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# Co-Op Scenes

By John Allen

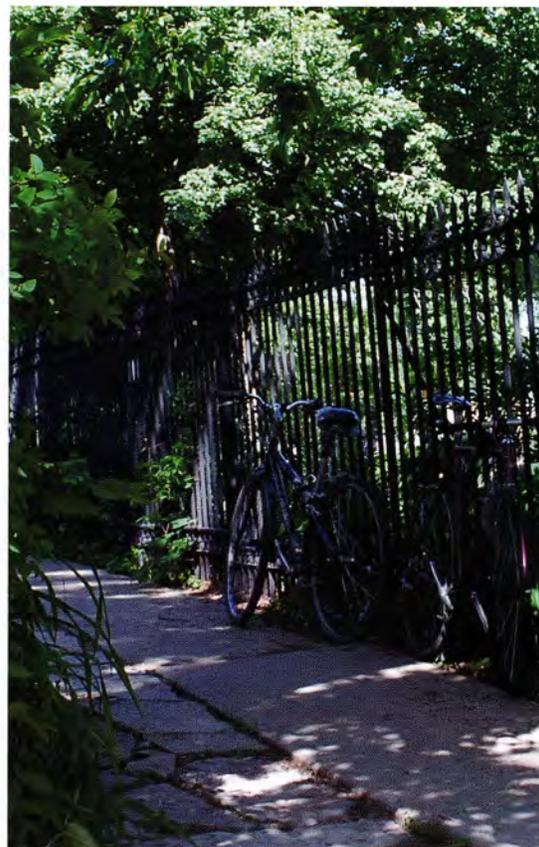
Conceived by students, guided by faculty, and boosted by Madison's hippie heritage, campus-area cooperative housing is still going strong.

In Madison's Mansion Hill District, just to the east of the state Capitol, a vast, pale gray home looms above a tiny park. At the lot's southeast corner, a bronze plaque, placed there by the city in 1976, honors the neighborhood's significance. This area, it proclaims, was once populated by the city's elite — legislators, lawyers, and captains of industry. "The seed of the Wisconsin Idea," the sign states, "may have been planted by informal discussion and from associations among these neighbors when they cooperated to determine policy and direct the course of events."

But on a tree above and behind this plaque there's another, far less grand sign — hand-lettered, in black paint on gray wood — identifying the home's current occupants: Hypatia Co-op. The residents are members of Madison Community Cooperatives (MCC), and they do not command vast sums of wealth or write the state's laws. But they do cooperate to live out their own Wisconsin Idea legacy, one created on — and off — campus.



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## Foundations

One name dominated the early history of campus-area co-ops: Harold Groves. His efforts affected thousands of students, though few probably knew who the professor of agricultural economics was.

What makes co-ops — whether housing, agricultural, retail, or anything else — different from other ventures is the principle of common ownership. A co-op's members own the organization's key resources in common and make decisions in a formalized — often democratic — way. In housing cooperatives, the key resource is the title or lease to the home.

In typical apartment housing, individuals or groups of students might sign a lease to rent a home from a landlord or real estate company, creating an informal relationship among the tenants. Co-ops, however, are predicated on a sense of intentional community. They create a sort of corporation, with a formalized agreement to govern decision-making,

requirements for membership, responsibilities, and benefits.

Co-op housing wasn't invented at the UW, but that sense of intentional community makes them a natural fit with the progressive ideals that underlie the Wisconsin Idea. That may be why co-ops have roots that run nearly a century deep at the UW. The first housing co-op — known as Mortarboard House — was created under the aegis of the dean of women, Lois Kimball Matthews, and gave a home on North Warren Street (now Randall Avenue) to seven women in 1915. Over the decades, many more co-ops came and went, with university faculty and staff often providing key support and guidance.

So where does Harold Groves fit in? In the 1930s and 1940s, he offered advice and support to several co-ops, helping them usher in what are known as the Rochdale Principles.

Developed in the nineteenth century at a weavers' cooperative in Rochdale,

England, the principles lay out a set of guidelines for how an ideal co-op should work, promoting centralized ownership, democratic governance, and (to avoid introducing external conflicts) political and religious neutrality. And he helped to create several of Madison's longest-running cooperative institutions, including the Green Lantern — a dining co-op — and Groves Women's Cooperative, an institution that operated from 1943 until 1987, when it reorganized into a co-ed co-op. It reopened, and continues today, under the name Hypatia.

**Co-ops have played an important role in UW student housing for generations. The three color photos on this spread show different views of Hypatia, a co-op found in Madison's Mansion Hill district. Hypatia has an impressive pedigree — the same building once housed Groves Women's Coop.**

**The black-and-white photo shows Groves circa 1951, when it was located at 1104 West Johnson, its home from 1946 to 1963, before it moved to the building that's now called Hypatia. Pictured are (from left) Adela Kalvary Owen '54, Carolyn Konoshima, Marie Cochrane Gadsden PhD '54, and Clarice Wruck Cox '53, MS'55.**

## Propagating the Faith

The UW faculty member who may have exerted the most influence on today's Madison cooperatives was also perhaps the least likely to become involved with the movement: James Graaskamp PhD'64.

In the late 1960s, Graaskamp was a young professor and rising star in the School of Business's real estate program. He was also an occasional diner at the Green Lantern.

At the time, the Green Lantern was "like a left-wing fraternity," according to Hank Beck '68, a member there. "It was a center, in my eyes, of political and social activity. [The members] were organizing protests against the Vietnam War and raising money to send people to Selma, Alabama," to march against racial segregation.

But Graaskamp was hardly a left-winger. Rather, he was "a business school guy who made good money as a consultant," says Max Kummerow '67, MS'73, MS'80, another Green Lantern diner and co-op leader of the late sixties and early seventies. He asked Graaskamp why a committed capitalist "would advise anti-capitalist student co-ops. He replied that it doesn't matter what you call it — profit, nonprofit, government, or co-op — what matters is who controls, who gets the rewards, and do they make good decisions based on good information."

"Graaskamp wasn't of the faith," says Jay Wind '71, another co-op of the period. "He didn't really believe that co-ops could succeed. But we all sat at his feet with great attention. He taught

us about equity and amortization and land contracts — all the stuff we needed to know."

In 1968, Graaskamp's protégés pushed forward an effort to unite several of the campus-area co-ops. The result was the Madison Association of Student Cooperatives (MASC), a league of eight organizations — five houses, the Green Lantern, and two stores — with Kummerow as the organization's first manager.

"My role," Kummerow says, "was to be the guy with short hair and no beard who went to Mark Musolf — then a young lawyer; Graaskamp had been his undergrad adviser and sent him to us — to incorporate co-ops and sign leases and purchase offers."

Not every campus-area co-op joined MASC (which changed its name to MCC in 1971). But the association helped launch a boom in cooperatives in the early 1970s, and enabled the city's cooperative movement to win its greatest challenge: the battle for Le Chateau at 636 Langdon.



**Above:** Even while he was building a reputation as one of the nation's best minds in real estate, James Graaskamp (left) was also advising many of Madison's co-ops during the boom years of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

**Above right:** In the early 1970s, the house at 636 Langdon was the center of Madison's co-op movement. Today it remains a co-op, under the name Phoenix.

**Below:** Scenes from many of the city's current campus-area co-ops, including (left to right) Lothlorien, Audre Lorde, Ambrosia, Rivendell, Nottingham, and International.



## The Tipping Point

“The purchase of 636 Langdon was the tipping point,” says Jay Wind. “That’s really when MCC went from being a concept that a few people were into to everybody getting it.”

The big French Provincial-style house on the corner of Lake and Langdon, just east of the edge of campus, has the stately architecture usually associated with fraternities — and until 1969, it was one: Alpha Chi Rho. But in the late sixties and early seventies, campus culture was drifting away from anything traditional, and Greek-letter organizations seemed to be dying out. Some thirty of them disappeared during that period.

“Fraternities were going belly-up all over then,” says Wind. “Co-ops stepped in to fill the void.”

In 1969, Alpha Chi Rho rented its building to a group of co-ops who renamed the site Le Chateau. Over the next several years, MCC built up the necessary finances to try to purchase the house. But it wasn’t the only outfit interested in buying. Madison landlord James Korb also wanted the property.

In the summer of 1974, it looked as though the fraternity would accept Korb’s offer over MCC’s. So MCC took its case to the streets.

Launching a campaign called Isaiah 5:8 (after a biblical verse that reads, “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth”), co-ops turned their campaign into a crusade. They called on Korb’s residents to strike

against paying rent. Le Chateau held a block party on Langdon, and hundreds of people came. By September, the co-ops had prevailed.

“That led directly to MCC becoming what it is today, moving it from the fringe to the center,” says Wind. “Before Le Chateau, a lot of people didn’t believe in the mythos of the co-op, that you could have centralized ownership and localized control, and still get things done. But we showed that if everybody would just stand up and say so, we could change things.”



## Thriving

Thirty-five years have passed since the battle for Le Chateau, and in that time, fraternities and sororities have grown again in popularity, and new generations of students and landlords have taken up residence in the old houses and apartments around campus.

But the area is still peppered with co-ops, eleven of them belonging to MCC — including the house that used to be Le Chateau, now renamed Phoenix, and the former Groves.

“The co-ops aren’t just surviving,”

says Hypatia resident Sherman Hackbarth JD’05. “They’re thriving.”

Hackbarth chose Hypatia because of its location — near his office on Capitol Square, but also because he didn’t want to live a solitary life in an apartment.

“The co-op experience is all about creating community,” he says. “I’ve met people who have preconceived perceptions of what co-ops might be like, people who are skeptical. But people here take care of each other. It’s a beautiful thing.”





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