

“It’s Hip to Unzip”:

Open Land Communes and Their Neighbours in Northern California, 1966-1979

by

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Abstract

This essay considers the histories of two countercultural, back-to-the-land communes located in northern California: Siskiyou County's Black Bear Ranch and Sonoma County's Morning Star Ranch. Both of these communes were highly influenced by the concept of Open Land, according to which anyone may freely live in a given space, particularly those individuals rejected or alienated by urban modernity. I examine the ways in which these communes related to and were shaped by their rural neighbours, as well as the local state, asserting the importance of the surrounding community in effecting events at each commune. I argue that positive relations with neighbours determined the continued viability of these communes, and that these positive relations in turn required a compromise of original founding principles including Open Land. I further uncover the changing perceptions rural people held of hippie communards, and contextualize the back-to-the-land ideal within broader American traditions of frontier settlement and reinvention.

Preface

This thesis is entirely the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, John Stuart Miller.

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Introduction

While probing the wilderness of northern California's Siskiyou County for fire lines in the summer of 1969, state Fish and Game officials came upon a gruesome discovery. At a fire pit on the property of a known hippie commune, Black Bear Ranch, the officers found an assortment of small bones—perhaps those of a child—and a God's Eye, a woven symbol of pagan origin. This find, the officials speculated, indicated that the counterculture and its dark excesses had arrived in their own remote corner of America.¹ In urban areas, the youth revolution had increasingly gained a violent reputation among disapproving conservatives as riots in Berkeley, Chicago, and elsewhere had recently played out on television screens. Cult figure Charles Manson and his "Family" of followers, meanwhile, were increasing in notoriety while staying in San Francisco's Haight Ashbury and later, the hills surrounding Los Angeles. Their massacre of actress Sharon Tate and others at her home would occur later the same summer, causing many Americans to conflate hippiedom with violent crime. With this nationwide disturbance in the background, the state agents in Siskiyou reported evidence of a possible child sacrifice to the local sheriff. Perhaps they felt justified in their distrust of the strange newcomers who inhabited the commune, used the fire pit, and left the bones. Upon further examination, the bones turned out to be those of a deer, and the hippies responsible for hunting the animal were only served with petty fish and game charges.² There was no satanic ritual involved. Rather, the new settlers had incorporated hunting into their new rural lifestyle.

¹ Kenoli Oleari, email to author, 29 June 2015.

² "Residents of Black Bear Raided by Sheriff Aides," *Siskiyou Daily News*, 18 June 1969, in *Free Land: Free Love: Tales of a Wilderness Commune*, ed. Don Monkerud et al. (Aptos, CA: Black Bear Mining and Publishing Company, 2000), 195.

The incident in the Siskiyou woods captured one particularly colourful example of the paranoia, fear, and resentment many hippie communards encountered as they settled territory far from their previous urban enclaves. As the counterculture flowered in many cities beginning in the mid-1960s, a major revival of interest in communal lifestyles across North America spurred thousands of primarily young, white, middle-class people to create new lives they envisioned as more authentic, rooted in the earth, and detached from conventional sources of authority. Hundreds of thousands of these hippies, political radicals, and other counterculturists migrated to rural areas, going “back-to-the-land” and founding new and diverse settlements often based in part on communal principles and practices they had previously attempted in cities.³ Rural areas offered more physical space for experimentation with architecture and agriculture, sanctuary from urban life many Americans increasingly perceived as corrupt, and some respite from police harassment. But the countryside was not vacant. Indeed, rural county authorities and established neighbours were frequently wary of the newcomers’ ways.

Communes served as a site of conflict for the many national concerns of the period, such as the military draft, drug use, burgeoning environmentalism, political radicalism, and unconventional sexual and spiritual lifestyles. Moreover, communes were also the stage for the emergence of distinct challenges, including land rights, health and building codes, and outdoor nudity. Communards additionally faced problems as they negotiated the integration of new members and the scrutiny of outside experts such as journalists and academics. But while hippies met much hostility in rural areas, not all contact between communards and their mostly

³ Jerome and Miller agree that roughly two hundred and fifty thousand people lived on rural communes by the early 1970s, with as many as half a million urban communards. Judson Jerome, *Families of Eden: Communes and the New Anarchism* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 16-18; Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), xx.

traditional, culturally conservative neighbours heralded animosity. Indeed, many hippies engaged in dialogue and built positive relations with non-communal people in the countryside through a shared work ethic, economic exchange, and in certain attitudes, such as a suspicion of “city folk” or excessive government intervention. I assert that commune viability depended on the willingness of counterculturists to reformulate and compromise their ideals. This need for compromise was driven by internal forces within the commune, but also by neighbours’ perceptions of communes, the shape of relations between communards and their neighbours, and the necessity of communards to earn the trust of the mainstream, rural communities around their settlements.

An affiliation with the counterculture and a sense of separateness from mainstream American culture are the most important attributes for this analysis of two Californian communes, as these qualities provided the context for communards’ relations with their neighbours. Certain other characteristics, however, consistently define the great majority of communes. Most 1960s communards, or participants in the back-to-the-land movement, expounded beliefs in self-sufficiency and separation from mainstream, urban society—ideas that in the United States date at least to the nineteenth century.⁴ Religious Studies scholar Timothy Miller defines a commune as a group of people living with a shared purpose and physical

⁴ Some communards imagined themselves the inheritors of a greater historical legacy, perhaps granting legitimacy and a retort to charges of anti-Americanism. Often these existed through family ties to earlier experiments or revived interest in literature about past communal projects. Scholars such as Miller trace utopian precedents for communal living as far back as the colonial period, during which various Christian groups, such as the Shakers, sought to form breakaway societies guided by religious principles. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, communes such as Oneida and New Harmony established a strong communal tendency among religious dissenters, and other communes were increasingly founded on the political principles of socialism or anarchism, such as California’s Kaweah Cooperative Commonwealth. Nineteenth and twentieth century writers such as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Borsodi, and B. F. Skinner wrote influential works of fiction and philosophy advocating for simple living, self-sufficiency, and carefully designed communities. Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 7-8.

location, some level of division from mainstream society, a preference for the common good over the individual, close personal relations among members, and a degree of economic integration. All communes exist somewhere along a gradient of adherence to these attributes. Roommates typically would not fall into the commune category, as they generally do not share a strong sense of purpose or exclusion from mainstream society. Furthermore, in the 1960s context few communes were composed primarily of members of the same nuclear or extended family.⁵ Many communes instead celebrated the construction of new, voluntary “families” built irrespective of literal kin. Miller’s work also minimizes the role of urban communal arrangements. For example, he questions the validity of claims that these so-called “crashpads” bore any resemblance to rural communes.⁶ In many cases, however, back-to-the-landers pioneered communal household organization in cities, pooling money and labour, and continued to maintain ties with urban communes once they settled in the countryside.⁷ Some urban and rural communes are thus better imagined as extensions of one another.

Alongside communes, communities of different sorts are central to this paper, as are the ways communities develop and their members relate to one another. I define the term *community* as the people living within a limited given space and their social, economic, and political relations. Individuals in a single community are not necessarily homogenous, but do share a variable assortment of qualities. I refer to the people who inhabited farms and small towns and

⁵ Ibid, xxii-xxiv.

⁶ Ibid, xxii.

⁷ The San Francisco Bay Area urban commune newsletter, the *Kaliflower*, provided information and contacts for those in the city interested in rural communes around the region, see “Somewhere over the Rainbow: Up North Communes,” *Kaliflower* 1.10, 26 June 1969, MS 4008, Box 1, Folder 12, Friends of Perfection Records (hereafter cited as FPR), North Baker Research Library, California Historical Society, San Francisco.

settlements close to each commune as together representing the *local* or *broader community*, or some variant of this term. I also refer to these local people simply as *neighbours*. The communities of rural people that existed around hippie communes did not share precisely the same identity. These rural people differed in occupation and to some extent, class and race, and held diverse, changing views of the communards. Communes themselves have often been referred to by communards and scholars alike as *intentional communities*, but the notions of *community* and *community building* apply equally to relationships between communards within communes, and to relationships between communards and their more ordinarily-living neighbours in the broader community.⁸

The members of the two northern Californian communes examined here experienced very different interactions with one another and their respective neighbours. Sonoma County's Morning Star Ranch was founded in 1966, and after years of legal battles with the county and conflict within the commune and with neighbours, it was left uninhabited by 1973, aside from the occasional return of its legal owner, Lou Gottlieb. Black Bear Ranch in Siskiyou County, meanwhile, was founded in 1968 and exists to the present day, though my recounting of its history ends in the late 1970s, when its communards forcibly removed members of a divisive cult. Each commune began with a similar premise of Free or Open Land: the conviction that all people are entitled to make their lives in a given space with few, if any, constraints. I consider the impact of Open Land on the histories of each of these communes, and the ways in which this concept was retained or modified as the communes' populations and relations to their surrounding communities changed.

⁸ Miller, *The 60s Communes*, xxii-xxiv.

A range of diverse decisions made at Morning Star and Black Bear differently showcase the possibilities for cooperation, conflict, and the recognition of shared values between communards and their rural neighbours. In particular, the manner in which the communards adhered to Open Land principles and made an effort to get along with neighbours accounted for Black Bear's survival and Morning Star's decline. The counterculture championed by members of both communes differed radically from the rural and small town cultures of communities present in Sonoma and Siskiyou. The history of these two communes, however, reveals rural Californians' diverse perceptions of the communards. This history further demonstrates the ability of many rural people to sympathize and cooperate with the intruders. Communes and their guiding principles were shaped in different way by other counterculturists and mainstream Americans from the broader community, and thus cannot be understood as self-contained entities, or as existing separately from the rural milieus they entered. Their development and viability depended upon the willingness of communards to renegotiate founding principles, especially those which regulated membership, and impose some restrictions on their own behaviour. This process was connected with the place of the communes within the broader community, and the mutable opinions and actions of locals.

Since the 1960s, scholars have illuminated many aspects of the back-to-the-land movement, though with relatively little focus on relations with those outside communes. The first scholarship on countercultural communes was primarily sociological and based on first-hand fieldwork, stressing intracommunal orders, health matters, unconventional familial and sexual formations, and childrearing. These early scholars, including Hugh Gardner, Judson Jerome, Bennett Berger, and Gilbert Zicklin, emphasize internal concerns as the primary drivers

of change in communes.⁹ Their work mentions hostile local receptions communes initially faced, but lacks a more robust and thorough examination of how community relations changed over time. Jerome treats the subject briefly, accurately stating that a good relationship with neighbours was an important objective of many communards. While some “square” locals may have thought hippies “crazy” for their countercultural activities such as outdoor nudity or recreational drug use, they could respect communards’ work ethic and even tolerate their breaking of gender roles and other unorthodox practices. Jerome does not, however, explore the histories of these interactions with much depth or dynamism. Existent scholarship generally does not pose relations between communards and their neighbours as complex, evolving historical processes in themselves. Meanwhile, Gardner, in considering the commune at Wheeler’s Ranch, largely ignores those locals sympathetic to the hippies in conservative Sonoma County, a region then home to many retired Bay Area police officers.¹⁰ Yet even in rural areas like Sonoma, where cultural norms differed immensely from those in Haight Ashbury, communards found willing allies.

Miller’s 60s communes oral history project dominated another major phase of commune scholarship. Miller’s comprehensive, historical overview of the 1960s-70s commune movement places diverse back-to-the-land settlements within the broader context of communalism in the United States.¹¹ While Miller’s oral history collection remains inaccessible to most scholars, the

⁹ Hugh Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity: Thirteen Modern American Communes* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1978); Jerome, *Families of Eden*; Bennett M Berger, *The Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life Among Rural Communards* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981); Gilbert Zicklin, *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Jerome, *Families of Eden*, 121-123; Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity*, 147-148.

¹¹ Miller, *The 60s Communes*; Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

interviews cited in his books assist in illuminating many aspects of the 1960s-70s communes.¹² A more recent wave of scholarship was produced through the Communes Project, a series of workshops and conferences beginning in 2003 at UC Berkeley and the Mendocino Institute. Participating scholars have reframed the commune movement as integrally connected to the radical politics of the era, affirming the back-to-the-land movement's commitment to broader social change. From this perspective, hippie communes appear more outward looking, and share affinities with contemporaneous Black Panther houses and the 1969-71 occupation of Alcatraz by Red Power activists.¹³ Some countercultural communards, according to this reevaluation, were looking for opportunities to engage with locals politically and personally, rather than merely seeking a hermetic existence away from mainstream rural or urban society. Scholars such as Felicity Scott and Cal Winslow note several points of tension with ordinary neighbours and the government, and explore the effects communes had on the rural regions in which they were founded. These episodes of conflict revolved around some communards' defence of the local environment and their feuds with county governments concerning bylaws.¹⁴ Finally, historian Stephen Vider charts the limits of what neighbouring people unaffiliated with the counterculture were willing to tolerate from communes during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Two gay liberationist communes where some members were known to crossdress, one near Port Angeles, Washington and the other at Wolf Creek, Oregon, were firebombed, and even faced opposition

¹² The collection is unindexed and not easily available in digital form, as the computer copy exists in an obsolete format. Timothy Miller, email to author, 20 January 2015.

¹³ Iain Boal et al., eds., *West of Eden: Communes and Utopia in Northern California* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Cal Winslow, "The Albion Nation: Communes on the Mendocino Coast," in Boal et al., *West of Eden*, 137-156; Felicity D. Scott, "Bulldozers in Utopia: Open Land, Outlaw Territory, and the Code Wars," in Boal et al., *West of Eden*, 57-71.

from local heterosexual “longhairs,” or hippies.¹⁵ Most countercultural communes, including those discussed in detail here, were primarily white and heterosexual.¹⁶ Communes specifically modelled on radical ideals pertaining to race or sexuality, such as those that espoused gay and lesbian openness and freedom, often met a different, fiercer set of challenges in settling urban and especially, rural areas.

This paper sets out to investigate changes in perceptions and relations between counterculturists and the inhabitants of the rural societies they entered, springing from recent scholarship’s recontextualization of communes within the wider political and social setting they occupied. The people of this study were not the binary “redneck” and “hippie” archetypes of popular culture, depicted as irreconcilable enemies for easy public consumption in the commercialized counterculture exhibited in films such as *Easy Rider* (1969).¹⁷ In fact, far from finding the hippies irredeemable, many rural people were open to the newcomers, opposed state intervention against communes, and supported communards’ freedom to live as they wished. Indeed, some neighbours of different backgrounds saw hippie communards as a persecuted group. At the same time, other neighbours were thoroughly opposed to large numbers of young people intruding upon their communities, and did not accept the disruptive behaviour and petty

¹⁵ Stephen Vider, “‘The Ultimate Extension of Gay Community’: Communal Living and Gay Liberation in the 1970s,” *Gender & History* 27.3 (November 2015): 875.

¹⁶ According to scholar Tim Hodgdon, in the late 1960s and early 70s many men at communes such as Black Bear linked homosexuality with “degeneracy,” but in time this view changed as gay liberation became more prominent, members came out as gay or lesbian, and gender roles blurred. Tim Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-1983* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 80, 95. For a short account of the “arrival of feminism and gay liberation” at Black Bear, see Don Monkerud, “Opening to Life: Fred,” in Boal et al., *West of Eden*, 226-228.

¹⁷ *Easy Rider*, dir. Dennis Hopper (Columbia Pictures, 1969); David E. James, “‘The Movies Are a Revolution’: Film and the Counterculture,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 299.

crime that some communes emanated. I argue that favourable relations with the broader community were critical for communards to sustain their experimental rural settlements, and that these relations hinged upon communards' willingness to revise original founding principles, such as Open Land.

1960s Communes and the Origins of Open Land

The three decades following the Second World War witnessed dynamic social, political, and cultural changes in the United States, as many baby-boomers challenged the assumptions of previous generations to an unprecedented extent. The tropes of the 1960s counterculture that emerged from this assault on the orthodox are familiar: flower children smoking marijuana and dropping acid in Golden Gate Park, African-American militants parading in combat fatigues, bearded spiritual gurus leading their enraptured disciples, and antiwar demonstrators igniting their draft cards as Vietnam itself burned. Many of these American dissidents targeted values such as consumerism, suburban conformity, militarism, and racial and sexual conventions. By the mid- to late 1960s, Beat literature, the civil rights movement, campus initiatives for free speech, dissatisfaction with foreign policy, and older legacies of leftist activism lay the groundwork for the counterculture, the black power movement, and the New Left. Millions of people saw themselves as belonging to some combination of these cultural and political factions, and thousands joined organizations such as the Black Panther Party, the Yippies, and the Gay Liberation Front, many of which effected American society to an extent well exceeding their actual size.¹⁸ Perhaps the only common purpose shared among all of the movements and individuals of the era was the desire for an alternative way of life. This reinvention extended from personal relations and novel forms of community to revaluations of social, spiritual, and political structures and authorities.

For some counterculturists, the desire for an alternative surpassed the possibilities offered by ordinary political activism or living arrangements geared towards the nuclear family. Many of

¹⁸ David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 172-173, 206, 221.

these counterculturists formed communal homes consisting of like-minded individuals bound through some combination of friendship; social, political, or spiritual allegiance; and sometimes sexual or romantic relations. These new way of organizing domestic life appeared to offer a powerful antidote to the staid nuclear families many communards came from. Another factor that motivated people to join the hippie commune diaspora was the rather swift degradation of countercultural bastions such as Haight Ashbury, which became increasingly inundated with hard drug use and violent crime in the two years following the 1967 Summer of Love.¹⁹ For some hippies, antipathy towards urban life precipitated the pursuit of an idyllic, uncorrupted vision of nature and the potential for independent sustenance based on agriculture, bartering, craftwork, hunting, and gathering.

Many of these “back-to-the-landers” found the space to practice their new lifestyles in rural northern California. In addition to its place at the centre of the counterculture, California has a rich history of utopianism and communalism dating much earlier, and the northern part of the state in particular continued to attract inspired communards by the 1960s and 70s.²⁰ Northern California’s pull can be attributed to a combination of then-affordable land, a temperate climate, and proximity to the San Francisco Bay Area, from which countercultural ideas and aspirants radiated. Black Bear and Morning Star were founded in very different regions of northern California; Morning Star in Sonoma County near the Bay Area and Black Bear in remote, mountainous Siskiyou County close to the Oregon border (see Fig. 1). Each embraced and proceeded to negotiate Open Land.

¹⁹ Katherine Powell Cohen, *San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 76-77.

²⁰ The Pacific coastal regions from the Bay Area to the Canadian border hosted the greatest concentration of countercultural communes. Winslow, “The Albion Nation,” 142.



Fig. 1: The two communes' approximate locations.²¹

The communes of the 1960s era took on a large variety of ideologies, structures, and characteristics including Open Land, which one commentator, Jefferson Selth, characterized as “anarchistic.”²² According to followers of this strand of communal thought, the central precept of Open Land was that none were refused the right to stay at the commune, and all were welcome to settle as they wished and enjoyed life without rent, compulsory structure, or governance.²³ Commune journalist Richard Fairfield dates the first Open Land commune to Amelia Newell’s Gorda Mountain in 1962, but Newell and those at the short-lived Gorda commune do not appear

²¹ Map source: “Show me...Northern California,” accessed 27 August 2016, http://www.thinkitseeit.com/mapchaser/CA/pages/CA_No_Relief.asp?Northern+California,CA. Modified by author.

²² Jefferson P. Selth, “The Ashram of Graton Road: Morningstar Ranch, a California Commune in the 1960’s,” *Communal Societies* 4 (1984): 207.

²³ Scott, “Bulldozers in Utopia,” 57-71.

to have recorded their philosophical position about land as a formal, written concept.²⁴ Several communards involved with Morning Star explained Open Land in two manifestos published in 1969 and 1971. The first of these manifestos forms a part of the larger *Morning Star Scrapbook*, a chronicle of the commune. The *Scrapbook* also includes a collection of photographs, newspaper clippings, illustrations, various spiritual and ideological pronouncements, and artwork. The first manifesto explained that Open Land allowed “interpersonal relations” to “grow and flourish as naturally as the seasons.”²⁵ The communards found that in a “no rules environment, hostilities could find little breeding ground.” One of the introductory pages of the *Scrapbook* further labeled “exclusive ownership of land” humanity’s “original sin,” rejecting the concept of private property, and offering an invitation to new settlers.²⁶ According to its proponents, Open Land was best experienced in the countryside, where a greater degree of freedom was possible, as counterculturists spread outward from the cities.

Open Land was a curious reconfiguration of some ideas particular to the 1960s counterculture and others deeply rooted in American history. Since the early seventeenth century, the settler colonial imperative had pushed the frontier of white settlement further, displacing indigenous peoples and thoroughly altering the landscape. Almost within living memory, the regions in which Morning Star and Black Bear were founded had been host to genocidal, state-sponsored vigilante expeditions organized by expansionist white settlers intent on massacring indigenous people. In February and March 1850 for example, white men in Sonoma and nearby

²⁴ Richard Fairfield, “Gorda Mountain the First Open-Land Commune,” in *The Modern Utopian: Alternative Communities of the 60s and 70s*, ed. Richard Fairfield (Port Townsend, WA: Process Media, 2010), 68.

²⁵ Lou Gottlieb et al., “Open Land: A Manifesto (I),” in *The Morning Star Scrapbook, 1966-1973*, 154.

²⁶ Gottlieb, “Good news,” in *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 18.

Napa organized and indiscriminately killed an unknown but “substantial” number of Costal Miwok people; ten bodies remained from a single incident. Two years later in Siskiyou, a group of white volunteers killed at least 158 indigenous people, and received twenty-three thousand dollars in reimbursements from the state. Volunteers found justification for these lethal expeditions in real or perceived crimes committed by indigenous people—often the petty theft of farm animals. To these white volunteers, however, the greater crime of indigenous people was merely existing, and obstructing the whites’ productive settlement and cultivation of the land.²⁷ Freshly cleared land subsequently figured as a kind of blank slate.

Throughout American history, settlers holding different religious and ideological beliefs have envisioned empty (or emptied) rural areas as sites to create what historian Lorenzo Veracini calls “a better polity, either by setting up an ideal social body or by constituting an exemplary model of social organization.”²⁸ Journalist Frances Fitzgerald further describes various late-1960s to early-1980s experimental subcultures as duplicating the consummately American practice of reinvention, which originated in Puritan governor John Winthrop’s vision of the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a “City Upon a Hill.”²⁹ According to the *Morning Star Scrapbook*, Open Land communards intended to launch just such an ideal society much in keeping with this older tradition, but their society would be cleansed of the “sin” of private property.³⁰ The founders of Morning Star and Black Bear did not acquire their rural land through conquest, in

²⁷ Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 120-123, 241-242.

²⁸ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

²⁹ Frances Fitzgerald, *Cities on a Hill: A Journey Through Contemporary American Cultures* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 23-24.

³⁰ Gottlieb, “Good news.”

contrast to traditional forms of settler colonialism explicated by Veracini, but instead through the conventions of mid-twentieth century rural Californian real estate.³¹ Yet the land's past resonated: Black Bear was first settled by whites as a gold mining encampment, and lay in a region long home to the Karuk, Yurok, and Hoopa people.³² While Black Bear attracted counterculturists in the late 1960s, in the nineteenth century the land attracted the same settlers and prospectors who also joined raiding parties against indigenous people. Writer Dina Gilio-Whitaker argues that the Black Bear communards, however noble their intentions, echoed a "sense of settler entitlement."³³ She further contends that this "entitlement" was a legacy of hippies' ancestors, and a product of the capitalist system back-to-the-landers sought to escape. While past and current cruelties to indigenous peoples received new levels of attention during the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly with the ascendance of the American Indian or Red Power Movement, few white political radicals or counterculturists gave much thought to indigenous sovereignty. In fact, many hippies tried to replicate some aesthetics and practices of indigenous peoples, while simultaneously failing to recognize the historical injustices that provided cheap rural land.³⁴

While, in a sense, 1960s communards emulated the settler colonial view of land, earlier models of settlement differed radically from what many back-to-the-landers envisioned,

³¹ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 3.

³² Black Bear "originally belonged" to California lieutenant governor John Daggett. Peter Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall: A Chronicle* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 148.

³³ Gilio-Whitaker references a letter written by several former Black Bear residents and others requesting that the Black Bear people "repatriate" the land to the local indigenous people. This pertinent question merits a paper all its own. Dina Gilio-Whitaker, "Decolonizing the Black Bear Ranch Hippie Commune," *Indian Country*, 28 March 2016, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2016/03/28/decolonizing-black-bear-ranch-hippie-commune>.

³⁴ On the appropriation of indigenous practices and aesthetics by the counterculture, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 154-180.

especially those at Morning Star and Black Bear. In theory, Open Land communards welcomed anyone, disavowed private ownership, and sought to provide sanctuary for the rejects of urban modernity.³⁵ In the case of Black Bear they also established friendly, non-exploitative relations with some of the area's indigenous people, all of which little resembled the past misdeeds of white-indigenous relations in California. The societies founded by counterculturists substantially diverged from those of earlier white settlers, even as they benefited from past settlers' clearing of the land. Open Land communards did not homestead in the conventional sense that entailed dividing settled land into bordered, legally defined parcels for small, patriarchal family units with explicit power structures. Many communards also rejected aspects of mainstream American culture that were as important in the 1960s Vietnam-era as they were in the nineteenth century, however markedly these principles had evolved. Much of the counterculture disavowed ideologies such as militarism, individualism, traditional forms of Christianity, and capitalism; rural land offered the space on which to found a new society in which these forces were absent. For many counterculturists, the recreational and spiritual use of certain drugs were a catalyst of this new society. If counterculturists viewed rural land as a frontier to be conquered, then so was the mind, and they believed these drugs could change and expand the mind tremendously. Close to two million Americans had tried LSD by 1969, and many advocates of psychedelics, like former Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary, argued that these drugs liberated people's minds from negative ideological structures, empowering new imaginative possibilities for social and

³⁵ Gottlieb, "Morning Star Faith," *Morning Star Scrapbook*, 7.

mental transformation and a “change in consciousness.”³⁶ Many proponents of Open Land and similarly minded counterculturists maintained that hippies should take these new ideas (and drugs) to the “frontier” of the countryside, where the land was inexpensive and less populated, if not quite “empty” or “free,” as previous generations of pioneers imagined.

In their everyday affairs, Open Land communes were highly influenced by the anti-authoritarian, iconoclastic, experimental ideals claimed by the counterculture, concepts which were in turn fostered by relaxed positions about property and behaviour on communal land. Throughout the period, many counterculturists moved back and forth between urban and rural settings, joining established communes and founding their own, each time taking new skills and ideas, such as Open Land, with them. There were other ideas, however, that motivated back-to-the-landers. Religious convictions governed many other communes. The beliefs of religious communards mandated a higher degree of structure; the Hare Krishnas, for example, required that members wake at 4 a.m. each morning for three hours of chanting and scripture reading.³⁷ A significant number of communes obeyed principles grounded in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism, but other religious communes integrated new spiritual systems that were part of what would eventually be termed the “New Age.”³⁸ As no scholars or journalists conducted substantial surveys of commune ideologies at the time, it is impossible to know for certain just what proportion of 1960s-1970s communes followed a more religious structure, espoused Open Land and other countercultural ideals, or combined both. However, neither

³⁶ 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings, “Figure 6.2 Annual Numbers of New Users of Ecstasy, LSD, and PCP: 1965–2001,” <https://archive.org/stream/resultsfrom2002n00offi#page/46/mode/2up>; Ramon Sender, “Chapter 2: First Arrivals,” in *Home Free Home: A History of Two Open-Door California Communes, Morning Star Ranch and Wheeler’s (Ahimsa) Ranch*, The Digger Archives, 1986, online.

³⁷ Fairfield, “The Krishna People: Serving God 24 Hours a Day,” in *The Modern Utopian*, 232-236.

³⁸ Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 126-127.

religious nor countercultural communes were marginal, and Jerome estimates that by the early 1970s the number of communes embracing a religious or philosophical “creed” that controlled daily life, and those that lacked such a tight framework (which would include Open Land and most other countercultural communes), was roughly equal.³⁹ Jerome further estimates that there were approximately twenty-five thousand rural communes nationwide by the early 1970s, with an average membership of ten to twelve people. Whatever the precise numbers, the Open Land concept likely influenced dozens and perhaps hundreds of countercultural communes throughout California and beyond during the 1960s and early 1970s, whether in a codified manner, as at Morning Star, or not. In any case, the celebration of free, open, communal land, food, and services amidst the plenty of the postwar United States was significant and widespread across the counterculture of the 1960s.

Morning Star and Black Bear did not maintain any consistent, hierarchical power structure or pervasive belief system beyond an at least initial commitment to Open Land, but some settlers at both communities nonetheless valued the mystical. These individuals identified with distinct political and social aspects of the counterculture, while taking a pluralistic view of spirituality and refraining from the strict level of religious structure maintained by, for instance, the Hare Krishnas. The authors of the *Morning Star Scrapbook* linked many spiritual themes to their overarching principle of Open Land, without highlighting any rigorous duties. These spiritual themes were composed of symbols and language from eastern and western mysticism, many of which were tropes of the 1960s counterculture. The *Morning Star Scrapbook* includes references to the “Om” mantra, a holy, meditative chant present in Hinduism, Buddhism, and

³⁹ Jerome, *Families of Eden*, 16-18; Miller, *The 60s Communes*, xx.

other Indian religions. There are also allusions to the classical four elements (earth, air, fire, and water), a mainstay of early western science and spirituality since ancient Greece. The *Scrapbook*'s writers additionally discussed a reformulation of the Christian concept of original sin as private property.⁴⁰ All of this imagery and rhetoric from multiple spiritual and metaphysical traditions offered a transcendental sense of legitimacy, as well as continuity with other practitioners of lifestyles and spiritualities outside of the mainstream.

⁴⁰ Gottlieb, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 7-9, 18.

“An Obscene and Disgusting Exhibition”: the Attack on Open Land

While the commune scene did not explode until the late 1960s, the first signs of the movement appeared near the beginning of the decade. Likely the first commune to embrace the notion of “Open-Land” was at Gorda Mountain, near Big Sur, California, where Amelia Newell invited anyone who wished to take up residency on her plot in 1962.⁴¹ Over the next five years, more than two hundred people accepted the invitation, but many locals were not pleased with this new presence in their community. The owner of a nearby gas station clipped a gun to his belt and denied service to the hippies and other locals posted signs warning them to stay away from their stores and offices. According to Fairfield, the commune was shut down in 1968 by county authorities, who cited health violations, and were aided in an unexplained capacity by local vigilantes. Yet this event did not occur in isolation and was not the end of the Open Land concept, as ideas put into practice at Gorda Mountain began manifesting elsewhere.

Following lesser known experiments in commune building, such as the one at Gorda Mountain, Morning Star Ranch, about an hour and a half north of San Francisco by car, became one of the largest and most significant Californian communes to embrace Open Land. Lou Gottlieb, musicologist, comedian, and bassist of the folk band the Limelickers, bought thirty acres of land near Sebastopol, Sonoma County in 1962, though the land did not become a commune for several more years.⁴² Sonoma’s economy has been largely agricultural since white settlement in the nineteenth century, and is now known especially for wine production. According to the 1970 census, the county had an overwhelmingly white population of just over two hundred

⁴¹ Fairfield, “Gorda Mountain.”

⁴² Fairfield, “Morning Star Ranch,” in *The Modern Utopian*, 69.

thousand, with a per capita income about seven percent below the state average.⁴³ From 1920 to 1988, the county fairly consistently voted Republican.⁴⁴ In 1968 and 1972, Richard Nixon's law-and-order, anti-hippie campaign was victorious. Sonoma was thus a predominantly conservative, agrarian county in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and many of Gottlieb's neighbours were farmers of poor or moderate means with political tendencies receptive to Nixon's reactionary rhetoric.



Fig. 2: An anti-hippie sign from a business near Mount Shasta, California, 1969-1970.⁴⁵

Beginning in 1966, Gottlieb's land transitioned from the performer's private retreat to a satellite of the burgeoning Haight-Ashbury scene. San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district was then home to thousands of young people from across the United States seeking community with others interested in social change, enlightened release from material concerns, or simply getting

⁴³ "1970 Census," Bay Area Census, accessed 12 October 2016, <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/SonomaCounty70.htm>; "U.S. Regional Data, California, Counties," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Research, accessed 21 November 2016, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/categories/27521>.

⁴⁴ With three exceptions being the 1932, 1936, and 1964 presidential elections. "United States Presidential Election Results: California," Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, accessed 12 October 2016, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/>.

⁴⁵ "We do not solicit 'hippie' patronage" broadsides, circa 1969-1970, BANC MSS 2013/54, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

high. One Haight-headquartered organization, the Diggers, provided a variety of services such as free stores, medical clinics, food, and political theatre, promoting a similar philosophy to practitioners of Open Land.⁴⁶ Gottlieb was a friend of the Diggers, granting them permission to use his land, and marking Morning Star's origins as an extension of urban communalism. In an outgrowth of their characteristically San Franciscan experiment in alternative community building, the Diggers put Morning Star to agricultural use, trucking food back to the city. The meeting of Gottlieb, Stewart Brand, publisher of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, and Ramon Sender, Bay Area artist and prominent hippie, all of them loosely affiliated with the Diggers, led to Gottlieb's declaration of Open Land in 1966.⁴⁷ Sender and Gottlieb summarized their vision in the acronym LATWIDN, meaning Land Access To Which Is Denied No One, and they referred to God as the sole owner of the property. In later comments made to a visitor to his commune, Gottlieb asserted his view that other communal projects he had read about "failed because they restricted access."⁴⁸ Word of Gottlieb's new free space circulated quickly, and a population of a half dozen people including Gottlieb, Sender, and some Diggers in June 1966 grew to thirty-five by the end of the year, many of the newcomers arriving from Haight Ashbury.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Curiously, the word "digger" was originally a derogatory term for indigenous peoples in California used by white settlers. The word dehumanized indigenous peoples by evoking a common racial slur for African Americans, while denigrating a diet partly consisting of edible roots. The 1960s Diggers thought of themselves as scavengers amidst a plentiful society. Michael William Doyle, "The Haight-Ashbury Diggers and the Cultural Politics of Utopia, 1965-1968" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1997), 136.

⁴⁷ Sender was a veteran of author Ken Kesey's notorious "acid tests," during which LSD was shared freely at locations such as La Honda, Kesey's commune-like residence. Sender and Gottlieb met at the acid-saturated 1966 Trips Festival. Doyle, "The Haight-Ashbury Diggers," 74; Gottlieb, "A Fast Run Through Part One," in *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 25.

⁴⁸ Selth, "The *Ashram* of Graton Road," 206.

⁴⁹ Fairfield, "Morning Star Ranch," 69; Lou Gottlieb et al., "Morning Star Ranch Chronology 1966-69," in *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 2.

Departing from their past urban lives and beginning rural life at Morning Star, the new communards continued to understand themselves as revolutionaries, in Gottlieb's words "questioning basic American assumptions about private ownership of land" and forging a more collective vision of life in and around their new settlement.⁵⁰ For the Morning Star communards, Open Land meant making territory freely available to the "naked, nameless and homeless" as a sanctuary, "replenish(ing) the soil," and an assumption of "Voluntary Primitivism."⁵¹ Finally, those that would not or could not obey the conventions of modern society, find employment, or live sedate, nuclear-family based lifestyles would have a place to call their own. Gottlieb, skeptical of the technology and technocracy he believed dominated urban life, told one journalist that the many alienated societal rejects on his land belonged to the "first wave of an ocean of technologically unemployables. The cybernation is in its early snowball stages."⁵²

With no single set of expectations for its inhabitants, Open Land encouraged sexual, spiritual, and artistic exploration, and entailed a negligible assertion of rules or structure. At Morning Star, this all translated to an experimental 'do your own thing' ethic, and many of those who arrived began cooking, tending to the garden and chickens, and adding to the cluster of existent buildings.⁵³ Other Morning Star people found more hedonistic or spiritual pursuits. Many practiced nude "sun yoga" and group chanting, and Timothy Leary once dropped by to offer a psychedelic benediction.⁵⁴ In time, babies were born at Morning Star, and some visitors

⁵⁰ Gottlieb, "Intro," in *The Morning Star Scrapbook*.

⁵¹ Gottlieb, "Morning Star Faith."

⁵² Dick Torkelson, "The Happiness People—II Graton Ranch Hippy Retreat," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, date unavailable (likely Summer 1967), in the *Morning Star Scrapbook*, 26.

⁵³ Ralph J. Gleason, "A Limeliter's New Thing," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 1967 (day unavailable), in the *Morning Star Scrapbook*.

⁵⁴ Alastair Gordon, *Spaced Out: Radical Environments of the Psychedelic Sixties* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008), 154-155; Gottlieb, "A Fast Run-Through Part One," *Morning Star Scrapbook*, 25.

and new members brought children with them. Gottlieb's wife, Rena Morning Star, gave birth to Vishnu, a healthy son, at the commune. Referring to the commune's maternity policy as "open land, open cervix," she described to Fairfield the simplicity and ease of her pregnancy and the group consumption of the placenta.⁵⁵ She also informed him of her prenatal diet which included no sugar, honey, or meat, but plenty of LSD, and Vishnu's "really really beautiful" appearance while the baby was on acid.⁵⁶ Occasionally, Gottlieb held meetings to discuss larger matters at the commune, but only some members attended and there was no established process of consensus- or democratically-based governance. They felt such a standard, consistent procedure would contradict the spirit of Open Land, according to which "the land (the vibes) selected the people who lived on it," and how they would live.⁵⁷ There was little will to enforce anything resembling a group decision following commune meetings.

Contact between Morning Star and the local community first occurred early in its history, and much of it was positive. Sender expressed the communards' wish to "establish a system of barter" in conversation with Morning Star's neighbours, through which they might obtain goods they could not make themselves in exchange for vegetables or labour.⁵⁸ One neighbour gave the communards milk, eggs, and butter after they assisted in the repair of her fence and barn. During another episode of contact with the broader community one month later, the communards organized a dance at a hall in nearby Sebastopol, and the police chief remarked that there was

⁵⁵ Fairfield, "Morning Star Ranch," 76-77.

⁵⁶ Vishnu graduated from Cornell Law School in 1995. "Lou Gottlieb, 5/11/95: Dear Joe," accessed 21 August 2016, <http://laurelrose.com/MORN/SU992.HTM>.

⁵⁷ Gottlieb et al., "Open Land: A Manifesto (I)," 154.

⁵⁸ Sender, "Chapter 4: Early Problems," *Home Free Home*.

“not a bit of trouble” as the hippies partied alongside the locals.⁵⁹ The continued fun and Gottlieb’s aspirations to Open Land, however, were quickly put into jeopardy by a combination of outside factors that together triggered a clash with concerned locals and the county government.

County authorities first visited Morning Star early in the commune’s history. As word of Open Land’s welcoming position towards prospective communards circulated among hippies throughout the region, Morning Star became a haven for many young runaways. Following a teenage hippie’s trip to an area hospital with a yeast infection in January 1967, a narcotics officer approached the people at Morning Star. The officer, no doubt with the intention to intimidate his listeners, sarcastically called the commune a “nice place to hang out and drop acid,” and according to Sender, the officer “leer(ed) at the ladies” in the vicinity.⁶⁰ Recreational drugs were in widespread use throughout the counterculture, and consistently brought hippies undesired, negative attention from the media and police. Though California banned LSD in October 1966 (the rest of the country soon followed), the moral panic surrounding psychedelics did not reach its climax until at least 1967, striking terror nationwide.⁶¹ Sensationalized reporting on and fictional depictions of LSD in television shows such as *Dragnet* (1967) and films such as *Hallucination Generation* (1967) all relayed exaggerated tales of youth decay and chaos brought about by the drug’s consumption, which according to some reports threatened to induce

⁵⁹ Staff Correspondent, “Hippies Stage Orderly Dance In Sebastopol,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 26 July 1967, in the *Morning Star Scrapbook*, 31.

⁶⁰ Gottlieb, “A Fast Run-Through Part One.”

⁶¹ Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), 149.

permanent psychosis.⁶² Law enforcement and much of the public imagined countercultural communes and drugs such as marijuana and LSD as a particular menace to vulnerable young people, on whom the continued national anti-communist effort depended.⁶³ This fear for young people and the future gave the more conservative residents of Sonoma County and the local police all the more reason to admonish Morning Star. The first drug bust occurred in April 1967, just as Morning Star became inundated with Digger farmers. The Sonoma police sent an informant to the commune, but the informant instead warned the communards of the impending drug search, so they had plenty of time to hide anything incriminating.⁶⁴ Subsequently, future drug busts were not an existential danger to Morning Star. Drugs were easily hidden, and often rapidly consumed upon availability, and so few remained on hand. The occasional possession charge only effected individual communards. Rather, the sequence of events ushered by the crowds that gravitated around Morning Star endangered the commune's viability.

Increasing numbers of communards and intrigued tourists, continually encouraged by publicity in national and local media, surpassed what Gottlieb's followers could handle, and what Sonoma County would tolerate. During the summer of 1967, the number of meal-eating communards ran well over one hundred, though many came only for brief visits, often hitchhiking to the commune or finding other makeshift transportation. During one weekend in July 1967, Morning Star people provided three hundred hippies with meals. Most of the food came from some communards' voluntary cultivation of the property's, which yielded enough

⁶² *Dragnet*, "The LSD Story," 1967, youtube.com, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eBPWwxOKwQ>; *Hallucination Generation*, dir. Edward Mann (Trans American Films, 1967).

⁶³ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987), 279.

⁶⁴ Sender, "Chapter 3: The Digger Farm," *Home Free Home*; Gottlieb, "A Fast Run-Through Part One."

food to “regularly ship” the surplus to the Diggers in San Francisco.⁶⁵ At around the same time, as many as two thousand tourists—defined by Fairfield as those individuals that neither ate with the communards nor stayed overnight—visited Morning Star.⁶⁶ Among the masses of young people who crowded onto the land, Gottlieb recognized potential troublemakers who might create discord within the commune or beyond. His reluctance to compromise the principles of Open Land directly contributed to Morning Star’s downfall.

The forebodingly named “Nevada, Gypsy, Chief, TW and Crazy Annie” settled at Morning Star in July 1967; they were a particular challenge, irritating many fellow communards, and engaging in “drunken brawls and aggressive thievery.”⁶⁷ According to Gottlieb, at a commune meeting “it was decided...that they would have to leave.”⁶⁸ The communards turned to Gottlieb to enforce the meeting’s consensus. Gottlieb disavowed any power structure, as this would be contrary to the “no rules” precepts of Open Land.⁶⁹ But he was nonetheless viewed by other communards as an authority figure because he was one of the original founders, likely one of the oldest present, and—though most communards claimed to disavow private property—the legal owner of the land. After Gottlieb initially confronted the discordant communards and demanded that they leave, he relented, suffering from a sudden, headache, “cold sweats, mild nausea and uncontrollable weeping,” and believing that “God’s will” had ruled that he must be

⁶⁵ Selth, “The *Ashram* of Graton Road,” 206.

⁶⁶ Fairfield, “Morning Star Ranch,” 70-71.

⁶⁷ Although not strictly prohibited, the excessive use of alcohol was frowned upon at Morning Star and at many other communes, and communards often contrasted alcohol with the more “heady” experience allotted by LSD, marijuana, and natural psychedelics such as peyote. Gottlieb told one journalist, “alcohol is a consciousness expander of very very minimal merit. Although, I sometimes like a glass of beer.” Gottlieb, “A Fast Run-Through Part Two”; Torkelson, “The Happiness People”; Sender, “Chapter 4.”

⁶⁸ Gottlieb did not record whether or not any defended Nevada, Gypsy, Chief, TW and Crazy Annie at the meeting. Gottlieb, “A Fast Run-Through Part Two.”

⁶⁹ Gottlieb et al., “Open Land: A Manifesto (I),” 154.

true to Open Land and not refuse anyone a place at the commune.⁷⁰ Nevada and the others stayed. Following Gottlieb's divinely-inspired change of mind, Morning Star continued to maintain several hundred meal-eating residents and regularly attract many more tourists.⁷¹ While some communards stayed more or less permanently, many of them farming and adding to the food supply on a voluntary basis, others came from San Francisco only during sunny afternoons or for several days at a time, hitchhiking or piling into the back of pick up trucks headed north. Still others arrived with no plans to leave at all, and their contributions to Morning Star's facilities varied wildly. It was nearly impossible to adapt the haphazard or nonexistent infrastructure to a growing population's demands, or maintain anything approaching sanitary conditions, and the consequences included an outbreak of hepatitis in August 1967.⁷²

While many ordinary neighbours were friendly to the people of Morning Star, engaging in trade or visiting the commune or events such as the Sebastopol dance, the crowds at Morning Star and visibly deteriorating conditions began to turn public opinion against the communards. Former college administrator and local resident Edward Hochuli expressed concern for the "minds of the children" put at risk by the hippies, including teenage runaways and the children of those on the commune, providing a spark for mounting local suspicion and the heavier imposition of state power.⁷³ Hochuli also complained about rumours of gunfire, "nudity visible from the public highways," and fire hazards.⁷⁴ In response, a Morning Star resident claimed the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Journalist Dick Torkelson reported that Gottlieb did "remove" at least one man due to alcohol-related problems. Local Reverend Jefferson Selth, however, claims that Gottlieb denied "access to none, right to the end." Torkelson, "The Happiness People"; Selth, "The *Ashram* of Graton Road," 204-211.

⁷² This viral flare-up also impacted urban communes in San Francisco. Sender, "Chapter 5: Slim's First Acid Trip, Nevada, Hepatitis," *Home Free Home*; Gottlieb, "Morning Star Ranch Chronology."

⁷³ Gottlieb, "A Fast Run-Through Part Two," *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 28.

⁷⁴ Staff Correspondent, "Hippie Colony Protest Meeting Saturday," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 12 September 1967, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 37.

shooting incident was simply rabbit hunting, but the sheriff reported that “two peace-loving hippie groups” had been disputing “the affections of a 17-year-old girl” at gunpoint.⁷⁵ In August 1967, Hochuli gathered signatures from locals and presented a petition against the commune to the county. One local woman who signed the petition had earlier given the communards food, but came to believe that the hippies were “careless about fires.”⁷⁶ The outrage surrounding Morning Star spurred a flurry of media attention, a subsequent spike in the number of tourists and interested hippies, and action from officials, some of whom wished to prohibit any communal arrangements in Sonoma County, citing concerns about sanitation.⁷⁷

Beginning in the summer of 1967, the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* published a string of articles that tracked events at the commune. This local coverage was supplemented by a prominent *TIME* magazine piece that brought Morning Star to the national spotlight. The *TIME* article excitedly described the commune as a place where “it’s hip to unzip,” but did not sensationalize the hedonistic side of hippie life much further.⁷⁸ The article, not particularly critical of the communards, instead expressed surprise that hippies could be so responsible and work so hard in the fields, and charted Morning Star within what the author considered a broader constructive push in hippiedom reflected in new underground publications, social work, and arts and crafts. This positive depiction, however, brought more tourists and new communards, and thus more controversy to Morning Star throughout the summer.⁷⁹ After this pattern repeated at another Californian commune thanks to *LIFE* magazine in 1969, a writer in the *Kaliflower*, the

⁷⁵ “Mysterious Gunfire at Hippie Camp,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, date unavailable (likely Summer 1967), *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 39.

⁷⁶ Selth, “The *Ashram* of Gratton Road,” 205.

⁷⁷ Sender, “Chapter 4.”

⁷⁸ “Morning Star,” *Time Magazine*, 7 July 1967, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 29.

⁷⁹ Gottlieb, “A Fast Run-Through Part Two.”

Bay Area's "intra-communal newsletter," accused *LIFE* and other mass media outlets of "transforming the communes into waiting room melodramas."⁸⁰ The problem was not necessarily that reportage was heavily sensationalized or based on negative stereotypes. Rather, what harmed communes such as Morning Star and the other commune covered in the *LIFE* article was simply any level of publicity in the mainstream media, which attracted ever-larger crowds.



Fig. 3: A clipping from the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*. Gottlieb is pictured on the upper left. The caption at the bottom reads "Flower Children Form Meditation Circle At Harmony, Occult Answer to County Conflict About Sanitation Laws."⁸¹

⁸⁰ "Black Magic," *Kaliflower* 1.41, 29 January 1970, Box 1, Folder 12, FPR.

⁸¹ Peter Golis, "No Harmony at Harmony: Straights Vs. Hippies," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, date unavailable (likely September 1967), *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 52.

In July 1967, the county authorities charged Gottlieb with hosting an illegal “organized camp.”⁸² The authorities further alleged the buildings at Morning Star did not meet health and building code regulations, and declared that Gottlieb’s followers must leave the property. A complex, prolonged legal battle followed in which Gottlieb eventually accumulated over fourteen thousand dollars in fines.⁸³ While the *TIME* article assured the continued flow of hippies and curious “squares” from further afield to Morning Star, the much less widely distributed *Press Democrat* became a forum for local debate about the communards. In the *Press Democrat*, area residents who advocated legal action hurled stereotypical accusations at the hippies in letters to the editor, calling them “lazy” and “parasites.” But some defended the communards. An anonymous neighbour writing under the name “Do Unto Others” pointed out that the communards demonstrated their good intentions and work ethic by creating a barter network in the area.⁸⁴ He further compared their plight to that of “Jesus and his followers,” offering support in language the conventionally religious people of Sonoma might sympathize with. Howard Coleman, a resident of nearby Cotati, contended that the county’s charge of unsanitary conditions at Morning Star was farcical, pointing out that “80 percent of the wells pump what amounts to sewer water” in the nearby town of Graton, and that the government should instead attend to the Great Society mandate of uplifting involuntarily impoverished citizens, rather than “picking on” “innocuous hippies.”⁸⁵ Not all poverty was part of a chosen lifestyle, after all, and Sonoma’s

⁸² ‘Do Unto Others,’ “‘Anti-Hippie Laws Wrong,’” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 27 July 1967, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 31.

⁸³ Selth, “The *Ashram* of Graton Road,” 208, 211.

⁸⁴ ‘Do Unto Others,’ “‘Anti-Hippie Laws Wrong?’”

⁸⁵ Howard Coleman, “County ‘War on Hippies’ Questioned,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 11 October 1967, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 33.

poverty rates were about forty percent higher than the state average.⁸⁶ Another local even compared the county's wish to "dispossess" the communards to the policies of Stalin and Hitler, sarcastically writing, "If they are different, they're evil—get rid of them!"⁸⁷

Unitarian reverend and local American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) chairman Jefferson P. Selth collected a group of neighbours sympathetic to the commune and founded the "Friends of Morning Star" in the Fall of 1967.⁸⁸ The Friends tried to help the communards improve living conditions by removing garbage and demolishing structures found illegal by the county.⁸⁹ The organization then assisted in the construction of up-to-code facilities, consulting an architect and contractor, and defended the hippies in print. One Friend, Rick Seymour, published a long letter in the *Press Democrat* comparing the hippies at Morning Star to Israel's communal *kibbutzim*. Seymour further drew parallels between the Morning Star people and the "hippies" who "landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620," "settled Jamestown," and "blazed the Oregon trail."⁹⁰ Some of the Friends of Morning Star explicitly considered hippies to be part of the same tradition as earlier pioneers, meaning that the Morning Star people were well in keeping with American values, and therefore legitimate in their rural endeavours. These neighbours approved of the hippies because beneath any counterculture eccentricities, they were profoundly American in their updated version of laborious frontier settlement. Selth especially admired the core "fifteen to thirty people who took communal living seriously," while referring to less productive communards as

⁸⁶ "California Counts: Population Trends and Profiles," Public Policy Institute of California, accessed 12 October 2016, http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/cacounts/cc_506drcc.pdf.

⁸⁷ "Let the Public Speak, County Officials: A Laughing Stock," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 15 September 1967, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 48.

⁸⁸ Selth, "The *Ashram* of Gratton Road," 208-209.

⁸⁹ "Friends Take Trash From Morning Star," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, date unavailable (likely early October 1967), *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 78.

⁹⁰ Rick Seymour, "The Other Side of the Hippie Story," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, date unavailable (likely September 1967), *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 56.

“parasites” that made Morning Star “unsalvageable.”⁹¹ The supportive voices and assistance of Selth, Seymour, and other locals were not enough to dissuade the county and Morning Star’s enemies from continuing their campaign against the hippies. Hard lines were drawn between those who sympathized with the idealism, agricultural labour, and other earnest work they witnessed at Morning Star and those who simply could not tolerate the intruding city folk, and preferred to see the commune as an eye sore at best, and a threat at worst.

As the situation on the ground escalated at Morning Star, Gottlieb became the subject of endless bureaucratic and legal battles with the county, all of which were keenly followed by the *Press Democrat*. Gottlieb was in and out of court over various charges including staging an illegal camp, contempt of court, and violating health codes. This litigation resulted in more visits from the police and building inspectors. Two FBI agents arrived one day searching for a fugitive, and questioned hippies at the commune. Several communards spent short terms in the county jail on drug possession charges, while Gottlieb received additional fines and injunctions against continued habitation of the property.⁹² The case posed a challenge for judges and sheriffs, as they had to identify legal grounds to evict the hippies, and eventually to demolish structures on the site. This required that they assert a questionable distinction between the rights of a landowner to host guests and staging an “illegal camp.”⁹³ Relations with many of Morning Star’s neighbours, meanwhile, became ever more strained as many locals sided with Edward Hochuli, pressuring

⁹¹ Selth, “The *Ashram* of Gratton Road,” 207-208.

⁹² The complete timeline of the case is far too lengthy to recount in full here, but the *Press Democrat*’s almost daily coverage seems to indicate that this affair was one of the most exciting events to occur in Sonoma County for quite some time. Gottlieb, “Morning Star Ranch Chronology”; Peter Golis, “A Strange ‘Raid’ That’s Beyond Recall,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 14 September 1967, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 46; Staff Correspondent, “First Drug Arrests At Morning Star,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 7 October 1967, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 68.

⁹³ Golis, “A Strange ‘Raid’.”

the county to persist in its legal case and threats. According to the *Press Democrat*, during one incident at a meeting held at a school in September 1967, two hundred and fifty “angry citizens of the “straight” world” confronted and aired their grievances with the “Love Generation.” While many neighbours’ attitudes continued to sour over time, this particular meeting represented a critical moment, particularly as so many locals were present. One neighbour complained about seeing “ten men standing on their heads nude” several months earlier, an “obscene and disgusting exhibition.”⁹⁴ Clearly many locals in the community felt offended.

In reaction to the commotion at the meeting, Gottlieb requested patience but teasingly proposed a huge pay hike for the local police, who deal with “a lot of nuts in the world.”⁹⁵ Gottlieb found humour in such self-aware mockery, but this response was not helpful in quelling the concerns of locals, and was indicative of the wider shape of relations between the communards and the greater community. Miller suggests in passing that the agitated neighbours of Morning Star may have been worried about more than just decency and “the children,” and that some may have had property values in mind, viewing Open Land as a fundamental threat to their own financial self-interest.⁹⁶ Certainly the countercultural commune movement involved philosophical clashes over conceptions of the land, and puritanical notions of morality and the jeopardized status of private property were both factors in the case. Some neighbours, accustomed to quiet, rural life, may have furthermore been concerned about the tax dollars that were being spent as police and other emergency services attended to the communards’ various antics, far disproportionate to property taxes paid by Gottlieb. Regardless, as well intentioned

⁹⁴ Golis, “No Harmony at Harmony.”

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 219.

as Gottlieb and his fellow communards may have been at the outset, decisions made at Morning Star and the behaviour of some communards, including Gottlieb, antagonized many neighbours. On numerous occasions, for example, some communards were jailed for breaking into homes on adjoining properties.⁹⁷ Others were jailed for disregarding county orders to vacate the commune land.⁹⁸ Gottlieb's refusal to limit the size of the commune's population or contain the pranks, idiosyncrasies, and outright criminal deeds of certain residents impressed upon the locals that an invasion was underway. As demonstrated by the openness of some neighbours to trade and converse, the many positive letters to the editor in the *Press Democrat*, and the physical assistance of the Friends of Morning Star, there was no lack of sympathy on the part of many Sonoma residents, at least initially. Yet Gottlieb and his followers were unable to capitalize on this, nor were they adequately willing to respond to the concerns of their neighbours, cementing hostilities.

With county authorities and neighbours further estranged, Gottlieb's experiment at Morning Star declined over the following years. Repeated arrests of communards and the county's demolitions of various parts of the commune, such as the kitchen, forced the hippies to flee or seek help from allied locals. One still supportive neighbour, Don Orr, offered the use of his own dining facilities a mile away.⁹⁹ For a more permanent refuge, many former Morning Star hippies migrated to another Open Land commune to the west, Wheeler's Ranch, but a similar

⁹⁷ Graton Road Resident, "Graton Resident Raps Hippie Aid," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 2 October 1967, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 62.

⁹⁸ "Hippies Arrested At Ranch," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 12 January 1968, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 88.

⁹⁹ "A Fast Run-Through Part Three," *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 40.

sequence of events played out there from early 1968 to 1973.¹⁰⁰ Others made their way to Morning Star East in New Mexico.¹⁰¹ In a satirical effort to co-opt religious sanction in defence of Open Land, Gottlieb formally deeded his land “to God” following a trip to India in May 1969, challenging the county to debate God’s existence and legal legitimacy.¹⁰² The ploy failed, as “God” was not considered a valid entity to take title according to California law, and could not be expected to pay property tax. Meanwhile, reports of violence, trespassing, and theft continued to plague the commune and its environs. In two unrelated incidents, a man enjoying a group campfire was stabbed by an unknown attacker, and on the same day county deputies brought two other Morning Star men with minor injuries sustained in undisclosed circumstances to the hospital.¹⁰³ Neighbours and even Gottlieb himself complained to the local authorities about constant theft of tools, tires, and other items.¹⁰⁴ These types of events were commonplace, and Morning Star remained in a state of “war” with the county for several more years. The commune’s population fluctuated, but never returned to its former vibrancy, and the land and structures were repeatedly “ploughed over” by bulldozers at the behest of officials.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, as late as the fall of 1970, Gottlieb still invited “whole communes” to the land “for a day, week, or month...to practice and develop country skills” in a letter he published in the

¹⁰⁰ The commune’s eponymous benefactor, Bill Wheeler, dramatically burned the rubble left by Sonoma County’s bulldozing of his commune. Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity*, 134-149.

¹⁰¹ Scott, “Bulldozers in Utopia,” 62.

¹⁰² Don Engdahl, “Lou Gottlieb Deeds Morning Star Ranch to a New Owner—to God,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 7 May 1969, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 135.

¹⁰³ “Mysterious Mishaps At Morning Star,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 1 August 1968, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ “Someone Stole Two Wheels From Gottlieb,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 6 August 1968, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 112.

¹⁰⁵ “Lou Gottlieb Thunders as County Again Plows Over God’s Land,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 12 May 1971, *The Morning Star Scrapbook*, 165.

Kaliflower.¹⁰⁶ Occasional visitors drifted on and off Morning Star at least until 1973, when Gottlieb reconnected with the Limelitters and went on tour, closing the land to visitors. The musician remained in ownership of the land until his death in 1996.¹⁰⁷

Commune scholar Hugh Gardner states that the prevailing traditional culture of Sonoma County in large part doomed Wheeler's Ranch, and by extension, Morning Star.¹⁰⁸ This is to say that the hippies could never have succeeded in the area already home to a community innately hostile to hippies from the city. Yet the *Press Democrat* and other sources clearly indicate that many neighbours were, on the contrary, receptive to the people at Morning Star, at least at first. Many locals voiced their support in the *Press Democrat*, defending the freedom of the communards or pointing to the authorities' hypocrisy over sanitation and building codes. Others assisted the Morning Star people in person, engaged in trade, or attended the communards' happenings, such as the dance they organized in nearby Sebastopol, with curiosity if not genuine cordiality. The sentiment of neighbours towards back-to-the-land pioneers was complicated. A surrounding rural, conservative culture did not prevent many residents of Sonoma County from defending Morning Star. But Gottlieb's dogmatic, uncompromising retention of Open Land catalyzed the fatal momentum of local bureaucracy, which singled out the hippies. In a much more remote location in the far north of the state, however, other hippie settlers with similar objectives and ideals found their place in the wider community and created a lasting communal legacy.

¹⁰⁶ "Dear Kaliflower," *Kaliflower* 2.30, 19 November 1970, Box 2, Folder 4, FPR.

¹⁰⁷ Sender, "Afterword," *Home Free Home*.

¹⁰⁸ Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity*, 147-148.

“The Most Beautiful Place in the World, If They Could Just Get It Together”: The Endurance of Black Bear Ranch¹⁰⁹

In 1968, about a year after Morning Star formed, another group of communards founded a settlement on the remains of an abandoned mining camp in a secluded valley of the Klamath Mountains in Siskiyou County, over two hundred miles north of San Francisco. Similarly to the Morning Star people, many Black Bear communards had roots in the Bay Area counterculture scene, and lived in semi-communal homes around San Francisco before moving north.¹¹⁰ While Lou Gottlieb had no pretensions to militancy at Morning Star, early in its history some at Black Bear conceived of their colony and others as places to prepare for the coming national breakdown, or even to train for active roles in what was thought of as the inevitable revolution. Actor and on-and-off resident of Black Bear Peter Coyote stated that “we thought the government was going to be overthrown in two years... and we wanted to have an alternative, non-mercantile alternative that offered citizens the options of being something other than a consumer or an employee.”¹¹¹ These words echoed a political landscape that had shifted swiftly and dramatically since the founding of Morning Star. 1968 featured unprecedented turmoil in cities across the United States and the world, and many young Americans were continuing to abandon urban life and join the back-to-the-land movement.

By the spring of 1968 onwards, a sense that societal collapse and violent insurrection were near pervaded both among counterculture radicals and many government officials. Cold

¹⁰⁹ Note: Many dates concerning events at Black Bear are difficult or impossible to obtain, as most of the primary sources are stories dependent on memory, rather than contemporaneous newspaper articles. Unsurprisingly, keeping chronologically precise records was not a priority for many communes. Also note that although I use the past tense throughout, Black Bear is still very much an active settlement.

¹¹⁰ Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 145-146.

¹¹¹ *Commune*, directed by Jonathan Berman (Five Points Media, 2005).

War fears that dated to the 1940s had shifted as the FBI and other authorities increasingly took note of more recent, major instances of urban rioting and insurgency, and accurately believed some radicals might prepare for further insurrections in rural areas. Richard Marley, the original legal owner of Black Bear, imagined rural warriors based in the countryside making forays into cities. He compared this model to that followed by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and the other revolutionaries that disembarked from the *Granma* in 1956 and launched a successful war against dictator Fulgencio Batista from Cuba's Sierra Maestra mountains.¹¹² While the FBI remained wary of rural and urban dissenters alike, the Black Bear communards did not retain their fervour for revolution. Indeed their initial concern was merely surviving the winter, especially as the settlers were generally inexperienced with the challenges of "primitive rural living."¹¹³ The revolution would have to be postponed, but for now the communards set out to create "Free Land for Free People," a mantra which echoed Lou Gottlieb's founding principle of Open Land.¹¹⁴

Before settling in Siskiyou and preparing for the trials of the winter, Richard Marley and his friends travelled across California locating sources of funding to purchase the land, eventually obtaining money through a major LSD sale and the generosity of several Hollywood celebrities, like actor Steve McQueen.¹¹⁵ They sought a location less likely to create problems, in part because back-to-the-landers throughout the region were increasingly aware of the afflictions that tended to plague communes like Morning Star. As one writer in the *Kaliflower* put it in 1969, Morning Star's successor commune Wheeler's Ranch was "so close to the city it hurts—

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 150.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 148.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 149.

especially as they will be shut down by county cops.”¹¹⁶ Black Bear people no doubt knew about Morning Star’s history from multiple sources; there were some Diggers who stayed at Black Bear.¹¹⁷ Elsa Marley, wife of Richard and also one of Black Bear’s founding communards, began with the intention to buy remote land, telling a realtor that they were looking for “eight to one hundred acres, isolated, good water, a house and outbuildings.”¹¹⁸ This isolation proved to be important, but not the lone factor in distinguishing Black Bear’s development from Morning Star’s. The potential for hordes of aspiring communards to arrive was diminished by Black Bear’s distant location at least a full day’s drive north of Haight-Ashbury, and thus county authorities cared somewhat less. Siskiyou was furthermore very sparsely populated, with a physical size about four times that of Sonoma, but a population of only around thirty thousand according to the 1970 census. The county’s population consistently voted Republican, while in 1970 the county had a per capita income almost seventeen percent lower than the California average.¹¹⁹ The electoral politics of Siskiyou were thus not altogether different from those in Sonoma, although the county was somewhat poorer and there were certainly fewer people in the vicinity of Black Bear. Yet despite Siskiyou’s diffuse population and Black Bear’s seclusion, contact with locals did play an important role in Black Bear’s history.

¹¹⁶ “Somewhere over the Rainbow: Up North Communes,” *Kaliflower* 1.10, 26 June 1969, Box 1, Folder 12, FPR.

¹¹⁷ Malcolm Terence, “Clear Cut: A California Commune Fights the Loggers,” in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 324.

¹¹⁸ Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 148.

¹¹⁹ “United States Presidential Election Results: California,” Dave Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, accessed 12 October 2016, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/>; “California Counts: Population Trends and Profiles,” Public Policy Institute of California, accessed 12 October 2016, http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/cacounts/cc_506drcc.pdf; “U.S. Regional Data, California, Counties,” Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Research, accessed 21 November 2016, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/categories/27521>.

Early contacts with locals were generally mixed. As the people of Black Bear struggled to establish themselves and adapt to their new lives, some neighbours reacted with suspicion. One neighbour, Larry Bacon, summed up the latest communal experiment down the road as an “invasion of flower children and druggies.”¹²⁰ After many years had passed, a comunard asked a neighbour what area residents thought following the hippies’ arrival. His simple answer was “Charles Manson.”¹²¹ Black Bear people tried to participate in a school potluck in the town of Sawyers Bar within a year or so of their appearance in the community, but their friendly overture towards the townspeople did not go over well. The comunards arrived late and were an unwelcome presence. According to local Brian Bundy, “everyone thought the hippies were filthy and their food would be contaminated, as well as weird.”¹²² At a subsequent school board meeting, locals deliberated on whether the hippies could be barred from future functions, ultimately deciding this action would be illegal. Other neighbours were less suspicious. Observing the earnest work of the former city dwellers, one local described Black Bear as “the most beautiful place in the world, if they could just get it together.”¹²³ The citizens of the two tiny communities on opposite flanks of Black Bear, Forks of Salmon and Sawyers Bar, initially took opposing views of the comunards. Area resident and craftswoman Thalia Truesdell suggested that the residents of Forks of Salmon were more accepting of Black Bear early on than those at Sawyers Bar, who took many years to fully accept them.¹²⁴ Truesdell attributed this to a more conservative culture in Sawyers Bar that disposed its few dozen inhabitants against the

¹²⁰ *Commune*.

¹²¹ This was recalled by one of Miller’s interview subjects. Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 218-219.

¹²² Thalia Truesdell, “Sawyers Bar Bazaar,” in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 210.

¹²³ *Commune*.

¹²⁴ Truesdell, “Sawyers Bar Bazaar,” 209-210.

hippies, but by the time Truesdell wrote her short account in 1978, this prejudice had since evaporated.

While the civilians of Siskiyou had mixed feelings about the communards, area police and government agencies adopted a clear and hardline approach to the hippies. For much of its history, Black Bear had an uneasy relationship with different elements of the local state. Particularly during the commune's early years, local police often visited or raided Black Bear. Some hippies were occasionally arrested or jailed on drug charges, similarly to those at Morning Star, but again, drug-related police action was limited in its ability to damage the commune's overall integrity. One of the editors of *Free Land: Free Love: Tales of a Wilderness Commune*, a compilation of remembrances, news clippings, and stories from Black Bear and its vicinity, referred to his time spent in the nearby Yreka jail as his "welcome to Siskiyou County stay."¹²⁵ The police often used their concerns about drug use and cultivation as a pretext to harass Black Bear people, but the few hippies that grew marijuana tended to do so some distance away from the commune. County police occasionally charged communards with marijuana possession, but because the Black Bear people usually consumed drugs immediately when available, successful busts were infrequent.¹²⁶ Some communards worked odd jobs for the state Forest Service, but during one episode Black Bear people championed opposition to the Service, in keeping with the era's nascent environmentalism. The hippies argued that the Forest Service was reckless for constructing a road in sacred indigenous Karuk territory, which required the clear-cutting of

¹²⁵ Don Monkerud, Malcolm Terence and Susan Keese, eds, "An Introduction to the Black Bear Anthology," in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 8.

¹²⁶ "Residents of Black Bear Raided by Sheriff Aides," *Siskiyou Daily News*, 18 June 1969, in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 195; *Commune*.

sensitive forest.¹²⁷ Despite these conflicts, Black Bear never faced the full weight of county power, due in large part to less intense and conflictual relations with locals than those that befell Morning Star.

Although the anarchic spirit of Open Land that created so much trouble for Gottlieb and Morning Star did persist to some extent at Black Bear, there was a degree of group decision making as the commune evolved. Reflecting on the commune's early years, Black Bear residents recalled that their first strength was not in child rearing, forestry, construction, or cooking, but in argument.¹²⁸ Commune meetings were free and open, and most members participated passionately. Tempers flared, and not all were content with decisions made at meetings, which were not necessarily enforced. Often the winner of a debate was whomever was the last to be physically exhausted by an argument, but winning a debate did not necessarily translate to a decisive group consensus. As time went on, disagreements on particular questions, such as whether to prioritize commune economics, gender equality, or the acceptance of homosexuality, led to the temporary division of the commune into factions that lived in separate areas of the property. Many individuals simply left Black Bear if they disagreed with others, and according to communitarian Don Monkerud, the victors of some disputes were sometimes "accidental" rather than in the majority or the most persuasive.¹²⁹ At other moments, decisions were made by clear consensus, such as when the Black Bear people decided to impose more sanitary kitchen standards to prevent disease. Black Bear by no means had a consistent method of decision

¹²⁷ Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 157-158.

¹²⁸ Don Monkerud, et al., "An Introduction to the Black Bear Anthology," 8.

¹²⁹ Monkerud, "Open to Life: Fred: An Interview," in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 228.

making throughout all of its history, but their frequent, open debates did have a moderating impact on the group—an effect conducive to getting along with one another and the neighbours.

Black Bear's residents quickly gave up on the idea of staging a revolutionary training ground, largely because they needed to concentrate merely on survival. This change of course was also consistent with their efforts to forge a positive relationship with the surrounding Siskiyou community. As the communards realized the revolution would have to wait, domestic matters also became increasingly important. For example, Geba and Yeshi, two Black Bear women, studied midwifery, enabling many successful births at the commune.¹³⁰ Higher authorities, however, seeking to quell violent radical groups in the Bay Area and elsewhere in California, identified Black Bear as a possible place of refuge for fugitive insurrectionists, not a place of family and nurturing. FBI agents monitored the commune for possible links to the Black Panther Party or the Weather Underground. Authorities speculated that Black Bear was a possible location of Patty Hearst, heiress granddaughter of tycoon William Randolph Hearst, following her kidnapping by the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974.¹³¹ Bearing ice cream and friendly smiles, agents visited Black Bear in search of Hearst, but the communards had nothing to do with the heiress's capture. Paranoia continued to circulate on both sides of the tinted glass. Federal agents returned to Black Bear each summer, compiling a notable file on the commune.¹³²

According to scholar Jesse Drew, who later obtained this surveillance file through a Freedom of Information Request, the FBI conducted aerial surveillance, used informants, bugged the nearest

¹³⁰ Michael Tierra, "Black Bear Ranch: A Healing Community," in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 259.

¹³¹ *Commune*.

¹³² Bernardine Dorn, "Why I Never Came to Black Bear," in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 219.

public telephone, and believed communal activity correlated with the capacity for violence.¹³³

Indeed, informants were present throughout the Californian counterculture, and by 1968, the authorities were skeptical of any rural communal effort. The agency never took more significant action while monitoring the communards. Had the Black Bear people followed through on their initial aspirations to train armed guerrillas, however, the communards could have faced a more serious confrontation with the FBI.

Despite coming under scrutiny from both local and federal authorities, the communards' presence did not provoke county authorities to act nearly to the extent of those in Sonoma. Black Bear was not demolished, and was spared Morning Star's prolonged legal feud. Sonoma authorities were more strict and willing to expend greater resources on enforcing building and sanitation codes. Most importantly, Sonoma's government also faced greater pressure from specific locals such as Edward Hochuli, who would not tolerate the petty crime and eccentricities of Morning Star and believed their principles to be ill-founded. But other factors were at play. The Black Bear communards increasingly succeeded at finding acceptance and their own place in the wider Siskiyou community. Moreover, while Black Bear's isolation meant that it never received the volume of possible members or tourists, its communards also acted more decisively in removing difficult individuals.

Establishing positive relations with the people around Black Bear required patience and repeated interaction. The small, dispersed population of the area limited contact between certain locals and the communards for months at a time, but this gave them the opportunity to slowly earn the trust and friendship of their neighbours. Some of their earliest allies were found among

¹³³ Jesse Drew, "The Commune as Badlands as Utopia as Autonomous Zone," in Boal et al., *West of Eden*, 46-49.

the indigenous Hoopa, Yurok, and Karuk people, who shared their status as “others” within the predominately white region. The indigenous people of the area were just as acquainted with media constructions of “drug-crazed hippies” as anyone else in Siskiyou.¹³⁴ They were nonetheless intrigued by the novelty of the formerly urban newcomers, as well as their elderberry wine, which the indigenous people obtained in exchange for fresh salmon and lessons on how to smoke it.¹³⁵ Eventually Black Bear people went fishing with some indigenous people during the salmon run.¹³⁶ Peter Coyote once sought advice from the nearby Karuk on how to handle a mischievous bear that stalked the commune, and after being told by one elderly Karuk man to shoot the bear “in the butt” “with rock salt” in order to scare it away, Coyote returned to find that another communitarian had already killed it.¹³⁷ While Coyote did not have the chance to act upon the advice, his counsel with the Karuk man demonstrated a relationship of trust and high regard. On other occasions, some Karuk invited the communards to their homes to share meals. Contact between Black Bear people and indigenous locals was made sincerely and respectfully, even as the continued context of settler colonialism was perhaps inescapable. To dismiss the back-to-the-land movement merely as a rehash of past white settler colonialism, as writers such as Gilio-Whitaker have argued, is to ignore the potential for reconstructed relationships built on more equal ground, however gradually. As communitarian Michael Tierra stated, however, “in the wilderness” it is impossible to “maintain the fiction of independence and alienation,” and for the indigenous people, “common decency” justified real human relationships.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Michael Tierra, “Encounters with the Karuk,” in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 173.

¹³⁵ Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 153

¹³⁶ John Salter, “A Visit Down River,” in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 162.

¹³⁷ Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 155.

¹³⁸ Tierra, “Encounters with the Karuk,” 173.

Other white residents came to improve their views of Black Bear, becoming “more tolerant” of the hippies in their midst with time, according to Truesdell.¹³⁹ When the longhaired hippies and a local “redneck” logger named Brian Bundy together found a lost hunter from Orange County, they made jokes about their “disdain for flatlanders.”¹⁴⁰ The communards and other Siskiyou residents sometimes shared in resentment towards “flatlanders” in southern California, for whom the county’s resources were exploited. In 1971 for instance, Black Bear people sent letters to nearby Salmon River residents announcing their opposition to a company’s plans to log a forest beside the commune, threatening a watershed.¹⁴¹ These anti-urbanite and environmentalist sentiments aside, Bundy and the hippies still rescued the Orange County man. Despite having origins in the city themselves, in this case the hippies were recognized by Bundy as belonging in Siskiyou, in contrast to the man from Orange County, who was worthy of mockery for his inability to navigate the wilderness.

Reinforcing their increasingly positive interactions with the area’s indigenous people and white locals, the Black Bear people demonstrated one additional difference that set them on a different course from Gottlieb and the Morning Star hippies. One particular incident involving a group of people that sought to join Black Bear illustrated a clear departure from Gottlieb’s Open Land creed. In the late 1970s, the Shiva Lilas, a small wandering band of child-worshippers heavily influenced by LSD and led by a patriarch named Gridley Wright, joined Black Bear, and

¹³⁹ Truesdell, “Sawyers Bar Bazaar,” 210.

¹⁴⁰ Glenn Lyons, “The Lost Hunter,” in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 189-190.

¹⁴¹ “To The People of the Salmon River Mountains,” in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 322-323.

converted many communards to their belief system.¹⁴² Wright proclaimed the need of each man to “gain self-realization,” which could only be acquired through “simultaneous relationships with at least three women.” This clear imbalance was masked by labelling women “goddesses” and men their “servants.”¹⁴³ Servants and goddesses alike were required to worship the young, which meant frequently “tripping” on large doses of LSD shared equally with adults, children, and babies. Toz, an inhabitant of Black Bear who was then a child, later recollected that he “saw them as evil,” and perceived serious rifts in the commune instigated by the cultish, “dark cloaked” group.¹⁴⁴ He witnessed adults “screaming” and “flipping out” at one another, unusual behaviour at the commune.¹⁴⁵ One Black Bear hippie under the Shiva Lila’s spell and armed with a hatchet charged at another pregnant communard, but did not injure her. In addition to their divisive role in the commune, the Shiva Lilas posed a risk for the unwelcome attention they might bring Black Bear from locals or the authorities due to their peculiar spiritual practices. Even within the Californian counterculture, the Shiva Lilas were seen as outlaws. According to Black Bear member Fred (surname unknown), the Shiva Lilas so dominated the commune that those Black Bear people not under their spell asked for the assistance of friends from communes in the city.¹⁴⁶

Together, several Black Bear communards and their allies from the affiliated “city families” “ran the Shiveys (Shiva Lilas) off.”¹⁴⁷ Like Morning Star, Black Bear maintained

¹⁴² Again, establishing precise dates here is difficult given the circumstances. The Shiva Lilas had been expelled from Black Bear for some time by Wright’s death in Goa, India in 1979 after being stabbed by an Australian hippie. Michael Marinacci, “Gridley Wright and Shivalila,” *Califia’s Children*, accessed 18 August 18 2016, <http://califias.blogspot.ca/2014/10/gridley-wright-and-shivalila.html>.

¹⁴³ Monkerud, “Open to Life: Fred,” 228-230.

¹⁴⁴ “Black Bear Born: Toz, An Interview,” in Monkerud et al., *Free Land: Free Love*, 99-100.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁴⁶ Monkerud, “Open to Life: Fred,” 229.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

connections with counterculturists in the Bay Area, but the nature of these links were somewhat different at each commune. Both rural communes attracted new members from the city and especially from urban communes, in keeping with their beliefs concerning free or Open Land. At Black Bear however, some of these urban communards helped reassert stability during the Shiva Lila episode, whereas at Morning Star the influx of people from the city was a continual source of instability. With the old order reestablished at Black Bear, the Shiva Lilas were forcibly overpowered and ejected, and they then journeyed to India, where many of their children perished during an epidemic.¹⁴⁸ While Black Bear's entire dalliance with the Shiva Lilas was damaging to social relations at the commune for a time, the episode contributed to the communards' decision to firmly control and codify membership in the commune. The Open Land or "Free Land, Free Love" approach had to be somewhat revised in order to maintain Black Bear's viability, both for the sake of internal cohesion and to stem unwanted outside attention the Shiva Lilas would have attracted.

Black Bear Ranch is one of the few communes founded in the late 1960s that still exists today. While its nearly five-decade-long history indeed hinged upon its emergence in an isolated region, cordial relations with local peoples were also of critical importance, as the county was never pressured by locals to intervene in any significant way. Furthermore, the size and character of the population never reached the point at which neighbours became concerned, as the Black Bear communards were ultimately willing to limit membership during the Shiva Lila episode. Unlike the inhabitants of Morning Star, the Black Bear people did not antagonize their neighbours through mischief or petty crime, and they did not become players in a media circus.

¹⁴⁸ *Commune*.

Survival required the fostering of good relations with the wider community, but it also meant a degree of compromise over Open Land, a central concept of many countercultural communes. Since 1987, the commune has been held by the Black Bear Family Trust, a legal structure composed of dozens of former and current inhabitants.¹⁴⁹ The Family Trust Document mandates “collective obligation” and “collective ownership,” and while it does not explicitly refer to the area’s indigenous people or other locals, it does label Black Bear a “vital forest community” “in ecological harmony.” It further defines the power of land trustees, and rights of beneficiaries, and codifies majority voting procedures necessitated for the introduction of new trustees or beneficiaries.¹⁵⁰ The Trust Document represents the evolution and codification of previous attempts at decision making at the commune, which were earlier “made up...as we went along.”¹⁵¹ Through the Trust Document, the Black Bear people aspire to enable Black Bear’s continued existence and prosperity.

¹⁴⁹ *Commune*.

¹⁵⁰ “Black Bear Family Trust Document,” blackbearanch.org, accessed 13 October 2016, <http://blackbearanch.org/about/black-bear-family-trust-document/>.

¹⁵¹ Monkerud, “Open to Life: Fred,” 228.

Conclusion

The histories of two major 1960s Californian communes, Black Bear Ranch and Morning Star Ranch, illustrate the dynamism involved in relations with rural locals, which had an important impact on internal commune affairs. Far from meeting universal hostility, communards in Sonoma and Siskiyou counties met a complex, mixed reception. Many locals were interested in supporting or welcoming communards, regardless of the countercultural lifestyles and values present at places like Morning Star and Black Bear. Positive neighbourly relations were based on locals' affinity for the communards' work ethic, everyday human decency, a belief in individual freedom and privacy, and a skepticism of government intervention in private affairs. The communards themselves, however, had to make an effort to find broad acceptance in the community, and negative stereotypes about hippies and the counterculture flourished.

Lou Gottlieb's dutiful adherence to Open Land, as though it were an infallible religious doctrine, hardened the attitudes of his commune's neighbours. The crime afflicting urban countercultural enclaves like Haight Ashbury by the late 1960s was also appearing at rural communes. The smell of marijuana and visible nudity offended conservative sensibilities, and very few inhabitants of Sonoma County were willing to accept the theft, violence, and trespassing associated with some members of Morning Star. At Black Bear Ranch, however, the communards' greater ideological flexibility and willingness to actually make important decisions about membership and behaviour permitted them to gradually earn the trust of the broader community. Contrastingly, many of Morning Star's neighbours became frightened and opposed to Gottlieb's experiment, resulting in the imposition of local state power.

By bringing the counterculture to the countryside, hippie communes represented a bridge between rural America, agrarian and subsistence lifestyles, and radical ideas and practices that originated in urban centres. A broader investigation of more communes throughout the United States would explore the extent to which these communes actually influenced rural cultures, whether through activist channels or in more concrete measures such as electoral politics, and the duration of this effect. Further scholarship in the same mould would advance a deeper understanding of the political and cultural polarization that has increasingly marred the United States through the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a dynamic that exists particularly along urban, suburban, and rural lines. The successful integration of some countercultural communes into rural areas importantly demonstrated that this polarization was not always inevitable. In *Ramparts* magazine, new leftist and former SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) leader Tom Hayden extolled the need for “world confrontation” as opposed to “escape...into rural communes or existential mysticism.”¹⁵² Rural communes and their founders, however, neither “escaped” the city nor the country, but continued to shape and be shaped by those around them.

¹⁵² Quoted from Mason Dixon, “Are Country Communes Escapist?,” in Fairfield, *The Modern Utopian*, 30.

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¹⁵³ Note: I have listed items within the *Morning Star Scrapbook* here, as given the unusual nature of this work I believe the reader would benefit from having a single list of its constituent parts used throughout this paper.

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