

1) Purpose & Context

- The recording is part of a **historical archive project** documenting student life at Cornell (late 1960s).
 - Focus: recollections of the “**Shire Cooperative**”, a student-run, co-ed living community.
 - Participants are former residents (mostly Cornell Class of ~1969–1971) sharing memories and personal histories.
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2) The Shire Cooperative (Overview)

- Located at **113 Oak Avenue**, near a suspension bridge to campus.
 - Operated for roughly **5–6 years** in the late 1960s–early 1970s.
 - Housed about **~20 residents**, mixed gender.
 - Eventually dissolved after the **owner (Mark Haig) sold the building**.
 - Later reverted to a standard rental house (no longer a co-op).
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3) Founding & Mission

- Created by **Protestant campus chaplains** (Methodist, Congregationalist, Baptist, etc.).
 - Original goal: an “**intentional Christian community**.”
 - Early reality:
 - Couldn’t sustain a fully religious community.
 - Became more **inclusive and secular**, including Jewish members.
 - Evolved into a broader **intentional communal living experiment**, rather than strictly religious.
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4) Historical Significance

- Likely the **first officially approved co-ed housing at Cornell**.
 - Approval may have been possible because it was **chaplain-sponsored**.
 - Reflects broader **1960s cultural shifts**:
 - Experimentation with communal living
 - Blending of social, ideological, and personal boundaries
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5) Daily Life in the Shire

Structure & Routines

- Residents:
 - Lived collectively in a shared house
 - Maintained a **communal lifestyle**
- Practices included:
 - **Group dinners**
 - Shared responsibilities (implied co-op structure)
 - Collaborative decision-making

Environment

- Informal, flexible, and experimental
 - Mix of personalities and backgrounds
 - Strong emphasis on **community over rules**
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6) Social Dynamics & Relationships

- Co-ed living created **new social dynamics** for the time.
 - Romantic relationships:
 - Not formally regulated
 - Left to individuals to “figure out”
 - Notable:
 - One couple (Leon and Rosemary) met there and later **married**.
 - Community was:
 - Socially close-knit
 - Based on mutual respect and shared experience
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7) How People Joined

- Entry into the Shire was **informal and network-driven**:
 - Friends inviting friends
 - Word-of-mouth connections
 - School and work relationships
 - Many residents transferred in or discovered it through **personal connections**, not formal recruitment.
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8) Personal Impact on Participants

- Residents describe the time as:
 - **Exciting and formative**
 - A contrast to more traditional dorm life
 - Influenced:
 - Social development
 - Lifelong relationships
 - Personal identity during a transformative era
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9) Community Culture & Values

- Shifted from religious to **values-driven community living**:
 - Cooperation
 - Inclusivity
 - Shared responsibility
 - Strong sense of:
 - **Intentionality** (even after religious focus faded)
 - Experimentation with lifestyle and norms
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10) Long-Term Connections & Reunions

- The group maintained **decades-long relationships**.
 - Reunions:
 - Started in **1981 (10-year reunion)** at a member's family farm
 - Continued **every 5 years**, later every **3 years**
 - Recent milestone:
 - Celebrated **50+ years** of connection (as of 2024)
 - Indicates unusually strong **lasting social bonds**
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11) Memory & Physical Legacy

- Participants revisited the house decades later:
 - Found remnants like:
 - Old furniture (e.g., yellow couch)
 - Handmade curtains still in place
 - Highlights:
 - Tangible continuity of their experience
 - Emotional attachment to the space
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12) Notable Individuals & Roles

- Various participants introduce themselves, sharing:
 - Where they live now
 - Career paths (e.g., social work)
 - How they joined the Shire
 - Some members played key roles in:
 - Organizing reunions
 - Maintaining group continuity
 - One member (Lester) is remembered as especially **influential and respected**, recently deceased.
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13) Overall Themes

- **Experimentation:** Early co-ed, communal living model
 - **Adaptation:** Shift from religious to broader intentional community
 - **Connection:** Deep, long-lasting relationships
 - **Cultural moment:** Reflects late-1960s social change
 - **Legacy:** Strong alumni network sustained over 50+ years
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Bottom Line

The Shire Cooperative was a pioneering, co-ed communal living experiment at Cornell that began as a religious initiative but evolved into a broader intentional community. It played a significant role in participants' lives, fostering strong interpersonal bonds that have lasted decades, with regular reunions and shared identity continuing into the present.
