



BRIDGING THE GAP

A Quaker Intentional Community Newsletter

Issue #2 (October 1999)

Here We Are Again!

In the last newsletter we posed the question of how to begin. We laid out three options that ranged from waiting until everyone has gathered, discussed and envisioned the community to "build it and they will come." Investigating the feasibility of that last option earlier this year, we found a 171-acre farm, Seven Bridges Farm, just three bikable miles from Powell House. We spoke to the owners and they liked the concept of a community being built on the site and encouraged us to consider buying it. The farm has many advantages besides being close to Powell House: there are some 80 acres of fields and 91 of woods that include good timber. A southwest-facing hillside, not too far from the old orchard, would be a perfect spot for houses. It includes an old farmhouse (which needs complete renovation but would make a great communal/visitors' building), streams, areas for a playing field and a good-sized pond, and a huge kitchen-garden site. The farm has not been used commercially for over 40 years and is essentially pesticide- and fertilizer-free, such that organic farming could begin relatively quickly.

There were a few unresolved issues about the farm, and the largest of these was the price: \$650,000. For twenty households this might be quite affordable, but for one or two it is high. In mid-September we told the owners that we could not afford the property.

The availability of Seven Bridges Farm, however, served to get us thinking on several tracks. The first is: how far do we go in jump-starting the community? We are open to and looking for a place to locate the community. If what seems to be the "right" place comes along, how should we proceed? Do we go for it? We would love wider input (from all of you) about the land; can we ask you all to come out to take a look and comment?

Secondly, we have been motivated to investigate communal land-ownership alternatives and to think about what impact these have on our relationship to the land. This is a big issue and the various alternatives need much space for appropriate examination, so please view the article later in this issue as a summary which I hope we can discuss more in detail face to face.

RESOURCES: OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Community Journal proposes that small communities are essential to developing a conscious and conscientious social structure.

P. O. Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387; send address for sample copy and book list; \$25 per year (quarterly)

We will be gathering to work on this-intentional community project February 25-27 in Old Chatham, New York, at Powell House (a Quaker conference center; www.nyym.org/powellhouse/ for info). Details of topics, structure, and cost next issue, but save the dates!

Your Thoughts (Feedback from Issue #1)

From Liseli Haines, Clinton, New York: Being a single mother in a rural area has had its challenges. But I love my home, my farm, and my land, and moving from it is one of the biggest challenges I see in living in community. Like so many other people, I would love to see a community come to me rather than go to it. But I am committed enough to the idea that I know I could move.

It is important to me that the community members be in close proximity to each other. I know how much difference a few miles can. I am in favor of the cohousing idea as more environmentally sound and in keeping with the concept of community. I recommend the book *Cohousing* by Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett.

I lean toward the engineered intentional community created by group discussion. I would like to see a lot of discussion about the decisions that are to be made—that is part of the process of creating a community, of everyone getting to know one another, their needs and desires. The decision-making process itself may be more important than the result. It is, however, very slow. The longer I look at the "engineered" option and the "jump-start" option the fewer differences I see, except that the Brauns would be making the initial outlay of money and choosing the property on which the community would be created. How does that change the community? I think it would, but I am not sure how.

I have lingering concerns about money. The area immediately around Powell House is a very expensive and exclusive area. Will there be a way for people in different class groups to feel comfortable joining this community, or be able to afford it? Diversity is something that is an ongoing concern for Quakers. Can we hope to achieve economic diversity in this setting?

I am excited about the whole project. It is an adventure just to explore the ideas and see a whole new way of life open up before me. I hope to hear from many of you to find out who you are and learn about your hopes and dreams.

From Alexander Haines-Stephan, Clinton, New York: I believe this Quaker community should be as self-sufficient as possible. I think that there should be cows and goats that can be milked, and some of the milk can be used for cheese. Sheep would be nice because their wool can be used for clothing and the milk could be sold to a place in Old Chatham. Chickens are good for their eggs. Hay and corn could be grown to support the animals. Also an orchard with pears and peaches and apples which can be used for cider. A vegetable garden would be nice. Lots of berry bushes—any kind imaginable that would grow. This is my vision of a community.

From Harold Braun, Missoula, Montana: Trying to live in an intentional way is the part of the message to which I react most enthusiastically, positively, commendably. I must, on almost a daily basis, pull myself up short and ask: "What am I doing? Why? Is this what I should be doing to be what I intend to be?"

And even among God-centered intentional lovers there must be quite a diversity. At one pole is Mother Teresa, who says: where can I find people least like myself? That's where I'll worship/celebrate/approach God by the actions of my life. Others simply find themselves

in some job/vocation/calling and say: Apparently this is IT for me: this spouse; this location; this allotment of intellectual horsepower. So be it. How can I worship/celebrate/approach God in this sub-optimal, even inhospitable environment? I'll do the best I can in the spot God/chance/my prior decisions and bankroll and horsepower have put me. Perhaps there's a like-minded person or two for support and nurture.

I confess that if I had young children, what would concern me most is the culture of self-aggrandizement, materialism, and technology-worship that surrounds us all. Should I tear into society and try to change it? Or try to insulate self and children from its miserable influence? I am not alone in finding that "children," 30 years later, have evolved in some ways totally out of keeping with their upbringing. Who the heck eats oatmeal now?

From Vicky Cooley, Dundee, New York: With regard to the three choices, I favor #3 [jump-starting], and I think #2 [gathering a group together to work the theory out in advance of buying property] is a bad idea for this kind of undertaking. Figuring things out in our heads for this kind of human connection is okay only as long as they are being tried all along the way and adjusted and new ideas are coming from our experience. After a community is established, the way people check out joining or not is by visiting, right?

I had to laugh at the idea that everyone wanted you to come to their part of the world—including me! Anyhow, I believe there are lots of people hungry for settled living. I am interested in how groups of people connect with one another. So I've sent in a long quotation and citation on networks.

RESOURCES: COMMUNITIES

The Farm, in Summertown, Tennessee, was begun in 1971 with a spiritual commitment to simple living and self-reliance. The Farm has pioneered a wide range of social and physical technologies appropriate to low-cost, high-satisfaction community living (plus a non-profit to support other "eco-communities").

www.thefarm.org
Summertown, TN 38483

Building a Real Bridge

Part One (Community Optimism): So here Eric and I are, trying to live a somewhat community-centered lifestyle on our little farmlet, making jam and giving it away without tending too much towards Martha Stewart, when Hurricane Floyd rolls in and takes away our bridge across the brook—which turned into a roiling, thrashing torrent that engulfed our garden and took it away, too, as well as flooding the meadow and knocking over a mid-stream rock bigger than your average stove. So we are bridgeless, with a 25' gap between us and our chickens which must be cared for at least twice a day. Full of confidence, I suggest that we invite many, many people we know over one Saturday to help us move the giant logs that will become the basis for our new bridge. My aunt and uncle have come to help (complete with rubber boots!). Surely we, deeply entrenched in one Quaker meeting and relatively established in our semi-rural neighborhood, can gather up at least 8 or 9 people to come heave on ropes and move these monstrous logs the 50 or 60 yards from the woods across the garden to the bridge site. I call around.

Part Two (Mechanical Advantage): I call fourteen people (not including children). I call four

or five days in advance. I promise cookies. What happens? No one can come. Everyone is busy, out of town, or both. One person can come help. I imagine eating all those cookies myself. Uh-oh. We and my relatives give in and go to Home Depot that Friday and buy a comealong (a gear that winds up a cable you attach to your ropes) so we can move the logs ourselves. And we do (s-l-o-w-l-y). But I realize, as I eat too many cookies and am thankful for my one neighbor who showed up, what a huge advantage it is—what sort of power and freedom it gives you—to be able to count on help from your community when you really need it, even physical help, without having to schedule it six weeks in advance in everyone's DayRunner. Seems to me an intentional community would profit from joint labor projects (barn-raising?) because working together and getting tired together *does* bring people closer to one another.

Part Three (Community Advantage vs. Mechanical Optimism): And imagine what could be done—done more cheaply, more simply, more old-fashioned and pleasingly, or maybe even more rapidly—if we lived in a community that remembered that many hands make light work. One person can hoe an entire garden instead of renting a rototiller, and not spend on or pollute with the tiller. But ten people hoeing can be done by lunchtime, and have more fun doing it. However, an entire field may require a tractor. So I guess my latest question is this: how could we arrange our lives in community so as to take advantage of this strength in numbers but not lose the balance—and there should be a reasonable balance—between handmade and mass-produced, old-fashioned and mechanized? Could we arrive at some guidelines that would lead us to raise our own barns but hire a well-digger to dig our wells? One thing I know--those Saturday-morning cookies would most likely be homemade.

—Ellen Key Harris-Braun

Community Land Trusts

In thinking about land, and our commitment to right living and the environment, it is appropriate to consider other than the standard land-ownership models. For example, many cultures have looked at land as un-ownable. Perhaps we could work towards not thinking of the piece of property either as property or as a commodity but rather as the place where we chose to live and thus as an integral part (even a member) of the community. In making decisions we might ask, "What does the land say?"

Nevertheless, in this country land must be owned. There is a legal mechanism, called a Community Land Trust (CLT), that might allow us to choose some land and then essentially take it off the market forever (by U.S. standards, since the real "forever" is a long time). This is how it might work if we formed a CLT:

The CLT is formed as a legal entity. Its purpose is to purchase and manage land according to specific guidelines set down in the bylaws. These can be items such as:

What percentage of the property will be available for housing. A decision on the number of homes that eventually will be built, and how much land these will occupy, needs to be made to create this guideline. We might say that we hope to eventually grow into being a community of 20-30 households. The building configuration will allow all to be built, cohousing style, within a 10-acre area and the remainder will be

protected in the bylaws as forest land, farmland, or communal project areas.

The terms under which lease agreements to community members will be made. If the land becomes the CLT's, community members in effect are able to lease for life (and for successor generations) the right to occupy the land. Any investments, such as

buildings, fences, or fruit trees, can be owned (and sold) by the lessees. Lessees' land use must be consistent with the objectives of the CLT. (For example, it might be stipulated that the land can only be farmed organically, and lessees would be prevented from using chemical pesticides.)

Community members pay a yearly lease fee to the CLT. Younger or older community members in good standing can pay reduced amounts; if the community begins generating income through a business, a certain percentage of profits can partially cover the lease fees. Many options allow the CLT to cover its expenses and properly manage the land.

The structure of the board. A number of CLTs have all their residents on their boards along with people from the wider local commu-

nity and non-local interested parties. In our case the board might be the community members, some Friends from Old Chatham Meeting and some of the community's neighbors, and Friends from New York Yearly Meeting. In the event the community

CLIPPINGS: THOUGHT-PROVOKING TIDBITS FOR
ALTERNATIVE LIVING

From A MIDWIFE'S STORY by Penny Armstrong and Sheryl Feldman (New York, Arbor House, 1986), a first-person account of a woman's life being an independent midwife in Amish country.

[The midwife, who is not Amish, is going into practice on her own among the Amish and is nervous about it: where will she get the needed equipment? Will the Amish come to her to deliver their babies?] "I was becoming--in spite of my entrepreneurial pose of confidence--thoroughly uneasy. An Amish neighbor tried to comfort me. She would say, "If it was meant to be, it will be." She wasn't particularly sugary about it, it's just that I could live without insipid comfort, thank you. My Amish neighbor didn't understand in the least. She didn't even guess that where I came from you made things happen, and if they didn't happen right, it was your fault.

"Let those who had legions of aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandpas to stand in their kitchen in times of trial sing 'What will be, will be,' because it was logical when everybody in horse-and-buggy distance was prepared to drop everything and come over to start raising your barn the day after it burned down. (One Friday I was going to make a house call on a woman whose barn had burned down on Tuesday, and was planning on finding the place by using the burned-down barn as a landmark. Wrong. They'd rebuilt it by then.) One can afford the luxury of being philosophical and bending with the wind when everyone in the neighborhood has known you since you were born and when everyone takes a personal and communal interest in your welfare.

"I came from the land of the lone tree."

disintegrates, the board will continue to ensure the land is properly managed. Usually the by-laws stipulate that if the board collapses, control of the land trust will be turned over to some other predetermined entity such as The Nature Conservancy, another local land trust, or a town or state government management entity. In all cases the trust provisions are legally binding.

Concurrent to the formation of the CLT is the search for the land. When it is located the CLT purchases it with funds borrowed from the initial “settlers.” The initial settlers can either consider their loan as prepayment of their lease amounts (a CLT can provide an incentive whereby a lump sum such as a 10-year prepayment will cover 12 years of lease), or it can be a real loan which is repaid as other community members join and begin making their lease payments.

Community Land Trusts tend to keep housing affordable. Some CLTs stipulate that homes can only be sold at a price that does not exceed the replacement value of the existing structure. In other words the price does not depend on the market for homes in the area but rather on what it would cost to build the house at current prices. This allows people—often young people—who normally would not be able to afford the appreciated value of the home to join a CLT. (CLTers recommend that one's home not be viewed as one's main investment, but that those who feel the need to have nest eggs invest elsewhere the amounts they save by living in community. Experience suggests that they will find their returns to be at least as good as the usual appreciation on a house, once savings on typical expenditures such as laundry, transportation expenses, food, lawn care, child care, etc. are figured in.)

Chatham has a land-trust management organization that focuses on conservation (rather than community) land trusts. But they are interested in our ideas and we have established a date in early November for an in-depth discussion. The E. F. Schumacher Society, an organization about 25 minutes away in Great Barrington, MA, specifically works on promotion of CLTs and can provide considerable legal expertise. (Coincidence?)

A more familiar, non-CLT option that achieves many of the same goals would be to form a homeowners' association—much as exists for most condominiums in this country. Community members would own their homes but pay condominium fees and establish guidelines for the use of the common areas. This option would not take the land off the market permanently, but would function as long as the community exists.

Again, we would love your thoughts and ideas, this time particularly on the alternatives between private, communal land ownership and the notion of giving up owning a piece of God's fine Earth in order to "rent" it instead as a caretaker while you are here.

—Jens Braun

RESOURCES:
ORGANIZATIONS/WEB SITES

E.F. Schumacher Society: resources for community renewal and environmental sustainability.
www.schumachersociety.org

Institute for Community Economics: technical assistance/financing for CLTs and other community-based organizations.
Springfield, MA (413) 746-8660

From ACEnet--Papers: The Transformation Of Policy In The New World Economy
(www.seorf.ohiou.edu/~xx001/polrec.html)

Networks are an increasingly common form for organizing businesses, communities, and government entities because they promote a continual stream of learning and innovation. Networks are flexible because they are an information and relationship rich form of organization that contains considerable diversity. Networks easily contain dramatic degrees of diversity because they have no rigid boundaries or no notion of membership.

They are, simply, people with similar interests sharing information, building relationships, and working on joint projects. This degree of diversity, which is at a much higher level than most individual firms or organizations contain within themselves, almost guarantees that new ideas will be generated and become the basis for taking advantage of new opportunities.

The importance of diversity is not simply that programs and policy may be improved because they are considering the perspectives, needs and resources of more groups. Our experience has shown that important conceptual breakthroughs occur when people have the opportunity to struggle, in a positive setting, with issues that arise around diversity. The process of opening up to accept and listen to perspectives quite different from one's own opens up thinking in general. The richness of these perspectives creates a more complex picture of reality for network participants, and enables them to liberate themselves from their more limited and limiting individual perspectives.

In these networks no attempt is made to get everyone to think alike; in fact, generally networks never meet as a whole group. People in networks know who knows what and who has what. Out of the entire pool of capacity, skill and interest, smaller clusters or action groups arise to design and implement collaborative projects: joint production, creation of a new joint business, or creation of a new service. What the cluster learns from the project is shared freely throughout the network, so each new project builds on previous success and failure.

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Another possible plan for the future is a Web site that would contain the newsletters, a private directory of subscribers, useful links to other sites, photos, between-newsletter updates, polls, a newsletter subscription form, etc. Ideas for more? Send them to us also!

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We believe community can be a means of working toward these four and a half main objectives:

1. To increase the mindfulness, spiritual focus and God-centeredness of our lives by finding and living near others who are like-minded and will reinforce, on a daily basis, our desire to live in worship.
2. To strengthen our family life both by creating a “village” setting in which to raise our and others' children, and by caring for our elders. This includes an emphasis on leaving behind cultural obstacles that interfere with providing the time and energy that healthy family life requires.
3. To examine carefully our participation in the national/international consumer economy and begin to build the critical mass necessary for viable business networks and sources of goods and services more appropriate to our Quaker testimonies.
4. To focus on a lifestyle that is environmentally sound and that attempts to give back to our planet as much as is taken from it.
- 4.5 To include a good measure of joy, fun, outreach, and service in our lives as we strive to meet the first four objectives.

Send us ideas, questions, musings, excerpts from thought-provoking articles, clippings, books, Web sites, etc., and we'll share them via this newsletter with others who are interested in intentional community...all for the purpose of learning how to bridge the gap between conventional American life at the end of this century and the communities we would like to be part of at the dawn of the next.