewed as a corrupt, violent and polluting society, bought up cheap land and derelict farms, and moved "back to the country." Many threw their lots in together and set up communal societies that briefly sparkled in the Canadian landscape and as quickly disappeared.

Most of the geodesic domes are gone, collapsed in fields somewhere, but some of the rural hippie communities never went away. Despite a dieback from the initial large numbers of these "alternative shared farmsteads," over a dozen still flourish in Eastern and Western Canada, spread almost equally in British Columbia and the Ottawa Valley. In Ontario, three active communities, Dandelion, Dragonfly and Morninglory, can trace their roots back to the 70s or late 60s. Other originals, like Herschel north of Bancroft and the former Rochdale Farm near Golden Lake, although no longer functioning as communes or collectives, continue as land trusts-shared property with one or more of members' residences on site.

"Don't say hippie commune," cautions 20 year old Daryl Anderman.

"For most people it means 'free sex. '" The lifetime resident of Morninglory Farm and program director for Killaloe community radio knows exactly what he's talking about. After all, he was born in alternative community, midwived into the world on The Farm in Tennessee--one of the longest-lived communal institutions of the 60s counterculture movement--and his two younger brothers were born in his parents' homestead, a converted solarpowered granary on Morninglory Farm. He suggests that the term "intentional community," is a broader, more neutral descriptor.

Whatever the nomenclature, the Communities Directory {OIJ 2000 {
HYPERLINK .. <http://www.ic.org> .. }) lists hundreds of such groupings
in North America. Tim Miller, author of *The 60s Communes and Beyond*,
believes that about one hundred of them have a direct connection to
the 60s counterculture movement. Laird Schaub of the Fellowship for
Intentional Community, which also publishes *Communities* magazine, sees
another crest
coming in the communitarian movement that last peaked "in the late 60s
and early 70s, with the advent of the Flower Children."

North America has a rich history of utopian movements, particularly in
the 19th century, but the tidal wave that became the back-to-the-land
movement of the 60s and 70s was unprecedented and unpredicted. Miller
estimates that there were thousands of communes on the continent with
perhaps tens or hundreds of thousands of members.

In reality, urban collectives and co-ops have always outnumbered their
country cousins (and still do), but the rural "freak" communes pricked
the public's attention. From *Easy Rider* forward, when spiritual
refugees Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda visited a desert commune on
their journey across Neolithic America, the media turned its leering
eye on these new agriculturalists.

Rural communes were sexy. *Time* magazine printed colour photos of naked
communards in the pages of its July 7, 1967 issue. These were good,
educated, middleclass kids gone feral. A new generation of primitives
living on the fringes of society, embracing nudity, folly, innocence,
and playfulness. The mere idea of a group of radical, iconoclastic,
longhaired, unrelated young adults living together under the same roof
conjured images of shared sex, marijuana and dirt floors. The public
was disgusted, titillated, repulsed and fascinated.

"Many people assume that illegal drugs and illicit sex were common in
modern communes," writes William L. Smith in his book *Families and
Communes*. "The truth is quite the opposite; yes drugs and sex were a
part of communal life for some, especially those who were not part of
religious communes, but drugs and sex were not the major reasons for
the development of the modern communal movement."

The Vietnam War, psychedelics drugs, and a rejection of consumerist
values were some of the touchstones that set off the

back-to-the-landers. Miller, however, suggests that the reasons for communality went deeper:

Philip Slater argued as long ago as 1970 that American culture had "deeply and uniquely frustrated" three basic human desires-for community, for engagement, need for dependence-and that the sixties represented an attempt to overcome that long-felt but little-articulated frustration to meet those basic drives of the human spirit ... but ... one can only say that an extraordinary zeitgeist materialized in the late 1960s and that the communes were a part of that much larger fabric.

One of the earliest manifestations of "turned on" community came about in 1959 when author Ken Kesey and his wife moved from Oregon to Pen)' Lane in Palo Alto, California. While on a writing scholarship at Stanford University, Kesey volunteered to be part of a study involving mindaltering substances (LSD, mescaline, psilocybin). Some of the drugs found their way back to Pen)' Lane, a block of cheap row houses where the bohemian element had collected. Instantly, psychedelic community was born. Writes Tom Wolf in *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*: "The Lane was too good to be true. It was Walden Pond, only without any Thoreau misanthropes around. Instead a community of intelligent, very open, out-front people-out front was the term everybody was using--outfront people who cared deeply for one another, and shared .. ~ in incredible ways, even, and were embarked on some kind of ... well, adventure in living."

Another early community, Drop City in Colorado, started in 1965, combined "themes that had been developing in other recent communities - anarchy, pacifism, sexual freedom, rural isolation, interest in drugs, art-and wrapped them flamboyantly into a commune not quite like any that had gone before," writes Miller. The members rejected steady jobs, gave themselves new names, created wild architectural structures and multi-media art projects that became hippie hallmarks. Jo Ann Bernofsky, one of the founders, writes about those heady times: "that we could just do something so outrageous and so far-out, that we could pull it off even though none of us had any resources .. it was extremely exciting and wonderful. You had a sense that anything was possible, that the potential was unlimited."

The alternative society link to Canada is strong. In the 60s, many Americans of draft age sought exile in Canada to escape from military

service in Vietnam. As well, two successful American communes had a profound effect on Canadian alternative communities. The socially experimental Twin Oaks community of Virginia has maintained a small colony in Enterprise, Ont. since 1975, and The Farm in Tennessee had a sister community in McDonald's Corners, near Lanark, Ont., for many years.

Ontario and British Columbia became especially desirable locations for the new pioneers. In Ontario, three locales were identified where cheap land was available: the lower valley around Perth-Lanark, the Bancroft region, and the Ban)s Bay-Killaloe area. Writer Peter Thurling romanticizes the migration to the Ottawa Valley: "The word was out. Some heard it in Peru or Kathmandu: Killaloe was one of the chosen places on eearth, a place where the psychic lines of power meet, and you could get 100 acres for \$5,000."

One of those American emigres who made the trek north was Robbie (Beaver) Anderman (Daryl's father). After getting turfed out of a Quaker College in Philadelphia, he landed in Toronto in the summer of 1968 and lived around the burgeoning "village" scene in Yorkville. That September he moved into Rochdale College, a Toronto apartment building that was originally intended to house University of Toronto students. It functioned briefly as an anarchic free college but became a haven for drug dealers and a Mecca for disenchanting youth from across the continent.

But Anderman didn't stay at Rochdale long. He, along with a former associate Michael Nickerson, purchased Morninglory fann near Killaloe in March of 1969 for \$4,300. "When we saw it, we just knew it was the place," he says.

Other communities formed in the area, lasted a few years and evolved into other things. Anderman rattles off the names on the phone. They're alchemical, as though he's reciting a spell: Cloud Mountain, Raphael, Echo, Sangsara, Sahajiya, Heaven, Mustard Seed Circus Farm, Doyle Mountain, Holsum, Matrix. I add them to the list I've collected from the Bancroft area: Namaste, Mckenzie Lake, Herschel, Dragonfly.

Dandelion (blessed are the hammock-weavers)

Dandelion is a half an hour's dusty drive north of Kingston, Ont., on a concession that looks like a single lane gravel road. Ruth Allen comes out to greet me. A thin, fortyish woman with thick glasses and long grey-brown hair, she is the untitled manager of the farm. "We get a lot of tractor trailers down that road," she says. "We can get 48 foot trailers in our driveway."

The transports deliver spools of rope, hammock stands and pallets of oak boards to the group's workshop. Framed beside a stackwall barn and a pastoral pond, it hardly looks the place for a micro-industry. But you can hear the drill press whirring and the droning voice of a CBC radio announcer above the exclamations from the appleyard ducks that come stmtting down the laneway.

These are the hammock makers and they've been here for 25 years.

The present population of seven (five adults and two of Ruth's teenage children) represents the Canadian branch of the Twin Oaks community of Louisa, Virginia. Founded in 1967, it originally drew its inspiration from the utopian ideals of psychologist B. F. Skinner, as outlined in his book *Walden Two*. Dandelion, while distancing itself from its behaviourist roots, has maintained a measure of work sharing derived from the Virginia model. Foremost among its principles are non-violence, egalitarianism, gender equality and income sharing.

But unlike other communities that formed in the 70s, they do not reject technology and idealize poverty. Dandelion has a microwave, television, flush toilets, and at one time had a swimming pool. Last year, Ruth and her partner, Mark Popham, pooled their private money and bought a 23-foot Halcyon sailboat (they have time for sailing in the fall, after the hammock rush is over). A community-shared Volkswagen Jetta sits in front of the farmhouse. The workshop is outfitted with modern exhaust fans, drill presses, and chop saws. "I'm a communities person but I'm also a fan of running water and electric light," says Ruth

In the early 80s a conscious effort was made to bring more people into the Dandelion fold. Mark, a partially dreadlocked, middle-aged man (what passes for dreadlocks on a Caucasian-more like sprung, disheveled ringlets) takes time away from weaving hammocks to answer

my questions about the old days. "We were growing about half our food, which is excellent," he says, rolling a Drum cigarette. "But the influx of new members, and the new buildings we built to accommodate them left us somewhat financially squeezed."

Along with a couple of almost-mandatory geodesic domes that served as a conference area, one of the new structures was a kids' house, a single story passive-solar building where all the light switches and wash basins are located at a child's level. Borrowing from the kibbutz model, the idea was to have all the children live together in the same building while the adults shared supervisory duties. The Dandelion alternative school ran for one year in the kids building, which functioned briefly as a school and dormitory.

"So there you are, 20 some odd people and kids in quite close quarters," says Mark. "It's crowded in the winter and people get on each other's nerves." In 1985 there were 11 people at Dandelion, and a couple of years later only a handful remained. Like other alternative communities, Dandelion has experienced high and low watermarks in its membership.

Ruth arrived in 1993 with her four children during the community's latest rebuilding phase. In its most recent incarnation, Dandelion functioned as a cooperative for 8 years. The workers rented the equipment and were paid by commission. Two years ago, after a change in membership, the collective returned to the income sharing system.

They also started taking turns cooking and having a communal meal once a day. "It seemed easier to start eating together and sharing meals," Ruth says. "I spent a lot of years cooking every meal. Now I only cook once or twice a week and do the dishes once or twice a week."

Weaving hammocks is soothing work. Mark spins a shuttle through nylon webbing in one part of workshop, while Ruth ties up the ringed harnesses at a nearby workbench. In another room, newest member Melanie drills holes in the hardwood stretchers that will become the frames for new hammocks. "All the money goes into the same pot and comes out of the same pot," says Ruth, taking a pull on a DuMaurier. "It's like a family farm."

Members get about \$100 a month discretionary money. All their necessities including food, clothing, dental and medical expenses are

paid by the collective. "This is a job in many respects," Ruth says. "I just think it's better than living in the center of a city and working probably for the same amount of money."

Dragonfly: Revolutionaries in the Woods

"[Don't let those silly fascists pluck at your nerves ... smile and know they are sad and completely devoid of the love that people like you possess. " Angela Davis

From Rat Magazine, March 1970, found in the Dragonfly archive.

Dragonfly was an attempt to move a radical urban community into the bush. This collective has deep political roots, and it remains a Petrie dish for an ongoing social anomaly. It was established by "a group of malcontents" from the Waterloo region who went looking for a utopia in 1978. They found it sitting on 250 acres of land on the rolling hills east of Algonquin Park and north of Maynooth, Ont.-a hundred year old farm that included a big wooden frame house and a series of outbuildings.

These people were anarchists from the Fairview Collective, former university students who shared a house in Kitchener, Ont. They were heavily involved in a variety of causes including environmentalism, unions, municipal politics and gender issues. Their idea was to continue to do activist work by transplanting their collective to a rural, sustainable setting.

Of the original stakeholders, Stu Vickars, who looks like a fortysomething John Lennon, spent the longest time at Dragonfly-13 years. He thought the ruralization of the community was a necessary' progression. "I've always had an impending sense of ecological doom," he says. "I saw moving to the country as a vital corrective to the waste and pollution of the dominant culture."

But the idealistic visions that the settlers brought with them were soon tempered by the realities of homesteading in a harsh climate. For inspiration, they studied the books of Helen and Scott Nearing.

The Nearings were eco-gurus. They applied intensive fanning techniques to marginal cash crop operations--maple syrup in Vermont and blueberries in Maine--and managed to thrive in isolated and rugged environments. The couple chose a simple, contemplative lifestyle, eating from their garden according to the seasons, and doing four hours of work in the morning so they could enjoy four hours of leisure in the afternoon to "read, write, sit in the sun, walk in the woods, play music, go to town. We earned our four hours of leisure by our four hours of labour," writes Scott.

But those four hours of labour had to be four productive hours. Not everyone at Dragonfly was prepared to do that. Jim Campbell, another original who lived at the farm for two years, explains the dilemma:

One or two people usually saw the need to work. The other people were quite happy to sit around and smoke marijuana, drink coffee, wake up at ten, fritter away a few hours and then try to do something for a couple of hours. You can't survive even minimally unless you're willing to work.

One visitor to Dragonfly in the early 80s described the kitchen as "a bad, dirty Dali painting: dirty dishes everywhere, spaghetti dripping down the counter and sauce on the fridge." But living on the farm provided a different perspective. Sam Balch was 20 years old when she arrived at Dragonfly in 1979. Her second daughter, Sable, was born in the living room of the big house, and Sam, herself, has a long history with intentional communities, having lived at Dragonfly for 7 years and 8 years at Dandelion. I talked to her on the phone briefly, as she was on her way to a truck driving school in Ohio:

Dragonfly was a lot busier place in those days. We had livestock and a big garden. In the early days we were ready for self-sufficiency. We had a lot of get-go. The trouble was getting the dishes washed. It's hard to be self-sufficient and a neat eater.

I learned how to live in a primitive setting. For the first 5 or 6 years I baked all the bread and ran two woodstoves .. days. It was a large family situation. At one point we had 8 people living in the house.

Things shifted with the addition of Brooke Logsdon and Cecilia Avila in the mid-80s. Brooke, a jack-of-all-trades from Windsor, Ont. met Cecilia, a tall woman of Hispanic and Yaqui Indian heritage, in California where she was studying botany. The two married at Dragonfly and Brooke received a 1962 Dodge Dart station wagon as dowry.

Then they went to work: digging a new well, expanding and improving the greenhouse, starting a bedding plant business, and a portable sawmill. This symbolized the watershed from the old laissez-faire days of Dragonfly to a partially commercial organization. In recent years Cecilia has added a mail-order garden seed catalogue to her repertoire. Siempre Viva Seedhouse offers organically grown seed stock specially bred for northern climates.

Agriculture, carpentry and the arts go together in most back-to-the land communities. Dragonfly, like most other alternative homesteads, has always had members who are farmers, tradesworkers, artisans and musicians-sometimes all of those combined.

The farm's connection to the literary arts is particularly strong. Andy Connelly, besides being Cecilia's partner in the greenhouse, writes a monthly gardening column for the Northwood~ Review. Wayne Elliot, the newest addition to the farm, designs web sites on an antiquated 486 computer mounted on boards over all old wash tub. He also puts out his own 'zine, Say What? currently in its sixth edition. For many years the Bancroft alternative magazine Grub was designed and published at Dragonfly. As well, Jim Campbell founded and produced Bulldozer, a prisoners' community newsletter in 1980 while he was living at the farmhouse.

The library upstairs offers a clue to Dragonfly's literary legacy. These were intellectuals. The shelves are crammed with books, some of them rare and obscure titles, dealing with ecology, psychology, sociology, political science and, of course, anarchy. A stuffy loft (dustballs the size of tumbleweeds) over the kitchen contains hundreds of underground press publications from the 70s: Oracle from San Francisco, Rat Magazine from New York City, Georgia Strait, Open Road and Overthrow from Vancouver, Alternate Society from Toronto, and Mother Earth News and Liberation from the US.

Jim Campbell estimates that 150-200 people have lived at the farm at one time or another, while thousands have visited from all over the world.

"Dragonfly was an experiment created to see what would happen," says Campbell. "It's a circus in the sense that you don't have any control over it." .

Morninglory Farm: "We've got to get ourselves hack to the garden" From "Woodstock" by Joni Mitchell

Morninglory Farm is a Japanese flute at midnight, beehives and maple beer, grafted apple and nut trees, blankets draped around the perimeter of the community garden (frost comes late to the highlands of Renfrew County, it was mid-June when I visited).

Nestled in a fen between Killaloe and Wilno, this is the cold clean air of the upper-valley: ancient Polish squared-log buildings dotting the blue and purplish hills; lightscapes blaring with white intensity at the approach of the solstice; dazzling, effervescent sunsets bouncing off nearby Round Lake. Twice deer popped out on me as I was driving to the 24-hour donut shop in Barry's Bay (some habits die hard).

Mominglory is three decades of community living, a village of 17 people on 7 homesteads living without electricity, 18 species of orchids and 55 types of visiting butterflies at 1,600 feet above sea level. It is also laptop computers and solar water heaters, photo voltaic cells and golf cart batteries (the farm has never paid a cent to Ontario Hydro).

Ethan, the Andemlan's second eldest son, takes me walking. The long-haired sixteen year old with sparkling eyes moves lithely through the brush. He points out birds by their call, gives me jewel weed for my blackfly bites, and gets on his haunches to show me the tiniest, subtlest orchids: flowers that are millimeters across, breathstopping explosions of colour on a deep green bed of sedge (for a crystal second the biting insect cloud around me disappears).

Besides being a naturalist and a figure skater, Ethan, as well as his brothers, is a crack chess player. He's never attended a conventional school. The forest is his classroom. "They (the authorities) have kind of forgotten about us," he says.

Two paths cross at the back of the lot. "This is where Gary Beckett goes to get water from the spring," says Ethan. A few minutes later we come across a clearing patrolled by healthy looking chickens. Out of the corner of my eye, I catch a glimpse of a naked man moving quickly up the steps of a cabin. The cabin, surrounded by a cedar rail fence, appears to be on stilts. Sections of the outside walls are particle board while the rest is covered with overlapping, weathered boards.

Solar-powered Sex Pistols blasting from an indoor radio are disorienting. Gary Beckett emerges, clothed (jeans and dirty shirt), from his cottage, looking every inch a biblical prophet: a tall, skinny man with a matted blond beard. He eyes my spinning cassette recorder suspiciously. "Maybe I should go inside and get mine and we can have dueling microphones," he laughs.

Gary's voice has an Ottawa Valley quaver. He says "yeah," by performing an elongated trill on the word and breaking it into three syllables-"eh-yah-hah" with the last note ending a third higher and trailing off. Through missing top teeth he tells me he's been here twenty-two years, because he's got nowhere else to go, joking that his grandfather used to tell the passing years by the age of the horses, instead of the kids, because the horses were more important to him.

Several times a day he has to adjust a pair of solar panels, propped against a crate in the yard, so they face directly into the sun. "I'm cutting my wood by sunshine," he says, holding up an electric chainsaw. "I'd like to be doing other stuff this time of year, but it's hard to get a good day's charging in the winter."

Gary actually has a very tight schedule. He embodies the "cleverlazy" style of many homesteaders: you have to work hard so that you don't have to work hard. He starts gardening at 8 AM so that he can be home at noon to listen to his favourite campus radio show from Ottawa. He keeps beehives chained in an old GMC van with the sliding door open a crack so the workers can get in and out ("I had to run a bear off the property a few years back," pointing to some trashed beekeeping equipment by the outhouse). In the springtime, he taps about a hundred

sugar maples. Each Tuesday he cycles 8 miles on an old CCM coaster bicycle and buys two jugs of whole milk from a local farmer who still sells unpasteurized milk. And every fall Gary orders 50lbs of rolled oats and 50lbs of whole wheat flour on the bulk food truck from Toronto.

Gary Beckett is also a musician. His Thursday night battery-powered music jams are famous: people come walking out of the woods with guitars, flutes, and a PVC pipe didgeridoo; Gary's Rickenbacker bass volts-up inside the stilt house; fireflies and field performance artist Charlotte spin balls of flame in the dusky meadow; young folks (20 year olds, the second generation of the back to the landers now Having their own "alternative" babies) sing Van Morrison on the porch "and it stoned me to my soul, stoned me just like coming home"; more than a few of mugs of Gary's beer tipped (a most tantalizing brew made from spring water, hundred year old hops that grow wild on the farm, and maple syrup whey --it has a delectable cider taste); and nobody will flinch if someone lights up a little "reefer," it being summer and the moon three-quarters full, and the music is good and loud, and has that close to the bone joy and naturalness that only amateurs can attain.

Christina Anderman, a blonde woman from sturdy Quaker stock, arrived in Killaloe in 1980 with a bicycle and \$100. A year later she married the gnome-like Beaver. Today she is the mother of Darryl, Ethan and Ben, and she is the originator of Christina's Cool Hemp, hand-made hemp ice cream that is licked clean off spoons by chi-chi bistro-goers on Toronto's College Street. A non-dairy ice that's cholesterol free and brimming with protein-the samples T tasted were exquisite, buttery. Now her biggest problem is keeping up with the demand for her frozen dessert and finding a steady source of hemp nut. Recently she's switched to a new seed supplier in Saskatchewan, using the Internet to get the best price. (Note: this is hemp not pot-none of the Andermans smoke marijuana).

While still growing most of their food, the Andermans are wrestling with the concept of the new business. Should it be worker-owned or profit sharing? A cooperative or a collective? Should they sign a contract with a dairy to make the hemp cream, or should they hire staff and continue to make it at their storefront in Killaloe?

The farm's strength is its ability to handle diversity and maintain

community at the same time. Each household survives as an autonomous entity with a separate economic strategy. One of the members works offfarm as a teacher and raises four kids, while two of the homesteads are almost entirely self-sustained.

When I come across Audrey, she's drawing water in front of her house, dressed kind of Spanish cowboy, a small woman with a bright vest and straw hat. She's wary of someone walking up to her with a microphone and a tape recorder. She doesn't like the media and thinks they have done unfair portraits of homesteaders. We talk for some time before she invites me in.

I set the microphone up in the middle of the floor and retreat to the opposite wall. Audrey begins by telling me that she's originally from Pennsylvania and she's lived at Morninglory for ten years. The house we are sitting in was made by herself using hand tools, from logs taken from the forest. She estimates that she gets by on \$ 1,000 per year, doing odd jobs. "The land supplies all the rest," she says.

During the time she's lived at the farm, her ideas about living without electricity have developed. Now she's uncomfortable even setting foot inside a "wired" house:

"At the beginning it was sort of a novelty. But over a period of time it became a principle. Now I think the way hydro is produced isn't very good for the planet.

"Our ancestors did quite fine without electricity . You have to have different ways to do things that require more interaction, but it's certainly not impossible to live without it."It may be too late for people to do without hydro in the amount that's coming to them. They just fall to pieces when the hydro doesn't work. During that ice storm in Ottawa, the city was in chaos. People were freezing. They can't cook their food and they're dying because they can't heat their houses."

Many of the tributaries derived from the hippie pioneers point to methodologies that promise more fulfilled, less expensive and sustainable lifestyles: community agriculture; group harvesting and canning initiatives; land trusts where members share taxes, roadways and tools; co-housing where residents share ownership, backyards and communal meals; intensive and organic microfarming; soft technologies like solar, wind and water power which are now efficient and affordable; straw bale construction and grey water systems that have

recently been included in the building code. Perhaps small communities like Dandelion, Dragonfly and Morninglory may offer hints about how to organize aspects of mainstream communities outside the traps of consumerism and over-consumption.

The possibility of Metro Toronto sending millions of tonnes of household waste a thousand kilometers to an open pit mine in Northern Ontario is a glaring example of a society that cannot cleanse itself. We are living in a culture of bloated excess—an excess of resources, wealth and power concentrated in the hands of a moneyed few. At a time when the pendulum of social conservatism is cutting its broadest swath, and the contemporary political debate is poisoned by an atmosphere of intolerance, greed and polarization (and the ground water's not looking too healthy, either), the back to the land communities are willing to sit tight and ride out the storm. "I think there has to be a group of people that retain the memories of how to live like this," says Audrey. "If anything happens that the grid doesn't work anymore, or the agricultural business breaks down, who's going to know how to grow potatoes?" •