

Communes from Chapel Hill to Hillsborough

A '60s lifestyle keeps a low profile in the '70s

By LAURIE BAKER
Staff Writer

People have stopped talking about communes, but they are still around. In fact, communes are emerging throughout Orange County.

Aloe, Chantal De Sales, The Way—these communes extend from Chapel Hill to Hillsborough.

Nevertheless, many Orange County residents do not know of them.

Many communes, cautious about their image, have kept silent. They want to avoid the furor communes caused in the 1960s.

"The word 'commune' has a bad connotation," a member of Aloe, a commune near Hillsborough, said. "Most people conjure up a bunch of naked kids running around a shack in the backhills."

Most communes call themselves communities to discourage a bad image. "I can't see our writing home 'Dear Mom. I'm living in a commune,'" said Rick Harwood, a member of the Christian community De Sales. "It probably wouldn't go over to well."

Communes can be strictly or loosely defined. In the broadest sense, a commune is a group of people who live together and share common interests. If this group seeks radical change and owns property collectively, then a commune is defined strictly.

IN EITHER case, members share long-term goals—religious, political, socioeconomic or professional—which distinguish communes from groups living together for convenience.

Aloe Community is one of the more structured communes in Orange County.

Two years ago several Hillsborough residents visited Twin Oaks, the commune in Virginia. It inspired them to form a commune in North Carolina.

"The long-range goal was to create a community that would encourage positive interaction among people," Layton, a member of Aloe, said. "Instead of using negative criticism and punishment, we should talk openly about our problems and dislikes and try to find a solution."

The original members converted an

everyone. Jeans are folded on shelves and arranged according to size. There are also racks for dresses and shirts, in many colors, patterns and styles. Even jewelry is provided for members.

"We grab whatever clothes we need for the day," Layton said.

The children's house is called Space. Each night a different adult sleeps with them. Mattresses are downstairs, a playroom upstairs.

The three children at Aloe are the responsibility of all the members, not

member said. "We, like Skinner, believe that most of our actions are determined by our environment. So we try to control it."

CENTRAL to Aloe is the labor-credit system of sharing job responsibilities. The community decides each week how much work and what jobs need to be done. People then sign up for the jobs they want.

The various jobs are given labor credits depending on the job's desirability. If many people sign up for milking the cows, then the labor-credit value of the job increases.

"Nobody is forced to do anything," Layton said. "If someone does nothing, then we talk to him. But we don't talk about him behind his back."

In fact, gossip is forbidden by Aloe's code of behavior. It discourages negative discussion of members when they are not present.

The code also discourages seeking prestige. Despite a member's position in society, he is supposed to be treated as equally as any other member. Everyone is called by his first name and adopts the last name of Aloe.

One section of Aloe's constitution is up for revision. It states that "we insist on open relationships whose members do not form exclusive pair bonds with other members." Many members are married and do not adhere to the rule. FABISHAK said other rules are not

a typical house in Chapel Hill. "What makes De Sales different is a religious bond that unites us who live here," Karl said.

Most residents are Catholic and all are male. Five members are seniors at UNC, and one is a graduate student. Unless new members are recruited, De Sales may fall apart next year.

THE HOUSE is located near the Newman Catholic Student Center. Members can take part in the center's activities and seek guidance from its chaplains. In fact, De Sales is named after the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, the order to which the center's chaplains belong.

In 1975 De Sales was organized as a house for men preparing for the priesthood. Its members have abolished that prerequisite. "Now we let in any males with religious intentions," Karl said. Prayers are recited every evening and Mass is held occasionally.

Each member pays a monthly salary that goes toward utilities, rent and food. Everyone has a particular duty—whether grocery shopping, cooking supper or cleaning the bathroom.

"If we get tired of a job, we'll switch with someone else," Karl said. "It's very informal here."

The counterpart of De Sales is Chantal for women. When St. Francis de Sales formed a Catholic congregation for women in the 1600s,

*I'm a life-long member of the Ku Klux Klan
Only for parties and fun.*

"The rules and organization of both the men's and women's communities are the same," said chaplain Tom Palko, who helped organize both communes.

"We segregated them because that's what the students wanted themselves," he said. "They wanted an exclusive situation without the complications of coed living."

He said that members are discussing the possibility of opening membership to the opposite sex. But the rules probably won't change, he said, since cohabitation would break the housing leases.

The Way, another religious community, is more structured than De Sales or Chantal.

The members state their goals as "spiritual growth and development cemented by the spirit of God through committing our services to God."

THREE MALES, one married couple, one female and a baby live communally in a home in Chapel Hill. A typical day at The Way begins with a prayer meeting at 6:30 a.m. followed by breakfast. As in most other communities each member has a household duty to carry out. After supper there is another prayer meeting with an hour of singing, praying and teaching from the Bible.

The birth of communes has not stirred much controversy in Orange County. A spokesperson from the Orange County sheriff's office said that communes in the county have caused no trouble: "To tell you the truth, I didn't even know they existed. They've kept silent. We've had no reason to prosecute them."

followed: "When I came to Aloe, I had hoped it would be more like Walden II with a nonpunishing environment. Aloe may not punish people physically, but punishment tends to come in mental and verbal barrages. There's just not enough cooperation."

The most recent dispute at Aloe revolves around a pregnant member. Members say they are not prepared financially for a baby and a nursery. "Births should be a community decision," a member said.

Don Karl, a member of De Sales, said communication is also a problem at his community: "Members have a tendency to go to their rooms and close the door if there's a problem. We need to discuss things more openly."

De Sales is a two-story white frame house on Cameron Avenue. It looks like

Jane de Chantal helped him. Chantal community is one year old. Seven women, most of them UNC undergraduates, rent a house on McCauley Street. The living room is carpeted in gold and adorned with modern furniture. A crucifix is on one wall, landscape paintings on another. In a corner, shelves are lined with books on Christianity.

"MOST PEOPLE think that Chantal is a pre-convent and that we want to be nuns," one member said. "That's not true."

Chantal women responded to these claims by composing a song to the tune of Yankee Doodle Dandy: "I don't want to join a convent. I don't want to be a nun."

planetary. The students' quiet whispers turned to a controlled roar of disbelief. Oohs and ahhs filled the room as the moon's image appeared overhead.

Manning explained, with the help of images flashed on the ceiling, how the different phases of the moon occur. The students watched attentively, but their interest began to wane as Manning's narration became slightly complicated. He played his ace in the hole.

"How would you like to take a trip to the moon?" he asked. The students responded predictably.

Clearing the sky of all but the stars, Manning switched on a taped radio dialogue between Mission Control and one of the Apollo moon flights. A space craft image appeared, settling down to a landing on a simulated moon surface. The students watched, fascinated.

Manning described the powdery surface of the moon, its topography and the vehicle used by the astronauts to explore the moon. Too soon, it was time to blast off again.

"I'm ready to go back home," a girl whispered.

Another trip through space back to earth, a parachute drop into the ocean, and the seat-bound travelers returned to Earth. The show ended with wild applause. The hour had passed quickly.

Liles' class did not stay to visit the campus, invade the Student Stores or have a picnic lunch by the Morehead Sundial. Many classes do.

Instead, they boarded their bus, still talking about astronauts, space flights and neat whatchamacallits.

"The word 'commune' has a bad connotation. Most people conjure up a bunch of naked kids running around a shack in the backhills."

abandoned tobacco farm near Hillsborough into a commune. They named it Aloe, which is a plant that heals burns. Aloe advertised in magazine *Communities* to recruit new members.

Now 13 men, women and children aged 6 through 50 live together on 230 acres of land.

IT WAS a lazy Sunday when I visited Aloe. I drove my car up a narrow, bumpy dirt road, bordered by fallow fields and quiet ponds. There was no sign of life anywhere. I knocked on the door of the largest wood shack, called Thyme.

A man with gentle eyes opened the door and hugged me. "Welcome to Aloe. My name is Layton," he said. He was more than happy to show off Aloe.

The front door leads to the kitchen. Pots and pans, dishes, silverware, mason jars and food are crowded on the counters. This chaos, Layton assured me is only temporary. Another building is being remodeled into a kitchen-dining complex.

The adjoining room is spacious, with chairs and mattresses strewn across the floor. Hanging curtains separate the mattresses, providing privacy. This room is a combined den and bedroom.

A crude wood ladder leads to a loft. Upstairs, mattresses are laid out in rows. They have no barriers between them.

"We believe in free sex," Layton said. "If any couple wants privacy, they can sleep downstairs."

Layton also said that no member has a fixed place to sleep: "We take any mattress available."

THE LOFT is the clothing center for members. Their clothes are owned communally. A few members shop each month and buy enough clothes for

simply their biological parents. Disciplinary actions and education decisions are made by a child board open to all adults. The children attend Greenwillow School in Chapel Hill, and the tuition is covered by Aloe's community fund.

"They have it made," Layton said. Sometimes the children's schoolfriends spend the night at the commune. They simply don't want to leave. They have fresh air, a pond, fields to romp in, their own house, and many parents to love them."

TWO COWS are part of the Aloe family, providing milk, cheese and ice cream. But Aloe does not grow its own food and thus is not self-sufficient.

Aloe's community fund receives most of its money from several members who hold jobs in Chapel Hill. A portion of their salaries goes to the fund.

This method of producing income caused a dispute this year that prompted one member to leave. Fred Fabishak had found an electronics job in Raleigh. Members said his salary was not high enough. Moreover, he was using Aloe's car and the community fund for gas. Fabishak kept the job and moved to Raleigh.

Aloe's income also comes from the farm's small tinnery, which members take turns operating. Tin cans are molded with a blow torch into unusually shaped plant and candle holders or lamps. These are sold in stores throughout North Carolina.

Aloe is based primarily on the principles of *Walden Two*, psychologist B.F. Skinner's fictional account of a modern utopia.

"Equal relationships between men and women, and freedom from jealousy and gossip are some of our principles," a

planetary. The students' quiet whispers turned to a controlled roar of disbelief. Oohs and ahhs filled the room as the moon's image appeared overhead.

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Continued from page 1.

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