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 History 91
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*Towards a New Social Order: The Macedonia Cooperative Community and The
 Cooperative Movement in the U.S. South*

Abstract: The Macedonia Cooperative Community was established in 1938 as an experiment in cooperative economics by Morris Mitchell who hoped that the model of the community would provide a solution to the South's economic woes. This vision was supplemented by the community's involvement with a broader group of actors through the Southeastern Cooperative League and other intentional communities. Following the end of World War II, the membership of the community was entirely replaced with conscientious objectors, a change which shifted the purpose of the community inward. Internal tensions over communal identity culminated in the dissolution of the community in 1958.

“The Macedonia Cooperative Community has been established as a thirty-year social experiment, beginning in September, 1937. It is the purpose of the Macedonia Cooperative Community to develop on a miniature scale a democratically controlled economy of abundance, and to promote individual creativity and freedom, in harmony with nature and in fellowship with others.” -Proposed Articles of Incorporation June, 1948

In the late years of the Great Depression, the United States had been languishing in the midst of severe economic hardship for almost a decade. In the rural South, conditions that had already been bleak for many of its inhabitants became even more so. The northeast Georgia region, tucked into the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains, was not immune to these national and global trends despite its isolation. Much of its population made modest livings off small-scale or subsistence agriculture. Yet for these people, the Great Depression was also a time of change for the region. As an Atlanta Constitution article about the Macedonia Cooperative Community commented, “experiments are nothing new in the life of north Georgia

in recent years. They have seen the WPA, the NYA, the PWA and all other New Deal agencies swing into action and they have welcomed them all with friendly tolerance.”¹

On the back of these changes, Morris Mitchell, a progressive educator set on reforming the South, established the Macedonia Cooperative Community in 1939 as an experiment in cooperative economics. As a planned, closely integrated, and largely self-sufficient community, Macedonia’s existence drew parallels to the American utopian communities that blossomed during the middle of the nineteenth century, but despite this apparent similarity, Macedonia’s history can only be partially understood through the lens of utopian communities. Utopian communities have largely been studied as isolated entities, retreating from and standing in opposition to mainstream society. W. E. Orser’s treatment of the Macedonia Community in his book, *Searching For a Viable Alternative*, largely takes this approach. While Orser analyzed many of the internal dynamics of the community, his approach misses many of the ways in which Macedonia created extensive social networks and played a role in movements for social change in the South. To grasp the community’s impact, Macedonia must be understood through the movements it interacted with, as part of regional and national trends in society.

The alternative vision that the Macedonia Cooperative Community offered was primarily one of economic reform; community was valued for its economic functionality, rather than as an ends in itself. Searching for identity and questioning the place of religion played a part in the community’s existence, but its legacy is rooted in its involvement with the cooperative movement in the South. This movement aimed to address the South’s economic underdevelopment and, in doing so, help to remedy social ills, namely widespread poverty and oppression of black Southerners under Jim Crow laws. Though Macedonia’s twenty-year

¹ Lamar Q. Ball, “Hard Labor is Foundation of Utopia,” 23 July, 1939, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

existence was often dominated by a struggle to stay afloat economically, as a node in the social networks that sustained the cooperative movement in the South, Macedonia contributed to a larger force for change than it could have achieved as a solitary community.

Section I: The Roots of an Idea

In a 1938 address in Barnesville, Georgia, President Franklin Roosevelt declared the South to be the nation's number one economic problem; in doing so he joined a litany of academics and reformers who were turning their attention towards the task of reshaping the South, to raise it out of its perceived economic backwardness.² Thus the people of northeast Georgia can be forgiven if they saw the creation of the Macedonia Community as just another in a slew of programs and projects to come to the region with hopes for bringing change. To them, "the doctor and his promised land [were] just another phase of what mountaineers [had] learned they must accept from those strangers who [were] moving in from abroad."³ It mattered little to them whether Morris Mitchell was a Southern native, born and raised in North Carolina as he was, or an outsider from the North. Indeed, the fact that Mitchell's project was a private undertaking, inspired by his own idealism and largely funded out of his own pocket seems to have been lost on many of the local residents who had few examples to measure his venture against except the various programs of the New Deal. They respected and trusted Mitchell but they did not see themselves as equals in the project. To them it was Mitchell's project and they were just signing on board as they might with a government program.

² Steve Davis, "The South as "the Nation's No. 1 Economic Problem": the NEC Report of 1938," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 62 (1978): 119.

³ *ibid.*

For these people, many of whom were just barely scraping an existence together, the various ideologies behind such projects mattered little in relation to the details of how the project could help them feed their families. For various grassroots reformers, this desperation for some alternative to the failures of the Depression made the 1930s a time ripe with opportunity for attempting radical new social experiments. One of the upshots of this wave of social experimentation was a renewed interest in utopian projects and ideologies.⁴ In this context, some Americans saw utopian and communal arrangements as an alternative to the individualism and competition of a capitalist order that seemed to have failed them. Utopian communities have often shunned individualistic and capitalist ways of living in favor of communal and cooperative ones, but for many of the utopian communities of nineteenth-century America the rejection of capitalism as an acceptable economic order arose out of beliefs about the the need for a social order that was more communal. For the Macedonia Cooperative Community and many other utopian-type communal experiments of this era, the economic critique was the central force driving the establishment of community.⁵ Community was not viewed as inherently better or necessary for religious devotion but rather as desirable because it facilitated a more sustainable economic order.

The Macedonia Community was brought into existence at this intersection of longstanding concern about the paired economic and social condition of the South and the acute

⁴ Donald W. Whisenhurt, *Utopian Movements and Ideas of the Great Depression: Dreamers, Believers, and Madmen* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 3.

⁵ Throughout this paper I use “utopian community” and “intentional community” interchangeably. Intentional community is a term often used by communities to describe themselves, as many do not see their goal as establishing a perfect world, as utopian is often understood to mean. Many scholars, however, use the term utopia/utopian community more broadly to describe communal experiments aimed at creating a better form of society. The Macedonia Cooperative Community identified as an intentional community and, as Barry Shenker argues, it is important to focus on how communities define terms rather than imposing terms upon them, but for the sake of not getting bogged down in arguments about utopian vs. intentional vs. communal, or other such terms, I have opted to use both to describe Macedonia and other communities, regardless of whether they considered themselves to be utopian or not. It is telling that the wave of communal enterprises of Macedonia’s era identified as “intentional communities” rather than “utopian communities” as it show a greater sense of the pragmatism and awareness of the limits of communities of this era of reformers.

suffering brought on by the Great Depression. Morris Mitchell viewed the South as a distinct challenge for reformers to tackle, but in this distinct challenge, he argued that the South also provided many opportunities for new philosophies of education to rework the structures of society. He took the view that economic problems are symptomatic of social and political problems underpinning a society, and thus the way to address the South as the nation's number one economic problem was to work to change the social and political landscape.⁶ For Mitchell, education was the way to effect this change. His conception of education was influenced by John Dewey's brand of Progressive Education, and more specifically advocated for schools that were tailored to the needs of the communities they served and provided functional education that would actually enable the students to be able to address the particular problems and needs of their community.⁷

Mitchell's attitudes towards education developed from a number of formative educational experiences and influential institutions. An early experience in his adult life that he would later refer to as influential upon his thinking about the connection between education and social change was his time spent as a teacher and superintendent in schools in Ellerbe, North Carolina, a rural and impoverished small town from 1919 to 1924. His experiences there both exposed him to the poor condition of many schools in the rural South and helped inspire his thinking about the role that schools could play in improving the conditions of such communities. From 1924-1926, Mitchell attended both the George Peabody College for Teachers and the Teachers College at Columbia University, both of which were centers of progressive educational thought.⁸ His association with Columbia, in particular, connected him to a network of progressive

⁶ Morris Mitchell, "Educational Resources in the Southeast" *Progressive Education* 17 (1940): 317.

⁷ Mitchell, "Educational Resources," 316-320.

⁸ Finding Aid, Morris R. Mitchell Papers, 1898-1976, collection 03832, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

educators in the vein of Dewey that saw education as a powerful tool to be used for developing democratic values and engendering social responsibility. Perhaps most directly influential to his vision for Macedonia, though, was Mitchell's time spent as a faculty member of New College, an experimental offshoot of Teachers College.

New College set up an experimental educational camp in Canton, North Carolina in 1932 as a sort of educational laboratory for its students. It provided an outlet for putting progressive educational theory into practice in an ideal, controlled environment. "The New College Community in North Carolina was the hidden jewel of the total student experience, because the importance placed on communal planning and living as part of the educative process for students had been an essential part of the New College curriculum plan from the beginning."⁹ In this venture, Mitchell was able to gain experience applying progressive educational philosophy in a rural southern setting. Moreover, the New College community in Canton provided an experiment in communal organizing, small-scale agriculture, and shared communal labor.

Mitchell then got his chance to strike out on his own. Thomas Alexander, the president of New College, continued to explore opportunities to expand New College with the addition of new locations. Between 1935 and 1936 Alexander was in communication with the board of education of Habersham County, Georgia about an opportunity to turn an old agricultural and mechanical school into a New College campus. Mitchell was sent to Habersham County by Alexander to look into the feasibility of this venture. Ultimately, the plan to establish a new community in Georgia fell through as New College itself was struggling to stay afloat financially and was closed in 1938. Mitchell, however, took the opportunity to enact his own visions. In Habersham County, a rural location tucked into the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, he

⁹ George W. Lucero, "New College Community Canton, North Carolina," *The Cultured and Competent Teacher* (accessed 31 October, 2016). <http://www.culturedandcompetentteacher.com/canton-north-carolina.html>

saw the chance to address his “belief that rural poverty was the South’s number one economic problem, and by extension the nation’s. Instead of pulling up stakes and heading back to New York Dr. Mitchell stayed on and founded the Macedonia Cooperative Community.”¹⁰

Thus the Macedonia Cooperative Community began to take life as its predecessor of sorts, the New College community of Canton, North Carolina, was drawing to an end. Cut free from New College but still full of reformist energy, Mitchell plunged himself into this new project.

Morris Mitchell, in 1937, bought 800 acres of Blue Ridge foothills 90 miles northeast of Atlanta, Georgia. ... Morris deliberately chose this area, feeling that a successful cooperative community under such adverse conditions would be a dramatic demonstration of the advantages of the cooperative technique. ... He had come to the belief that what was needed for the South, the nation, and the world was an example of the way in which rural people could create their own salvation by applying cooperative methods to the problems of their communities.¹¹

Yet the Macedonia Cooperative Community was not an outpost of New College, cut loose when finances forced the closure of the college. It drew on many of the philosophies of Alexander, New College, and the educational philosophies associated with Teachers College, but it was, at its core, Mitchell’s own creation. Although it had its roots in educational experimentation, the Macedonia Community was an experiment in community and economics first and an educational institutional only in the more general sense that the community was educating people in a new manner of social and economic organization. As opposed to the Canton community, which was structured around providing an educational experience for students of New College who would come to the rural North Carolina location, Macedonia was established on the premise of working with and uplifting the local population. The agricultural

¹⁰ George W. Lucero, “New College Habersham, Georgia Community,” *The Cultured and Competent Teacher* (accessed 31 October, 2016). <http://www.culturedandcompetentteacher.com/habersham-georgia-community.html>

¹¹ Community Life Report, 1948 pp.4-5, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

and communal aspects in the background of the Canton experience were brought front and center in Mitchell's plan for Macedonia.

Part II: The Macedonia Cooperative Community, the Early Years

Morris Mitchell's choice of location for the Macedonia Cooperative Community and his inspiration to help rural, Southern communities grew out of the connections and experiences he had established through his work with Teachers College and New College. But the creation of the Macedonia Community hearkened back much further, to the utopian communities of nineteenth-century America. While the utopian communities of the nineteenth century were neither the first such experiments in the United States nor the last prior to Macedonia's establishment, they claimed such a place in the national consciousness that much popular and academic thinking about intentional and utopian communities has used this era of communities as a touchstone.

Shifting the focus from the educational mission of New College towards an economic focus aligned the Macedonia Community more closely with utopian communities than educational experimentation. At the same time, however, Mitchell envisioned a type of community that was quite different in many ways from the typical utopian community of the nineteenth century. Certainly there were commonalities between Mitchell's vision for Macedonia and its utopian predecessors, but it was also a distinct creation, a community, but a community envisioned in a new form.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's influential *Commitment and Community* established the importance of communities generating a strong degree of commitment from its members in order

to create a successful utopian community.¹² Her study focused primarily on the long-lasting communities founded in the mid-nineteenth century, with the aim of finding common factors that could be generalized as successful characteristics for community. In contrast to this approach to community, Macedonia was planned as a loosely connected community, structured around the principle of cooperative economics. The chief means of production, such as the land, cattle, and machinery, were owned by the community, and members were paid wages for their labor.¹³ The parameters and membership of the community were defined, written down in articles of incorporation with the signatures at the end to attest to their commitment, but their commitment was almost more akin to employees signing on with a company than utopian communitarians agreeing to start a new a life together.

Another departure from the pattern established by previous utopian communities was the fact that the first members of the Macedonia Cooperative Community were not a group of disaffected people who organized to drop out of mainstream society together and strike out on their own. Though many utopian communities seek to withdraw from society, Yaacov Oved argued that few communities are actually able to do this. Challenging Kanter's research, he argues that connections with the outside world are indispensable to intentional communities.¹⁴ Macedonia, however, was premised, from the beginning, on a connection with the outside world; the first members of the community were all locals of the northeast Georgia area. One family, the Worleys, actually lived on the land prior to the community's establishment. For the four original families that Morris Mitchell convinced to join his experiment, the possibility of better

¹² Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1972).

¹³ W. Edward Orser, *Searching for a Viable Alternative: The Macedonia Cooperative Community 1937-1958* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1981), 43.

¹⁴ Yaacov Oved, "Communes & the Outside World: Seclusion & Involvement," *Communal Societies* 3 (1983): 84.

housing and a more stable income were more of a factor than a disillusionment with modern, industrialized society.

Mitchell had grand goals for reshaping Southern economic and social relations, but his revolution was a gradual one that sought to tweak the structures already present rather than overthrow the system. Although he supported the efforts of some of the New Deal programs, Mitchell's vision for the uplift of the South was focused more on drawing upon the resources already present rather than relying on government programs and money. This would come in the form of "an awakening of the Southern people, Southern farmers, an awakening in which they will see a direction and grow into a great new confidence in themselves."¹⁵ This emphasis on gradualism is seen in Mitchell's description of the form of the community as it took shape:

It seems to follow that farm people could cooperate better if they lived near enough together to provide greater neighborliness and yet far enough apart to insure privacy and family integrity. Accordingly, there has been a tendency for families to move into a cooperative village...A few workers live at a distance and walk daily to the project.¹⁶

This design largely allowed the members of the community to retain many, if not most, aspects of their lifestyles. Though this lack of tight centralization and commitment to community would appear to be a weakness from the perspective of Kanter's analysis, this was precisely what Mitchell wanted in his community.

His goal of uplifting the economic condition of poor, rural Southerners did not require them to buy into some grand ideology; in fact in various publicity materials, he made a point of asserting that Macedonia belonged to no "isms."¹⁷ His emphasis instead was that the Macedonia Community should be one of an array of elements in a "folk movement" throughout the South

¹⁵ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Elvin Roberts, August 12, 1941, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

¹⁶ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Joshua Cope, August 28, 1946, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

¹⁷ Purpose Statement, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

that would draw on the many organizations and agencies, working on various projects from “soil conservation” to “rural electrification.”¹⁸ Mitchell “had come to the belief that what was needed for the South, the nation, and the world was an example of the way in which rural people could create their own salvation by applying cooperative methods to the problems of their communities.”¹⁹ Thus, the direct goal for the community was to be a functional form of economic improvement for the rural northeast Georgia area, specifically for the members of the community. In addition to this, though, Mitchell also wanted Macedonia to serve as a model community for the rest of the South, and even the world, to show that it was possible for people “to work together so that there will be plenty for everyone and so that everyone will use that plenty.”²⁰ In this manner, the Macedonia Community was continuing the utopian tradition of attempting to bring change to the world by demonstrating the viability of an alternative social order. But he was also shunning the tradition of escapist and isolationist tendencies of most of these communities to turn their backs of the world and focus all efforts inward.

With a strong theoretical vision, 800 acres of forest and farm land, and a small group of committed locals on board, Morris Mitchell set the Macedonia Cooperative Community into action. The principles of the community were based around the Rochdale Principles of cooperative organizing with some of Mitchell’s own philosophies added to the mix.²¹ The resultant combination created a community founded around cooperative principles of

¹⁸ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Mary Wiser, August 14, 1941, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

¹⁹ Macedonia Community Report, 1948, pp.4-5, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

²⁰ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Elvin Roberts, May 6, 1940, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

²¹ The Rochdale Principles were established in England in the mid-1800s by the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers who are often cited as being the originators of the cooperative economics movement. The principles, as printed on a Southeastern Cooperative Education League newsletter are as follows: 1. Democratic control/one member, one vote 2. Limited interest on capital 3. Cash business 4. Savings returned in proportion to patronage 5. Voluntary, open membership 6. Reserves for constant education 7. Neutrality in religion and politics 8. Cooperation among cooperatives.

membership and operation with an added emphasis on improved land-use practices and reliance on technology and modern science to improve agricultural outputs. Within the first few years a cooperative store was established, homes were built or improved, land was worked for farming, depleted hillside lands were reclaimed, a dairy was brought into operation, and a system of community shares and wages for work was implemented. Under Mitchell's guiding hand the community steadily came together, took shape, and established connections in the community and beyond.

Turning to some of the agencies that Mitchell saw as being part of his vision of the "folk movement" in the South, the community established relationships with the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Farm Security Administration. Agreements were made for the Macedonia Community to carry out experimental methods in erosion control, tree tests and forest management, and agricultural science on behalf of TVA studies.²² The Farm Security Administration provided a more basic need of the community- financial support in the form of start-up loans. More than just providing financial support, though, the FSA's mission to support small, rural farmers had much in common with Mitchell's goal for Macedonia. So much so that an early agreement stipulated that the management of the Macedonia Community would be conducted jointly by the local FSA supervisor, the community manager, and Morris Mitchell.²³ It is not clear that the FSA or its local supervisor ever actually ended up having any role in the management of the community, and the TVA only coordinated very loosely with the community, but the fact that Mitchell and the community were willing to work in partnership with them is informative.

²² Agreement between the MCC and the Forest Tree Crop Unit of the TVA, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

²³ Agreement between Morris Mitchell, Elvin Roberts, and Mr. Frate Bull of the FSA, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

The decision to work with these agencies reveals the particular nature of the Macedonia Cooperative Community. As Timothy Miller argues, the 1930s were a distinct new era for communal and utopian activity in the United States, and many of the communities that emerged during this era were the product of, or inspired by, the multitude of government sponsored depression-fighting programs and agencies:

At least twenty-five cooperative group-farming projects, with varying levels and types of communitarian features, were organized between 1937 and 1939 by the Farm Security Administration in the hope that through cooperation and sharing some indigent farmers could at least survive until the economy improved. The FSA farms were in turn part of a larger effort on the part of a variety of New Deal agencies (including the FSA's predecessors, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads and the Resettlement Administration) to establish cooperative agricultural and industrial settlements, garden cities, and other innovative, nonindividualistic approaches to the economic crisis.²⁴

During this era, there was a good deal of cross-pollination between New Deal programs and liberal thinkers interested in communal and cooperative alternatives.

One of the programs carried out by the Resettlement Administration (which later became part of the Farm Security Administration) was the creation of "Greenbelt" communities that drew on utopian and cooperative principles to attempt to create a new type of suburban community.²⁵ The head of the Resettlement Administration, Rexford Tugwell, was an economist who was concerned with agricultural problems, embraced collectivism, and advocated for a more cooperative society.²⁶ Similarly, the first chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Arthur Morgan, was interested in the potential of communalism as an avenue for fighting the economic hardships brought by the Great Depression and the long-term economic struggles of the South. After leaving the TVA, he founded the Celso Community in the mountain country of western

²⁴ Timothy Miller, *The Quest for Utopia in Twentieth-Century America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 133.

²⁵ Jason Reblando, "Farm Security Administration Photographs of Greenbelt Towns: Selling Utopia During the Great Depression," *Utopian Studies* 25 (2014): 52-86.

²⁶ Reblando, "Farm Security Administration Photographs," 54.

North Carolina at roughly the same time that Mitchell founded the Macedonia Cooperative Community.

Even where programs did not have direct connections to proponents of communal and cooperative methods, President Roosevelt's call for American society to embrace a general spirit of cooperation dovetailed well with utopian thinking. Moreover, the suffering brought about by the Great Depression spurred many to look for creative new solutions to economic problems, and the apparent failure of capitalism made people more willing to consider options that strayed towards the ideologies of socialism or even communism and fascism.²⁷ Such was the case for the founding families of the Macedonia Cooperative Community.

Applying a combination of select elements of the TVA and FSA with the local knowledge of the community members, Macedonia gradually came into shape as a functioning farm cooperative. There were some local murmurings of the community members being communists, but it seems that the local reaction to the community was more confusion than antagonism. It was clearly something new and different, but it was also primarily composed of locals doing a lot of the usual work of the area- farming, dairying, and cutting lumber. Additionally, true to Mitchell's mission, the Macedonia Community worked with its surrounding community; the cooperative store seems to have drawn in a number of members beyond the Macedonia families, and the Macedonia Community's work with the local farm extension was of use to many local farmers not otherwise involved with the community. The dairy, being well equipped with modern machinery, allowed the community to become the milk provider for the county school system, further establishing a positive reputation in area.

²⁷ Donald Whisenhunt, *Utopian Movements and Ideas of the Great Depression: Dreamers, Believers, and Madmen* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).

By 1944 Mitchell was reporting substantial progress for the community. Such optimism no doubt grew out of a grounded sense that starting a cooperative, agriculturally-based community in rural Georgia would be a slow and challenging process, measured in small improvements in quality of life. Indeed, in the context of the Depression, a steady source of work and decent housing were markers of progress. Yet the community was starting to be able to “not only hold [its] own but to move upstream a little, against present currents of human affairs.”²⁸ The dairy was quadrupled in size and outfitted with high quality supplies, the community gained electricity, two new houses were built, and nearly 400 acres of land added to the community’s property.²⁹ More importantly for the members, the community was able to move towards financial stability; after making little income the first few years, Mitchell reported the community to have brought in \$11,000 in 1945 and been on pace to more than double that in 1946.³⁰

In the face of this optimism, though, finances proved to be a defining factor of much of the community’s existence during this period. Mitchell was able to pour in some money from his teaching positions and speaking engagements on a somewhat regular basis, but this never amounted to much more than enough to just get by and stay on top of loan payments on the land and supplies and money for food and other essentials not provided by the operations of the community. Despite the initial talk of working with the FSA, the assistant administrator ultimately decided that the link between Macedonia and the FSA’s goals was too tenuous to

²⁸ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Lee Brooks, November 2, 1944, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Lee Brooks, April 24, 1946, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

provide substantial aid to the community.³¹ Thus, with the exception of a small FSA loan, the community had little in the way of outside funding to prop up operations in the lean, early years; the members of the community were not asked to turn over all their resources to common ownership, nor did they have much to contribute had they been asked to contribute it.

With only Mitchell's small investments to cushion the community's finances, Macedonia was constantly treading near the edge of falling apart. Even small failures of crops or projected costs and unexpected expenses would leave the community scrambling to find money and stretch it to cover their payments. Often the community had to resort to cutting and selling their timber to stay afloat financially, a practice that Mitchell disliked on two grounds: it led to unsustainable land management and selling timber was, to him, a waste of resources that could bring in much more money if actually cut into lumber or better yet, turned into finished wood products on site. The members of the community worked long hours and endured living on meager essentials to keep the project alive. In this sense they were successful, but it was clear in the early years of the community that Mitchell's vision for a "democratically controlled economy of abundance" was a long project of social change, not an immediate poverty relief effort. The cooperative values that Mitchell promoted would have to be integrated gradually, and the benefits reaped in the long-term.

Part III: The War Years and After: Macedonia Expands

³¹ Letter from the assistant administrator of the FSA to Morris Mitchell, May 2, 1939, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

Even in the early years of the community's existence, it was not an entirely local operation. While its membership was comprised of locals, there were many other people from the Southeast and further afield who interacted with the community. Some stopped by only briefly out of curiosity on their travels elsewhere, others were drawn through Mitchell's connections in the worlds of education, the cooperative movement, and southern liberal circles, others yet came to the community to work and stay for extended periods of time.³² In this third group, many were part of work camps held at Macedonia in coordination with the American Friends Service Committee. These camps were held for a number of summers during the pre-war years and brought crews of college students to provide additional manual labor for many of the community's projects, including building houses and work on creating a lake and dam to provide electricity and expanded recreational opportunities.³³ The dam never became a working reality, and whatever money brought in by these camps seemed to hardly make it worthwhile considering the effort it took on the part of the community members to host the campers, but these camps were valuable in connecting Macedonia to the outside world. Many of the students who attended these camps stayed in-touch with Macedonia-- some continued to come back year after year-- and these connections would prove to be important in drawing a new wave of members to the community during and after World War II.

The war years brought an interesting challenge to the Macedonia Community-prosperity. As the American economy mobilized to support the war effort, a greater number of job opportunities were made available to many throughout the United States. This surge in industrial jobs provided an attractive alternative to subsistence farming for many in the rural

³² "News From American Friends' Service Work Camp At Macedonia, Art and Mary Wiser Tri-County Advertiser, July 31, 1941, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

³³ Macedonia Community Report 1948, p.5, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

South. Such was the case for most of members of Macedonia. “By mid-1943 all of the community men except [community manager, Elvin] Roberts had taken jobs outside. With the wartime economy jobs were now more plentiful and wages higher than in the Depression period when the community had gotten its start.”³⁴ The meager and somewhat unreliable income that the community provided had never allowed families to live comfortably.³⁵ Torn between the need to provide for their families and their loyalty to Mitchell and the community, all but Elvin and Lucille Roberts chose to leave the community for jobs elsewhere. This parting of ways does not seem to have generated animosity on either side, only a tacit understanding on the part of Mitchell and the Roberts that it was too much to ask people to pass up a decent living for the sake of furthering the ideological experiment of the community. These people had not joined the community out of a strong ideological commitment to the ideals Mitchell laid out; they joined because the community gave them a route to a better quality of life. When the outside conditions changed so that the community no longer filled that role, they left.

During the height of the war years, the community struggled to survive. Morris Mitchell was mostly absent from the community, corresponding with Elvin Roberts as to the maintenance of the aspects of the community’s ventures and weighing financial decisions. Roberts near single-handedly kept the dairy, fields, and other aspects of the community functional, if ever so barely above failure. Yet out of this rough period, a new life of the community began to blossom from the meager remains of the original community. The seeds that had been planted by the American Friends Service Committee work camps and Morris Mitchell’s wide-ranging connections began to bear fruit.

³⁴ Orser, *Searching for a Viable Alternative*, 75.

³⁵ Orser, *Searching for a Viable Alternative*, 88.

Just as the war economy drew labor away from the community, bringing it near to its demise, the reaction to the war also brought new interest in alternative forms of living. Although the war brought prosperity, it also challenged many people's sense of the world and their place in it. Seeing the horrific destruction and violence of World War II, the second such war in thirty years, challenged those who opposed it to examine the roots of conflict. It also galvanized many to take greater action against the evils they saw in the world. For a portion of Americans this began with registering as conscientious objectors, refusing to be drafted into military service. This was a radical stance, but for many conscientious objectors, simply refusing to take part in the war effort was not enough; their negative actions had to be coupled with positive actions to build up a new world order that was not only against war but was against the societal structures that led to conflicts and war. For many this led to a critique of capitalism. Communal societies thus became an appealing alternative to the individualistic, capitalist world that they saw as being responsible for the violence of World War II and the alienation of the individual in mass society.

This theoretical understanding of communal organizations as an alternative way to live was bolstered by the experience of conscientious objectors in Civilian Public Service work camps. These camps were established to allow conscientious objectors an alternative way to serve their country doing something productive and beneficial for society rather than serving in noncombatant roles in the military or wasting their time and talents sitting in jail.³⁶ Although the camps were largely designed with the purpose of being alternative prisons for conscientious objectors, these camps provided two significant, unintended consequences: first, they gathered like-minded radicals together where they could discuss and expand their views, and second, the

³⁶ Nicholas A. Krehbiel, "Part I: The Story Begins," *Living Peace in a Time of War: The Civilian Public Service Story*, accessed 14 November, 2016. <http://civilianpublicservice.org/storybegins>

communal nature of the camps provided C.P.S. camp members with an experiment in communal living that they could draw on to imagine alternative forms of living after the war.

More specifically related to the Macedonia Cooperative Community, CPS Camp No. 30 in Walhalla, Michigan established a direct connection between conscientious objectors interested in cooperative living and the Macedonia Community. In 1943 the School of Cooperative Living was established at the camp under the direction of Morris Mitchell.³⁷ This semi-formal school gave members of the camp an outlet to engage their ideas academically, a balance to the manual labor of the daily camp work. Students wrote essays exploring the theories behind organizations and movements for social change as well as personal reflections on their own philosophies for life. Many of the students of the School of Cooperative Living would visit Macedonia on their furloughs from the camp. This interchange both helped to vitalize Macedonia at a time when it was in serious need of labor and convinced many of the conscientious objectors to commit to joining the community upon their fulfillment of their service in C.P.S. camps. A few, including Henry Dyer and Art Wiser (who had been involved with the community prior to the war), were so excited and dedicated to the prospect of joining the Macedonia Community that they spent much of their free time carrying out calculations and plans for the community, ranging from detailed analysis of how much Macedonia could afford to pay in wages to broader considerations of how they could serve as an educational resource and challenge politics and social problems in Georgia.³⁸ For this group of conscientious objectors, joining the Macedonia Cooperative Community was a practical way to implement their ideas, ideas that had been shaped and

³⁷ "CPS Unit Number 030-01," *Living Peace in a Time of War: The Civilian Public Service Story*, accessed 15 November, 2016. <http://civilianpublicservice.org/camps/30/1>

³⁸ Letters from Henry Dyer to Morris Mitchell, April 7 and June 18, 1946, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

crystallized by their time in the School of Cooperative Living and the Civilian Public Service camps.

With the economic upswing brought by the war economy also came a greater concern among some of the population that the United States' economy, and capitalism generally, were inherently linked to wars. The suffering of the Great Depression had not yet faded from memory, but new concerns were beginning to crowd out the economic-centered reforms of the 1930s. Moreover, the increased employment in industry during the war era facilitated migrations that drew many rural Southerners to cities and out of the region, weakening the vision of Mitchell and others who focused on the organization of rural, Southern farmers as the starting point for vitalizing the economy of the region.³⁹ Though this remained the heart of the Macedonia Community's mission, the influx of conscientious objectors and others catalyzed by war pushed the nature of the community towards that of a more typical utopian community. As one of the new members wrote, the unifying values of this new wave of members were pacifism, a "disillusionment with modern industrial society," and a lack of faith in "the usual kind of political activity or the wistful thinking of liberals."⁴⁰ Whereas the community had previously been an experiment in organizing a rural population in a more efficient, cooperative manner, the stream of members from outside the local area, many with urban, educated backgrounds, now made the community more reminiscent of a back-to-the-land movement, disillusioned with "modern industrial society."⁴¹ The most important thing to them was "not the business activity

³⁹ Christopher J. Tassava, "The American Economy During World War II," *Economic History Association*.
<https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-american-economy-during-world-war-ii/>

⁴⁰ David Newton, "The Macedonia Community." *Politics* Winter (1948): 28.

⁴¹ *ibid*

of the place but the special quality of relationship among living things,” a distinct turn from the original membership.⁴²

At its founding, the community was styled as an intentional or utopian community but challenged many of the historical trends common to utopian communities. It could be questioned how much the members who joined in the late 1930s saw what they were doing as something radical in opposition to social norms. Barry Shenker described the drive to form communal societies as an attempt for people who feel alienated (in a Marxist sense) in mainstream society to seek to reconcile their inner identity and personal ideology with their manner of living.⁴³ For the first iteration of the community, it does not seem to be the case that the members chose to join the community because they were experiencing alienation in the prevailing society; they joined because the community seemed to offer a better way to provide for their families. With the wave of members joining at the end of the war, Kanter’s analysis seems to be much more applicable. While Macedonia was not completely disengaged with the national economy, it allowed its members to live lives that were much more consistent with their principles than they saw as possible by remaining in mainstream society and working standard professional jobs.

Yet although this new wave of members brought new reasons for joining and approached the act of living in an intentional community from a more principled stance, they largely embraced Mitchell’s communal structure. By the efforts of Elvin Roberts, the community had been kept alive through the difficult war years, giving the new members a functional operation to step into upon their arrival. Indeed, given the pressing economic situation of the Macedonia

⁴² Macedonia Community Report, 1948, p.3, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁴³ Barry Shenker, *Intentional Communities: Ideology and Alienation in Communal Societies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

Community, there was little time for the members to sit around and debate the nuances of communal philosophy; if they wanted the community to exist at all, they had to keep their focus trained on maintaining operations and keeping up payments on loans. In the face of the pressing economic strains on the community and the challenges of integrating a wave of new members, though, hope for a promising future was building. Mitchell reflected, “we are happy to feel at Macedonia a fresh surge of energy with the war’s close. Daily community meetings have been natural and easy once more.”⁴⁴

With more members came more stability for the community. This was a result of a greater supply of labor to allocate to the community’s work as well as a greater sense of a common goal among the members. Aided by a greater sense of community, Macedonia was finally beginning to possess the democratic nature that Mitchell had planned for it but had been unable to achieve prior to the war. During the early years it was arguably Morris Mitchell’s community and the members just lived in it; Mitchell was the man with the vision and the money and, as such, very much controlled the operations of the community, lest it stray from his vision. In letters from the community members to Mitchell, it is clear that they were apprehensive to do almost anything without first getting his approval. With the new community makeup, however, Mitchell had a group of members who were almost all well-educated and who shared many of his ideals, in short, people who he would have seen as his peers, rather than people to be helped by his plans.

In time, though, this revitalization began to strain the community between a commitment to the old and desire to strive towards something new. Mitchell remained highly involved in the community and wanted to see it hold fast to his view of a “cooperative community” which kept a

⁴⁴ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Horace and Mary Jane Reed, September 21, 1945, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

degree of distance between members, sharing means of production but not individual possessions and assets. To him living near together should facilitate cooperation but not impinge on privacy and family integrity.⁴⁵ This system was built around a model of paying wages for labor, an obligation that was hard to meet when most of the money generated by the community's ventures went to paying loans and buying supplies. The simple solution to this would have been to abolish wages and implement a system of communal ownership of all possessions; this was favored by many members of the community. Mitchell resisted, though, as such a change would necessitate a shift towards a much more tightly integrated community than he wanted. This tension between visions for Macedonia came to a head in a discussion between Mitchell and Art Wiser; the two discussed back and forth for a long while, with Mitchell proposing to find a new group if the current members would not buy into his vision, but eventually Wiser won him over to agreeing to the community's wish to change.⁴⁶

Such challenges are common to utopian communities; indeed, Shenker argues that such tensions are an integral part of the existence of intentional communities. He asserts that "over-integration, over-regularization and over-control can be as damaging as their opposites, as they too do not allow for adaptation and change."⁴⁷ Mitchell's view of a cooperative community was an attempt to strike this delicate balance between over-integration and lack of communal organization, but when his view of community was no longer in line with the identities of the members, there was a need for change. When presented with the need to adapt to new views, Shenker argues that "if the community is to ensure both continuity and change then the ideology must be so structured that its basic premises remain intact, although the specific expression of

⁴⁵ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Joshua Cope, August 28, 1946, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁴⁶ Trevor Wiser, *The Last Inch: Macedonia and the Struggle for Community*. (n.p., 2009), 34.

⁴⁷ Kanter, *Intentional Communities*, 18.

them may vary quite considerably.”⁴⁸ The issue for Macedonia was that Mitchell saw this degree of individuality as an integral aspect of what the community was and should be, while the other members saw it as only a detail of community life, less important than the bigger mission of rejecting a society founded on war and competition. Despite the relatively smooth resolution of the issue, this proved to be a turning point for the community.

From this point on, the Macedonia Community’s focus shifted away from being a model community for rural economic uplift. Though almost all the aspects of the original community remained intact, the community had gradually but markedly changed. Although Mitchell acquiesced to the changes, it was not so much that he agreed with the new direction but that he was resigned to the possibility of the community as he had envisioned it continuing to be a reality at Macedonia. Gradually he drew away from the community, channeling his efforts instead into work with the Southeastern Cooperative League, a group dedicated to promoting all manners of cooperatives- from credit unions to cooperative stores- throughout the Southeast.

In 1949 Mitchell signed over the deed to the land and all accompanying loans to the community, thus formally resigning from any significant role in the community, though he maintained a part-time residence on community land and stayed in touch with the members. Though the transition seems to have been made without resentment, a reflection by Mitchell in a letter to an acquaintance outside the community hints at a sense of his feeling that he lost the community to the new members. In the letter he laments that prior to the war Macedonia “was moving forward in this general direction [toward its goals] at a highly gratifying rate until the war brought severe interruption...We weathered the war. But at the close a number of young

⁴⁸ Kanter, *Intentional Communities*, 103.

people who had been in C.P.S. or prison came and gradually took over complete charge.”⁴⁹

Mitchell, like many founders of utopian communities before him, found that once he had brought his creation into existence, he was faced with a dilemma. He could keep the community true to its founding principles only by remaining an autocratic leader, which was a failure of his plan for the community to be democratically controlled. In this face of this dilemma Mitchell took the high road and set the community free to forge its own path forward.

The years that followed proved to be a time of relative stability and vitality for the community. By 1951 the community swelled to 56 members, owned over 1,000 acres of land, managed 100 acres in pasture and crops, and had a burgeoning wood block business.⁵⁰ Finances continued to be an issue, but there was less concern with the potential of not being able to make ends meet than there had been in earlier years. For many of the members, generating wealth above what was needed to meet expenses and provide for a life of “functional simplicity” was seen as being complicit with the spirit of capitalism they were attempting to escape. The wood block business, which grew into a small business serving a national clientele, proved to be a testing ground for these principles; faced with the potential for making a healthy profit, the community eschewed selling at market competitive prices, opting instead to carefully calculate the cost of materials and labor to sell the blocks at a subsistence price. The debates over the nature of the community and the continuing financial challenges only drew the community closer together. When the sociologist Henrik Infield visited the community to conduct sociometric tests⁵¹ as part of his study of contemporary American intentional communities, he concluded that

⁴⁹ Letter from Morris Mitchell to J.C. Brown, May 16, 1948, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁵⁰ Newsletter from Macedonia Cooperative Community to friends, June 10, 1951, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁵¹ These tests involved an elaborate set of questions that evaluated how members of the community interacted with each other, how integrated or isolated they felt they were, and how much they were satisfied with their life in the community. Additionally,

“the results indicated that the group had become well-knit and that it enjoyed, socially, a condition healthier than that found in any other group of its kind.”⁵²

These years of relative stability were, however, certainly not without tensions and disagreements. Even at a time when outside pressures on the community were not overwhelming, the internal tensions between individual and community were issues that Macedonia had to wrestle with. Such issues are often pushed to the periphery during times of stress when the community is rallied together over a common goal, but when that sense of purpose dies away the issues in the details take on new significance. Kanter argues that long-lasting communities are able to persist by generating a strong degree of commitment from the members through measures of enforced conformity.⁵³ While this may have been true for many of the communities she studied, this view defines success only in terms of the persistence of the community. The individuals that make up the community, in this view, are only important insofar as they subordinate themselves fully to the goals of the community.

Shenker offers a nuanced view that intentional communities must balance a number of opposing forces to create a balance between the needs of individuals and the needs of the community. As the novelty of living at Macedonia faded into the daily realities of life there, members began to question what exactly they wanted the community to be. Some disagreements were detail oriented- how much community money should each family be allowed to spend on outside goods, for example. In the context of an intentional community, though, debates over seemingly small details are often reflections of debates on fundamental principles, such as what it means to live a simple lifestyle. One point of contention highlighted by David Newton was the

Infield's tests mapped out social networks within the community to assess how communal the community really was from a standpoint of people's reported connections to other members.

⁵² Henrik F. Infield, *The American Intentional Communities* (Glen Gardner, New Jersey: Glen Gardner Community Press, 1955), 39.

⁵³ Kanter, *Commitment and Community*.

balance between highly integrated community and room for individuality and privacy.

Reflecting on his experience with the community, he wrote:

I'm going to get up some morning and look in the mirror and find I've become somebody else, if I stay in this place much longer. I'll become so well adjusted to group living that I'll lose all my individuality and peculiarity. Now, my peculiar self is precious to me, so I think I'd better leave before it's too late.⁵⁴

Such tensions proved to be a reminder that “the old game of losing one’s self so that one can find one’s self is just as difficult as ever.”⁵⁵ Specifically Macedonia was challenged by the prospect of balancing a rhetoric of open membership which welcomed anyone, regardless of background, with the reality that a large degree of conformity is required to maintain a sense of community and common purpose.

Most of the members found ways to maintain a sense of individual identity within the highly communal life of Macedonia, but for a few it proved too radical a departure from the life they found fulfilling. Some found their knowledge and skills to be underutilized at Macedonia; others found that they did not feel sufficiently similar to other members to continue living so communally with them. The most important challenge, though, came in 1953 from a surprising angle, the question of religiosity. For some time the community had been questioning its identity and purpose. Looking back to the examples of the utopian communities of the nineteenth century, they realized that almost all those communities were centered around a common religious belief or something closely akin to a formal religious identity if not specifically religious. Turning a critical eye on themselves, they questioned whether their pacifism and sundry anti-capitalist values constituted a solid enough central core to sustain their community. This unease with a perceived lack of a core, unifying set of values was then submitted to a

⁵⁴ Newton, “The Macedonia Community,” 27.

⁵⁵ Newton, “The Macedonia Community,” 27.

crucible of identity by a visit from the Bruderhof,⁵⁶ a religious, communal society looking to establish a community in the United States.

The Bruderhof's visit brought to the fore questions that had been simmering below the surface in community discussions. Though few of the members identified with any formal religion, many had been raised in some form of Christian religion and maintained some sense of spirituality. Meetings were held in the Quaker manner, listening to and sitting with difficult questions and searching for consensus. The Bruderhof challenged the members of the Macedonia Community to think deeply about their religious beliefs and what it meant to live out those beliefs if they held them. In this process, many found that they felt a "close bond of fellowship and love" with the members of the Bruderhof.⁵⁷ This process of soul-searching was a drawn out process that began in 1953 with roughly half the members electing to join the Bruderhof in a new community in New York and the other half remaining at Macedonia, remaining committed to their view of a secular community. The two communities remained in touch and jointly managed the wood block business. Eventually, though, the strain of being two separate but linked communities wore on the members of Macedonia, and they considered once more the option of joining with the Bruderhof. In 1957 the community decided to disband:

In the end, the full members and provisional members of Macedonia met, with no one else present, and each one said what he felt he must do. To our wonder, we all felt the same thing: that a new community should be formed based on Jesus, and that the Society of Brothers should constitute that community.⁵⁸

With this second wave of departures, all members of the Macedonia Community had either joined the Bruderhof community in New York or elected to strike out on their own by joining

⁵⁶ also known by their English name, the Society of Brothers

⁵⁷ Letter from Mark Kurtz to Morris Mitchell, November 5, 1953, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁵⁸ Letter from Macedonia Cooperative Community to friends of Macedonia, September 16, 1957, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

other communities or returning to mainstream society to fight for change from within the system. The property was sold at an auction on June 27, 1958, with the money primarily going towards paying off outstanding loans.⁵⁹

Part IV: A Web of Connections

What are we to make of the Macedonia Cooperative Community, a community that sprang into existence on the heels of the Great Depression and whose twenty-year existence was largely defined by struggles to stay economically viable? If the community is studied in isolation, as an individual unit divorced from any meaningful relations to the world outside, then perhaps it is fair to look at the Macedonia Cooperative Community and see a community that started with bright prospects but never lived up to its hopes and withered to an end ten years short of its original goal as a thirty-year social experiment. Furthermore, the struggles and ultimate demise of the community might stand as evidence that the experiment was either a failed experiment or, at most, a successful experiment that illuminated the challenges to Mitchell's view of cooperatively organized communities throughout the rural South. Much scholarship on utopian communities focuses more on *what* communities are and seek to do rather than *how* they go about achieving those ends.⁶⁰ Focusing on how Macedonia went about executed its goals gives a richer understanding of what the community was. To understand the significance of the Macedonia Community, it must be seen not as an isolated outpost, standing against the forces of the world, but as a node in a wide web of communities, radical individuals,

⁵⁹ Finding Aid, created by Anne Yoder, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁶⁰ David W. Plath ed., *Aware of Utopia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 69.

and organizations seeking to change the economic and social condition of the South and, more broadly, the entire country.

Writing on the Celo Community, a community that was somewhat of a sister community to Macedonia, George Hicks argued that “to understand Celo’s endurance for several decades, one had to consider the involvement of its membership with groups and persons outside Celo.”⁶¹ Communities like Celo and Macedonia were never intended to be isolated reclusive communities; they were created with the intention of impacting broader communities, if not the entire nation. By Morris Mitchell’s own admission, “Macedonia was never intended as purely a local community enterprise, rather as a center for the radiation of the cooperative idea.”⁶² There is little hope for a small intentional community to enact social change if it has few connections to the world outside of its borders. Additionally, the people who join intentional communities generally do not purge themselves of all connections from their life prior to joining the community, rather they maintain those connections and through those connections spread the impact of the community to a wider audience. As Hicks argued, this relationship is reciprocal, as communities also draw on outside connections to strengthen the community in various ways.⁶³

Seeking to understand how intentional communities execute their mission in a way that reaches beyond the immediate scope of the community, Hicks applied the idea of social networks to intentional communities. Using this understanding, Macedonia can be understood not solely through the actions carried out in the community but through the networks it sustained, the groups and movements it was in touch with and supported, and the people who either visited Macedonia or were in contact with the community through letters, newsletters, pamphlets, and

⁶¹ George L. Hicks, *Experimental Americans: Celo and Utopian Community in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 6.

⁶² Letter from Morris Mitchell to Ruth Morton, October 2, 1946, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

⁶³ George L. Hicks “Utopian Communities and Social Networks,” in *Aware of Utopia*, David Plath, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 138.

publicity material. Over the course of its existence, the Macedonia Cooperative Community interacted with a wide array of connections to support its existence and broaden the reach of its influence.

Macedonia's connections existed in three general, and sometimes overlapping, circles of influence: Southern liberals looking for ways to uplift the South economically and gradually dismantle segregation, conscientious objectors and others involved in pacifist circles, and a small group of other intentional communities throughout the United States that began during the 1930s-1940s. Of these three broad circles of influence, the connections the Macedonia Community formed with other like-minded intentional communities provide the most concrete avenue to understanding intentional communities as nodes in a social network. With the new membership at the end of World War II, the members of the community both had more connections throughout the United States than the early members and thought of their project on more of a national scale.

In the revised articles of incorporation proposed in 1948, one of the stated purposes of the community was to provide "mutual assistance with other cooperative communities."⁶⁴ The emphasis on *cooperative* communities is clearly an element of Morris Mitchell's interest in furthering the cooperative movement in the South, but the new members were less tied to Mitchell's regional and economic focus. They looked more broadly to communities that were similar to them in form rather than in purpose. In 1952 this led to a handful of loosely connected communities coalescing into a formal organization named the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, which included: Celo, Glen Gardner, Gould Farm, Hidden Springs, Koinonia Farm, Macedonia Cooperative Community, Quest, Tuolumne Cooperative Farms, The Vale, and

⁶⁴ Proposed Articles of Incorporation, June 1948, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

Woodcrest.⁶⁵ Although the various communities that made up the Fellowship of Intentional Communities (F.I.C.) were geographically dispersed and had many different goals for their communities, all were united by a similar faith in the power of communal ventures to improve society in their respective ways and took similar approaches to creating community. The Fellowship was aptly named as its primary function was not necessarily to carry out some project greater than any of the communities were doing individually but rather to provide a network of information and support for the member communities through sharing their individual experiences and, in doing so, creating a sense of a larger community of intentional communities.⁶⁶

The organization held bi-annual meetings, often at Yellow Springs in Ohio or Pendle Hill in Pennsylvania but sometimes elsewhere including the Highlander School in Tennessee and Macedonia, and published a small newsletter that served primarily to keep the communities aware of the work and challenges that each member community was facing.⁶⁷ The meetings served as a sort of conference space where a few representatives from each community would speak on behalf of their community's views on community and strive towards creating a common definition of the nature and purpose of intentional communities. In a few cases members from one community would visit another community in the Fellowship for short or extended visits, or perhaps even relocate from one community to another. When Macedonia dissolved in 1958, not all the members elected to relocate to the Woodcrest Bruderhof community in New York. Those who were not interested in the religious focus of the Bruderhof

⁶⁵ Infield, *The American Intentional Communities*, 8.

Infield did not list The Vale in his description of the F.I.C., but F.I.C. material discusses it as a member community, and as meetings were held at Yellow Springs (the location of The Vale) this was likely a mistaken omission on Infield's part.

⁶⁶ F.I.C. Newsletter, June, 1957, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁶⁷ Orser, *Searching for a Viable Alternative*, 163-164.

drew on their F.I.C. connections to locate alternative communities; one family moved to Yellow Springs, another joined Glen Gardner after a brief stint at Woodcrest.⁶⁸ The F.I.C. was never an organization that facilitated radical action, but in providing support and connection for this group of intentional communities, it helped turn their efforts from isolated dissents against mainstream American society into a larger movement.

In light of the original mission that Morris Mitchell laid out for the Macedonia Cooperative Community, it is particularly interesting to consider Macedonia's connections with other intentional communities and similar organizations in the Southeast, some that were associated with the F.I.C. and others that were not. Two of these communities, Celo (located in Yancy County, North Carolina) and Koinonia (located in Sumter County, Georgia), exemplify the overlap between the different circles of influence that Macedonia interacted with. As members of the F.I.C., both of these communities were structured in a similar fashion as Macedonia, but as communities founded in the South during the tail end of the Great Depression, they also shared similar values in regards to using intentional communities to reshape the social and economic landscape of the South.

Celo was perhaps the community whose history, goals, and structure come closest to approximating Macedonia's. As noted earlier, Celo was founded in the same year as Macedonia by Arthur Morgan, who had been the first director of the TVA prior to starting Celo. Like Mitchell, Morgan was interested in exploring new ways of expanding upon the actions of New Deal agencies in a more organic, community-focused manner. Paralleling Macedonia, Celo began with a membership consisting primarily of people drawn from the local area, but was

⁶⁸ F.I.C. Newsletter, January, 1958, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

remade after the war with an influx of ex-C.P.S. conscientious objectors looking to channel their ideologies into a new, productive endeavour.

Although Celo held similar views to Macedonia, it had two key differences in its early years that set in on a slightly different path than its sister community. For one, the community did not establish a comprehensive cooperative community in the manner that Macedonia did; there was a cooperative store like at Macedonia, an emphasis on agriculture, and a degree of sharing, but not all members worked inside the community. Some worked outside the community and contributed a portion of their income to the community. This, combined with the fact that Arthur Morgan secured substantial financial backing from a wealthy donor and had connections to many business and industrial leaders, allowed Celo to begin from a point of financial security.⁶⁹ The flexibility provided by these two aspects of the community at times created challenges for the community in the attempt to create a tight sense of community, but ultimately, the flexibility and financial health of the community allowed it to persist through hard times and weather changing social trends.

While the Macedonia and Celo communities styled themselves as experiments in a new economic order for the betterment of the South, Koinonia Farm was founded on challenging the racial order of the South. Though Mitchell, Morgan, and many of the members of Macedonia and Celo were opposed to segregation and the social order of the Jim Crow South, they often shied away from addressing the issue of segregation head-on. For many white, Southern liberals in this era, the ever-looming “race issue” was a delicate matter. The political climate was such that many saw outright denunciation of segregation as too dramatic a step that would only stir passions and sink any hope of progress. Instead, many supported efforts to improve the lives of

⁶⁹ Hicks, *Experimental Americans*, 55.

Southern blacks and gradually subvert Jim Crow without attacking it outright.⁷⁰ Mitchell and Morgan saw cooperative communities as a potential means of helping Southern blacks. Yet while both communities agreed to the Rochdale principle of open membership and Macedonia explicitly stated in its purpose statement that “any person is eligible for membership, with no regard for race, creed, or nationality,” neither community took the steps to reach out to blacks and bring them on board as members.⁷¹ Koinonia, on the other hand, was founded, first and foremost, with the goal of creating a community of blacks and whites living and working together in the face of segregationist policies.⁷²

Like Macedonia, Koinonia Farm focused its community around a cooperative style of community based primarily on agriculture as the means of supporting the community. Because of its location in southern Georgia in the heart of the cotton belt, though, Koinonia was better able to apply the ideas of cooperative economics to the problems of tenant farmers and sharecroppers. This held much more promise of uniting blacks and whites of a similarly marginal economic status to eschew segregation and cooperate for their common benefit. The argument that many Southern liberals and labor organizers put forth was that segregation was a tool of the elite class to keep the poor from organizing for better conditions. As one politician’s appeal went, “you are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings.”⁷³ Clarence Jordan, the chief founder of Koinonia, saw the opportunity to create a community that brought together three distinct but related issues: interracialism, cooperative economics, and pacifism. All three of these he saw as growing out of his interpretation of the Christian faith and

⁷⁰ Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 62-63.

⁷¹ Proposed Articles of Incorporation, June, 1948, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁷² Tracy Elaine K’Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 5.

⁷³ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 9.

the teachings of Jesus.⁷⁴ This religious core and emphasis on taking immediate and direct action against segregation set Koinonia apart from Macedonia and Celso, but the communities all saw themselves united in a common mission.

When resistance to Koinonia's interracialism broke open into economic boycott and violence against the community, Macedonia, Celso, and the other members of the F.I.C. paid close attention and offered what help they could. Moreover, knowing that one of their fellow communities was taking meaningful action on an issue of importance to many of them helped strengthen the faith of communities that they can and were playing a role in creating change on a larger scale than that of the community. Many in these communities were not satisfied to make their own lives better by withdrawing from the problems of the world. "They tended to equate isolation with selfishness and escapism, and they regarded both attributes as immoral. Involvement with the great issues of our age, they said, was the moral duty of every human being."⁷⁵ When they could not directly engage with these issues, they could still feel connected to the fight by maintaining the connection to and support of their fellow communities that were positioned to engage with the issue.

Macedonia's involvement with social movements was not limited to the members of the F.I.C. by any means. Though the F.I.C. provided a defined and formalized relationship between Macedonia and other communities, there were numerous other groups and organizations, not necessarily communal in structure, that Macedonia communicated and collaborated with in more informal and irregular ways. Most significant among these was the Highlander School in Monteagle, Tennessee. Though the school was not a community in the sense that Macedonia and the F.I.C. communities were, it was much more than a place of education. The founder,

⁷⁴ K'Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South*, 6.

⁷⁵ Hicks, *Experimental Americans*, 150.

Myles Horton, modeled Highlander on general principles of progressive education influenced by John Dewey and more specifically on the system of folk schools in Denmark, to be a school in service of the needs of its community. More than just serving the immediate community, however, Horton also envisioned Highlander School to be “a stopping place for traveling liberals and a meeting place for southern radicals,” a sentiment similar to Morris Mitchell’s vision of making Macedonia into “a center for the radiation of the cooperative idea.”⁷⁶ In time this vision reached fruition more so at the Highlander School than it did at Macedonia. Highlander’s workshops for labor organizing and later for desegregation drew in a range of activists from throughout the South and created networks between movements.

Celo, Koinonia, and Highlander were the closest parallels in close geographic proximity to Macedonia and, as such, provided key nodes which social networks could coalesce around. Though these three were significant points of connection in Macedonia’s network of radicals and social visionaries, many minor and far-flung connections filled in the network and helped strengthen existing connections. Many of these organizations were doing significant work in their own right but interacted and overlapped only sparingly with Macedonia either because of differences in goals or geographic separation. One such example is the Delta Cooperative Farm, formed in 1936 by the Southern Tenant Farmers Union to provide an interracial, cooperative farm as an alternative to tenant farming in Arkansas and Mississippi.⁷⁷ Though the work and vision of the Delta Cooperative Farm was quite similar to the Macedonia Cooperative Community, there is little evidence that the Macedonia Community had any meaningful direct connection with the Delta Cooperative Farm. However, the two communities had many mutual

⁷⁶ Aimee Isgrig Horton, *The Highlander Folk School: A History of Its Major Programs, 1932-1961* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 31.

Letter from Morris Mitchell to Ruth Morton, October 2, 1946, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

⁷⁷ Miller, *The Quest for Utopia in Twentieth-Century America*, 137-138.

connections with individuals and through organizations, such as Highlander, that both communities worked with. In this way Macedonia was able to tie itself to broader movements in the South, leveraging its small contribution to greater effect. Perhaps its most powerful contribution to social change in the South was its role in forwarding the cooperative movement in the region through its association with the Southeastern Cooperative League.

Part V: The Cooperative Movement in the South

The history of the Macedonia Cooperative Community is one of many streams of social movements meeting up and flowing as one. Utopian community met rural relief and economic reform; pacifism and anti-segregation mixed in; religious traditions ranging from Quaker organizations to radical Southern, Protestant preachers lent influence. Of the various influences that converged to bring the Macedonia Community into existence and shape its form over the years of its existence, the cooperative movement was perhaps the most significant. Though Morris Mitchell's experiences prior to founding Macedonia were largely tied to progressive education, during the twenty-year period of Macedonia's existence cooperative economics and the establishment of the cooperative movement in the South seems to have taken over as the chief focus of his endeavors. His vision of applying the lessons of the cooperative movement to the social and economic problems of the South was not limited to the establishment of Macedonia. During his time working with Macedonia, Mitchell also worked with the

Southeastern Cooperative League to promote and support cooperative endeavors of various types throughout the South.

The language of the community's articles of incorporation make it clear that Mitchell had become well-versed in the literature of cooperative economics, specifically the tradition that grew out of the Rochdale cooperative store established in England in 1844. Mitchell and other proponents of cooperative economics in the United States looked to Rochdale as an icon of the cooperative movement, part practical example to be replicated, part origin mythology to be revered. As the idea of cooperatives spread to northern Europe, Canada, and the United States, Rochdale took on a mythic quality whose story and principles were adapted to fit a range of narratives.⁷⁸ By the early 1860s cooperatives were beginning to take hold in the United States. They gained traction largely with agricultural producers cooperatives which allowed small farmers to share resources and organize to give themselves greater control over the marketing of their products.⁷⁹ As the idea of cooperatives spread, it began to be incorporated into other reform movements; in the Midwest the Grange movement supported the creation of thousands of farmers cooperatives, both for buying and selling.⁸⁰

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw cooperatives taking root in the United States but only certain forms and not evenly throughout the country. The original Rochdale cooperative was a cooperative store, focused on serving the consumers, whereas the cooperatives that were becoming popular among farmers were primarily producers cooperatives, which protected the interests of farmers against merchants, railroads, banks, and monopolies.⁸¹ For the

⁷⁸ Brett Fairbairn, *The Meaning of Rochdale: The Rochdale Pioneers and the Co-operative Principles* (Saskatoon, Canada: Center for the Study of Cooperatives, 1994), 18.

⁷⁹ Joseph G. Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise 1620-1920* (Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc., 1969), 69-73.

⁸⁰ Fairbairn, *The Meaning of Rochdale*, 18.

⁸¹ Fairbairn, *The Meaning of Rochdale*, 40.

farmers who founded these marketing and buying organizations, cooperatives were a means to an end, one of a range of avenues to fight the growing industrialization and corporatization that was threatening their livelihood. These cooperatives used many of the Rochdale principles, but their focus was not so much on creating a movement and changing social relations; it was a much narrower interpretation of the utility of cooperatives.⁸² Nonetheless, these farm cooperatives gave the cooperative movement a foothold in the United States from which it could grow in new directions in coming years.

As the twentieth century began, the cooperative movement in the United States stood at a promising point but was still searching for direction. It had succeeded in becoming widely accepted as a viable tool for agriculture, but it had not yet been able to expand into a more widely accepted movement. Consumers cooperatives were uncommon and largely failed to become strong businesses where they did exist.⁸³ Yet energy and experience were steadily gathering; in 1916 The Cooperative League of the United States of America came into existence to support greater regional and national coordination of cooperatives and push for a renewed emphasis on “true Rochdale cooperation.”⁸⁴ By 1920 there was more development in the realm of cooperative stores and regional cooperative wholesales, but the development still drew largely on agricultural organizations and remained geographically uneven.⁸⁵ The Midwest continued to be a hotbed of cooperative activity while other regions, namely the South, saw only sparse forays

⁸² The Rochdale cooperative was influenced by the thinking of Fabian Socialists who argued that the consumer must be front and center of the cooperative movement as “consumption was a universal interest binding together all people. The advance of consumer co-operation could ultimately, thought the Fabians, lead to cooperatives encompassing and reorganizing all of society. Co-operation of workers or producers, on the other hand, was limited to separate, narrow functional groups within each sector; and the successful co-operation of any of these particular groups could lead to the exploitation of the wider consuming public.” Thus for many who looked to cooperatives to change society, the producers cooperatives that became popular among farmers in the United States in the late nineteenth century were largely peripheral to the cooperative movement as they envisioned it.

Fairbairn, *The Meaning of Rochdale*, 14.

⁸³ Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 417.

⁸⁴ Fairbairn, *The Meaning of Rochdale*, 19.

⁸⁵ Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 416.

into cooperatives. The agricultural structure of the South was markedly different from other regions of the United States, and it did not lend itself so readily to adopting cooperatives even though Southern farmers had perhaps the most to gain from the promises of cooperatives. In the coming decade, however, cooperatives everywhere would be challenged by the financial challenges brought by the Great Depression.

At the same time, the Great Depression also ushered in a new era in the cooperative movement. It provided proponents of cooperative economics a valuable opportunity to showcase the shortcomings of capitalism and propose a new alternative. Not only did the hard times make people more willing to experiment but the New Deal relief programs' emphasis on cooperation brought the ideas of the cooperative movement to a wider audience. For President Roosevelt and many of the people helped by these programs, cooperation was an innovative approach to dealing with the economic crisis, but for a few radical Southerners, cooperation was more than an economic salve for the issue of the Depression. In the eyes of these reformists, the Great Depression was only acute suffering heaped on top of chronic suffering that the South had been experiencing for decades, and thus, what the South needed was not simple economic relief but a substantive change in Southern society.

The desire to bring the cooperative movement to the South came from a number of directions, and it was this diversity of interests within the movement that made it so interesting. In many ways the cooperative movement in the South served as a uniting force, bringing many brands of reformers under one common goal. Reformers of this era argued that the problems of the South-- segregation, economic underdevelopment, lack of industrialization, and lack of modern standards of living-- were all a result of the legacy of slavery and plantation agriculture. They argued that, "slavery spawned tenancy, soil erosion, poverty, ill housing, ill health,

ignorance, race prejudice, crime, demagoguery, and paternalism and exploitation in business dealings.”⁸⁶ The legacy of slavery had many implications, but one of the most significant was that it established a social order of racial segregation that persisted long after the legal end of slavery. Whereas prior to emancipation menial white laborers could assuage themselves as being “not slaves,” following emancipation poor whites increasingly had to rely on creating an identity of being “not black” to distinguish themselves from poor black laborers whose social position was disturbingly similar to their own.⁸⁷ Labor organizers and proponents of the cooperative movement, however, argued that this manner of thinking was being used by the elite class of the South-- the plantation and factory owners-- to keep poor whites and poor blacks alike marginalized, propping up Southern agriculture and industry that relied on cheap labor, rather than modern technology, to be economically competitive. The cooperative movement, they argued, would bring people together and, in doing so, improve the economic standing of both. Rather than fighting the symptoms, the cooperative movement was believed to hold the potential to treat the root causes of the South’s issues.

Having seen the potential for cooperatives to succeed not only on an individual scale but also on a regional scale in the Midwest and on a national scale in Denmark, Southern reformers looked to bring the cooperative movement to the South. Though cooperatives had largely failed to take hold in the South, some scattered stores and credit unions and newly founded communities such as Macedonia, Celo, and Koinonia held hope for greater progress in the region. Several conferences had been convened in the late 1930s to discuss establishing cooperatives of various kinds in the South; through these meetings many began to realize that

⁸⁶ “Proposal for the Development of Consumer Cooperatives in the Southeast,” Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

⁸⁷ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. (New York: Verso, 2007 [orig. 1991]), 170.

what the South needed was a region-wide organization to systematically promote new cooperatives and support existing ones. To meet this need, Lee Brooks, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, spearheaded the formation of the Southeastern Cooperative Education Association (SCEA)⁸⁸ in 1940 with the purpose of providing an organization to “educate people to help themselves through economic cooperation” and to “act as a clearing house for information on existing organizations.”⁸⁹ In 1941 the organization renamed itself the Southeastern Cooperative League (SCL), a change that reflected the organization’s shift towards being a more dynamic network of cooperatives as well as a formal association with the Cooperative League of the United States. The leaders of the SCL, however, were cautious about the degree to which they associated with national level organizations; they were very intentional about making the SCL a Southern movement for the improvement of the South, not a subsidized project of Northern reformers and philanthropists.

Many of the thinkers involved with the SCL used the metaphor of colonialism to understand the relation of the South to the nation. In addition to the exploitation of its own people in the form of slavery and later sharecropping and tenant farming, they argued that the South was the victim of exploitation at the hands of Northern capital that owned “so much of its land, its minerals, [and] its factories.”⁹⁰ Even programs that aimed to help the South often perpetuated the dependency of the South on the capital of the rest of the country.

After years of experimentation, it finally seems clear that the problems of the South, which President Roosevelt has called “the Nation’s No. 1 economic problem,” cannot be solved by any plan which does not provide for full participation by the Southern people themselves. The recent trend toward industrialization of the region, which seemed to

⁸⁸ “Southeast” was defined broadly, including 11 states in the League: Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North and South Carolina, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, Louisiana, and Arkansas.

⁸⁹ SCEA bylaws, adopted May 11, 1940, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

⁹⁰ “Proposal for the Development of Consumer Cooperatives in the Southeast,” Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

some to offer a solution, has left the heart of the problem untouched and may even in the long run tend to increase the very dependency from which the South is seeking freedom⁹¹

Cooperation, they theorized, would end this cycle of exploitation by keeping capital in the region, but it was important that the cooperative movement in the South be driven by the people and resources of the South so as to not perpetuate the dependency of the South on the rest of the nation. In the actual operation of the SCL, though, this position was softened. While the League made many decisions that emphasized the organic Southern nature of the organization, it also worked with non-Southern organizations and even depended on outside financial backing from the Rosenwald Fund to sustain some of its operations.⁹² It sought to balance a sense of Southern authenticity with a need and desire to connect its work to larger movements.

It was this very concern for Southern authenticity that brought Morris Mitchell on board with the SCL. Though most of the people involved in forming the SCL were living in the South, not all of them had been born there. It was imperative to those forming the SCL that some of the leadership of the League should include people born and raised in the region with a Southern accent to lend authenticity to their claims of being a Southern organization. In consideration of a potential executive secretary to carry out the grassroots level work of promoting and organizing cooperatives, the leaders of the SCL were attentive to the fact that whoever filled this position needed to not only be well versed in the literature of cooperatives but also have a sense of the “rural provincialism” of the South and an ability to deal with the “common man” that the movement wanted to reach.⁹³ Mitchell was tagged as a man who could successfully straddle the gritty agricultural world and the academic world that was the domain of many of the leaders of

⁹¹ “Cooperative Education in the South: Responsibilities and Opportunities of the Southeastern Cooperative League,” 1941, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

⁹² “Proposal for the Development of Consumer Cooperatives in the Southeast,” Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

⁹³ Letter from Ruth Morton to Ed Yeomans, November 28, 1940, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

the SCL. Mitchell's association with the SCL naturally brought the Macedonia Cooperative Community into the fold of the SCL, though it seems that he maintained a degree of distance between his association with Macedonia and his work with the SCL.

The SCL linked Macedonia to a movement much broader and more diverse than its direct ties to other communities and like-minded organizations. The relationship was reciprocal; Macedonia provided the SCL with an outstanding example of cooperative principles being implemented to a degree seen almost nowhere else in the South. In this way Macedonia was a valuable recruitment tool for the league; it was living evidence that the progress that the movement claimed could happen *was* happening. Macedonia's efforts took on greater significance when tied into the cooperative movement. It was held up as an exemplar of the movement, and its early members were seen as success stories. One promoter of the cooperative movement drew on the example of one of Macedonia's early families to illustrate the potential of the cooperative movement in the South:

They [the Worley Family] are symbols to me of the new South. I think I know them because of this movement. Once they were sick as the whole South is sick ... I have noticed in this organization [Macedonia], as in no other, that here is the spark for the thing for which we are all willing to live and for which the thousands of men now fighting are really dying. ... We are interested in cooperatives, in bringing a new order.⁹⁴

In this way Macedonia was used as a metaphor for the cooperative movement as a whole; the grand views of the movement could be distilled in the example provided by the Macedonia Community.

Though the SCL pointed to Macedonia as an exemplar of what the cooperative movement could achieve, the community represented the idealistic end of the cooperative spectrum. Much of the SCL's work focused more practically around integrating elements of

⁹⁴ Dr. Max Dond's contribution to a panel discussion on cooperatives led by Mr. Murray Lincoln, Macedonia Cooperative Community Records, 1937-1958, DG 071, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

cooperative economics into the fabric of society without calling for an upheaval of the system. Although the movement sought to bring about “a new order,” the SCL couched its rhetoric and actions in terms that were more palatable to a wide Southern audience. Rather than presenting the movement as a challenge to society outright, the SCL framed cooperatives as an evolution of American society that would lead the South and the country towards a modern and advanced society. The SCL often found itself caught between the desire to hold true to the ideals of its leaders and the practical need to work within the existing structures of society.

Unsurprisingly, this tension often came to a head over the issue of segregation and Jim Crow laws. The leaders of the SCL fit into a larger network of Southern liberals who denounced the state of racial relations in the South but were cautious to not directly challenge Jim Crow laws in public.⁹⁵ Though some members of the SCL, such as the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, were challenging segregation outright, the organizational level stance was more tempered. Leaders argued that the cooperative movement in the South should avoid addressing the “race issue” directly.⁹⁶ They feared that the movement would become identified narrowly with one group if it focused too much on appealing to the needs of that group. As such, it was important to the SCL that “the movement in the region [did] not become identified either as a Negro group or a white group, but a movement that attracts all people.”⁹⁷ Seeing cooperatives as the salvation of the South, the SCL sought to introduce cooperatives in a careful manner so as to ensure that it did not become a niche movement. Careful integration of cooperative institutions and values into the fabric of Southern society took precedence over bringing about immediate upheaval and change.

⁹⁵ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*.

⁹⁶ Letter from Morris Mitchell to Lee Brooks, April 24, 1946, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

⁹⁷ Unsigned letter to Lee Brooks, November 27, 1946, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

Conscious that cooperative economics presented a challenge to capitalism, the SCL emphasized the democratic, American, and Christian nature of the movement as a balance to the radicalism of their message. Furthermore, the leaders of the SCL were clear to distance the cooperative movement from communism and fascism, emphasizing that what they were proposing was voluntary cooperation in contrast to “dictated cooperation” of totalitarian states.⁹⁸ The leaders of the SCL maneuvered a careful rhetorical position, holding up cooperatives in European countries as evidence of the viability of cooperative while asserting that the cooperative movement in the South was a distinctly American endeavour. To distinguish itself from government orchestrated economic cooperation, the SCL characterized itself as a movement for the common man, a movement of self-education for self help- picking yourself up by your bootstraps American idealism.

Macedonia’s early years, before the influx of conscientious objectors at the end of the war, stood as a testament to this vision of uplifting the common Southerner. Though it had its deal of struggles, the Macedonia Cooperative Community had taken a group of rural farmers and laborers, successfully introduced them to the principles of the cooperative movement, and, for a few years, provided them with a higher quality of life than was otherwise available to them. The cooperative community model, though, was only one form of cooperative enterprise supported by the SCL, and it was a form that became increasingly peripheral to the SCL’s vision for a modern American society based around cooperation.

During the Depression era, the possibility of radically reshaping society seemed promising. In search of some change for the better, people were questioning institutions and opening their minds to alternatives, and the New Deal provided government-sponsored

⁹⁸ Essay by Lee Brooks about the SCEA, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

experiments in more cooperative forms of living and organizing society. As the war took over the American consciousness, many of the New Deal programs were abandoned in favor of mobilizing the country for war, and defending the country took precedence over reforming it. In the context of the war, alternative forms of government and social organization were burdened with greater meaning. Opinions about fascism and communism became mixed up with opinions about countries that ascribed to those forms of government. Moreover, the war stirred patriotic feelings and called for a defense of American values, making it harder for the SCL to propose changes that might be deemed un-American. If the SCL hoped to establish a broad membership, it not only had to tread carefully in its challenges to segregation but also had to be executed “within the framework of democracy and..traditional freedoms.”⁹⁹ Radical departure from standard society, such as agriculturally-based cooperative communities, held little promise of being widely embraced, and, as such, could not be the base of the cooperative movement.

Instead, the SCL focused more on replacing capitalistic institutions with cooperative versions of existing institutions. Cooperative stores, buying clubs, and credit unions were the most common types of cooperatives promoted by the League as they could be plugged into communities as an alternative to standard stores and banks. These institutions were particularly appealing as they required people to change very little about their lifestyle but could still be the bedrock of substantial change. The Light of Tyrrell credit union established in a rural, black community in Tyrrell County, North Carolina exemplified the potential for this approach to change within the existing structures of society. Seeking to address black farmers’ difficulty purchasing their own land, a few leaders in the community looked to cooperative principles to empower the black community. Realizing that the difficulty of obtaining land was largely an

⁹⁹ “To All Cooperatives Everywhere,” Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

issue of the difficulty of obtaining credit “the founders of the Light of Tyrrell [provided] an alternative to usurious lending rates,[helped] black farmers save their land and their homes, and [offered] loans to fill the swamps and build livable houses with electricity.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, as emphasized by a magazine article about the Light of Tyrrell, the credit union provided an entrypoint into other forms of cooperations, such as cooperative farming and a cooperative store.¹⁰¹ If Macedonia was an example of the idealistic end of the cooperative movement, the Light of Tyrrell exemplified the pragmatic approach embraced by the SCL: self-help through cooperative organizing, working within existing social forms, keeping capital local, and improving the lives of poor blacks without explicitly challenging Jim Crow laws.

Yet despite the promise of Macedonia, the Light of Tyrrell credit union, and many other cooperative experiments scattered throughout the South, the SCL struggled to create the widespread movement that it hoped would help give rise to a new South. During a stretch of the war years, a lack of funds and disruption of leadership forced the League to suspend most of its work. For many of the years, the efforts of Morris Mitchell kept the SCL alive and Macedonia provided a location for the headquarters of the League.¹⁰² Following the war, Mitchell spurred the revival of the SCL, and for several more years it provided an organizing force for cooperatives in the South. By the early 1950s though, the Southeastern Cooperative League had slowly dissolved. Although many of the member cooperatives continued to exist and in a few places thrive, the energy for a region-wide movement for economic reform through cooperatives had dissipated. Post-war prosperity dampened the desire for economic reform, and wartime industrialization drew many rural farmers away from working the land to working in factories.

¹⁰⁰ Alison Collis Greene, “Radical Christianity and Cooperative Economics.” in *The Pew and the Picket Line*. eds. Christopher D. Cantwell, Heath W. Carter, and Janine Giordano Drake (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 167.

¹⁰¹ “A Light is Kindled,” by Roy F. Bergengren, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

¹⁰² Finding Aid, Southeastern Cooperative League Records, 1939-1952, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

Energy for reform in the South was also shifting towards more direct attacks on segregation. “During the depression it had been possible to lose perspective on Jim Crow amid the poverty of the South. The boom generated by the war, however, made it clear that rising prosperity alone would not alleviate racial discrimination.”¹⁰³ Some organizations within the web of the cooperative movement, such as Koinonia and the Highlander School, were able to find a place in the burgeoning Civil Rights movement, but the economic focus and gradualism of the SCL was quickly losing its appeal. These new challenges proved to be too much for the League, but while its dissolution represented the failure of the cooperative movement to realize its hopes for the South, its decade of existence had many impacts that outlived the formal existence of the SCL.

The purpose of the SCL, after all, was largely concerned with establishing networks of communication and support across various groups throughout the South, and these connections were not severed by the demise of the League. The diverse groups brought together by the cooperative movement proved to be a useful networks of radicals that could be drawn upon during the Civil Rights movement. Additionally, the work the League did promoting cooperatives and educating leaders about cooperative principles helped to integrate cooperative institutions and values into Southern society, and they likewise did not disappear with the end of the SCL. Many cooperative stores and credit unions continued to provide Southerners with alternative economic institutions that gave them greater independence and control of their finances. The SCL fell short of its grand goal of bringing about a new and vibrant Southern economy, but its efforts did have lasting impacts that, in time, helped nudge the South further down the road toward the vision of Brooks, Mitchell, and other leaders of the SCL.

¹⁰³ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 120.

Section VI: Conclusion

The Macedonia Cooperative Community persisted for a few years after the end of the Southeastern Cooperative League. Though each relied on the other in various ways, Macedonia's existence had never been closely tied to the existence of the SCL; the community was an independent operation based on self-sufficiency. The League provided the Macedonia Community with a broad network of resources and connections but had little impact on the day-to-day challenges of maintaining the vitality of the community. What the SCL did give Macedonia was a greater sense of purpose. By itself, the Macedonia Community was a single outpost of the cooperative movement helping a few rural Southerners to live slightly more prosperous and comfortable lives. It was a voice of resistance against the competitive world of capitalism and later against the destruction of war as well, but alone, its protest would have reached only a limited audience.

The networks that the community generated independent of the SCL certainly helped to connect Macedonia to larger social movements, but these often did not create a strong sense of purpose. The Fellowship of Intentional Communities, for example, gave Macedonia a sense that it was not alone and provided a forum for interrogating and affirming communal principles, but the diversity of goals within the group deterred any real sense of purpose for the Fellowship. Mostly these connections provided channels to attract people who were interested in joining the community or staying for extended visits. The Southeastern Cooperative League, on the other hand, tied Macedonia to a legitimate social movement for the improvement of the South. In the early years, dreams of a subtle grassroots revolution for the common man inspired leaders of the SCL to promote the virtues of the cooperative movement. In this context, Macedonia's existence

was given greater meaning; it was at the front of a wave that would slowly sweep the South as cooperatives came into existence and connected with each other.

With the arrival of the conscientious objectors at the end of the war, the Macedonia Community was distanced from this vision. Although the community maintained its cooperative structure, the cooperative movement was no longer at the heart of the community's identity. This distancing from the cooperative movement was furthered when Morris Mitchell formally turned over his ownership of the property to the community. Through all this time though, Macedonia's work and existence was given meaning through its connection with the SCL and the cooperative movement in the South. When the League dissolved in the early 1950s, the members of Macedonia were forced to think more carefully about the purpose of their experiment in community.

Many of the members saw communal life as a necessary protest against a society centered on individualism and competition which bred conflict and wars. But at the same time, the members did not want to be self-serving escapists, simply running away from a society they disagreed with. They wanted to be a force for changing the qualities of society that they deemed to be alienating and destructive. To do so, the community could not act in isolation; it needed to be part of larger social movements. The gradual fading of the cooperative movement pushed the community to seek a new sense of purpose.

Pacifism was a common value but one that was hard to enact through community and harder to rally around after the war had ended. The Civil Rights movement began to sweep up other similar communities and organizations in the South, but Macedonia was largely isolated from being able to take action as its surrounding population was overwhelmingly white. Though plans had been discussed for adding an educational center or making Macedonia a regional

gathering center for radicals, similar to the Highlander School, these plans never materialized. Not being able to shape their identity around a common purpose of greater scope than the community itself, the members found themselves drawn back to religion as a source of identity and meaning. When the Bruderhof arrived and swayed members to join their community, this should not be seen as a sudden break in Macedonia's history but rather as the culmination of a trend that had begun years earlier.

Just as the Southeastern Cooperative League had a lasting impact despite falling short of its goals, so too did Macedonia's existence hold significance despite its premature ending. In the small world of intentional communities during the 1940s and 1950s, Macedonia was seen as an exemplar. When it folded in 1958, there was a sense among many members of the Fellowship of Intentional Communities that the network of intentional communities had lost a valuable member. As a piece of the cooperative movement in the South, Macedonia was both a testament to the potential of cooperation and a pillar on which the SCL could rely on throughout its existence. Moreover, in continuing to view the Macedonia Community through the perspective of social networks and movements, Macedonia's existence helped support the existence of other communities and organizations that were working in their own ways to reform Southern and American society.

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