

Lady Cooperative Vigilantes and the Cooperative Youth: Women's Roles in Teaching  
Cooperative Ideology Through Cooperative Summer Youth Camps in the Early 1950's

Andrea Elise Lund

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Dr. Jane Carroll  
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On April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1952, the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild held their 22<sup>nd</sup> annual convention at the Labor Temple in Superior, Wisconsin. Mr. Erick Kendall, editor of the cooperative newspaper *The Cooperative Builder*, provided opening remarks to the women in attendance. In his speech, he offered a challenge to the women of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild to become "lady cooperative vigilantes," thereby taking the ideological framework of the cooperative movement into their own hands.<sup>1</sup> These women rose to the posited challenge by aiding in the sustainment of cooperative education through their facilitation of youth cooperative summer camps during the 1950's.

Consumer cooperatives, a form of business owned and operated democratically by its members, were introduced in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Consumer cooperatives posit an alternative economic model to traditional capitalism through an emphasis on providing goods and services rather than generating profit.<sup>3</sup> Focused on ideological notions such as political neutrality, full democratic participation, and gender neutrality, consumer cooperatives have historically acted as both a social and economic way of life for many Americans.<sup>4</sup> Cooperatives especially flourished, in both their conception and sustainment, in the Great Lakes region of the Midwest; the support of cooperative movements in both Minnesota and Wisconsin were fueled in particular by the involvement of Finnish immigrants, who began arriving in the area in 1864.<sup>5</sup> Finnish immigrants evoked an established history of Scandinavian radicalism in

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<sup>1</sup> "Meeting Notes of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Northern States Cooperative Guilds and Clubs Convention, April 7, 1952" (Papers of the Northern States Cooperative Guilds and Clubs (Superior, Wisconsin) 1930-1969, Immigration History Research Center no. 1690, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1952).

<sup>2</sup> Clarke Chambers, "The Cooperative League of the United States of America, 1916-1961: A Study of Social Theory and Social Action," *Agricultural History* 36, no. 2 (1962): 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly A. Zuli and Robert Cropp, *Cooperatives: Principles and Practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, 2004), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Chambers, 59-60.

<sup>5</sup> June Drenning Holmquist, ed., *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 296.

their local cooperative involvement, thus radicalizing aspects of the Great Lakes cooperative movement.<sup>6</sup> Utilizing the ideological basis of gender equality, both Finnish and American-born women began to organize themselves within the Midwestern Cooperative movement; the first such organization within the United States was the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, established in Superior, Wisconsin in 1930. Through internalizing national cooperative ideology, which viewed the participation of housewives as crucial to the cooperative movement, this larger association of localized guilds and clubs placed significant importance on youth education. It was thought that the education of youth in cooperative ideology would bring about a new generation of cooperative citizens focused on rejecting the status quo of traditional capitalism in favor of the consumer cooperative economic model. The women of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild sought to educate youth in cooperative ideology through the establishment of a cooperative youth summer camp in 1930, focused on implementing the cooperative way of life within a camp context. Cooperative ideology is evident in all aspects of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild's summer camps; this ideology can be seen in the motivations of guild members, written camp manuals, the structure of the cooperative youth camps, and daily camp life.

During the 1950's, the American political and social climate underwent a shift towards conservatism due to the country's involvement in the Cold War, a tense political conflict with the communist USSR; the Cold War resulted in the complete rejection and persecution of any organization or individual suspected of communism.<sup>7</sup> Because of the cooperative movement's ideological emphasis on the rejection of the traditional American economic model, consumer cooperative ideology would have been viewed as suspect by normative society. The cooperative

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<sup>6</sup> Holmquist, ed., 235.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 21.

youth summer camps remained in existence, despite the changing political and cultural climate of 1950's Cold War America, in which consumerism, heightened conformity, anti-communism, and re-envisioned ideals of domesticity were rampant. Throughout the early 1950's the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild sustained the existence of cooperative youth summer camps that taught cooperative ideology, which presented an alternative economic model to capitalism, despite the heightened anti-communist fervor of the Cold War, which considered any such ideology as suspect. Two factors made this possible: one, the adaptation and internalization of a modified ideology that called for reform but not revolution; and two, the women who organized and operated the camps adhered to socially accepted gender roles.

The various aspects of American political and social climate during the 1950's has and continues to be explored extensively by historians. A brief overview of historiography relevant to the context of this paper will be presented, along with the historiographical gaps in which this paper intends to fill. General overviews of the McCarthy era, as presented in Richard Fried's Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era In Perspective as well as in Ellen Schrecker's The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents, emphasize the importance of patriotism, conformity, and the rejection of radicalism in 1950's America; additionally, both texts illustrate the significance of anti-communist ideology, as well as consequences faced by those who challenged this ideological status quo. Patrick Major and Rana Mitter's essay, "Culture" within Cold War History, investigates the political undertones which fueled the propaganda of Cold War popular culture; it is argued that popular culture aimed at spreading the ideological values of domesticity, anti-radicalism, and consumerism.

Literature discussing women's roles in the public sphere presents a number of inconsistencies. Some sources argue the gender repression of the 1950's was insurmountable,

while others claim activity outside of the home was accessible to certain groups of women.

Arguments that claim women could not claim public roles range from Elaine Tyler May's assertion in No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States that ideological importance of the family limited women, to Nancy MacLean's consideration of the limitations women faced from society's emphasis on the embracement of feminine nature in The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents. Other scholars, such as Marlene LeGates' chapter from In Their Time: A History of Feminism In Western Society, assert that women were able to claim political authority through a utilization of the maternal ideology of the first feminist wave as moral justification for their involvement in the public sphere.

The available historiography regarding the national cooperative movement during the 1950's primarily focuses on dominant shifts and trends in cooperative ideology, as seen in Clarke Chambers' article "The Cooperative League of the United States of America, 1916-1961: A Study of Social Theory and Social Action." This theme of ideological exploration can also be seen in both John Curl's For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation: Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America and Zeuli and Cropp's "Cooperatives: Principles and Practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Though Paul Mishler's Raising Reds is not tied to cooperative history, it explores communist sponsored youth summer camps in the 1930's and 1940's; while the ideological foundations of these camps differ, the structure of the camps themselves and intent of the communist facilitators can be seen as similar to the cooperative camps facilitated by the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild.

As to literature specifically addressing women in Minnesota during the Cold War, it is evident that the scope of research is somewhat limited. Texts such as Katheen Laughin's "Civic

Feminists: The Politics of the Minnesota Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, 1942-1965" focuses on Minnesotan women's political participation generally, while both Steven Keillor's, Cooperative Commonwealth: Co-ops in Rural Minnesota, 1859-1939 and Annette Akins Creating Minnesota: A History From the Inside Out briefly mention women's participation in the cooperative movement. In They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups, edited by June Drenning Holmquist, the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild's involvement in cooperative youth summer camps is explicitly mentioned within the context of Finnish cooperative involvement; however, the actualization of the facilitation of the camps and ideological foundations are not explored.

With this literature review in mind, historiographical gaps are evident. First, women's general role in the cooperative movement during the 1950's has yet to be explored. Second, it is not apparent how a particular women's association both internalized and utilized cooperative ideology in the 1950's. Third, the ideological framework of Midwestern cooperative youth summer camps within the 1950's has not been investigated. Thus, an analysis of the sustainment of cooperative youth summer camps in the 1950's through cooperative ideology and women's roles will address elements of these gaps; however, it is important to note the aim of this analysis is not to fill these gaps in their entirety, but rather provide new insight into the relationship between cooperative ideology and activity within a particular context.

An understanding of the general social and political climate of the 1950's illustrates the significance of the sustainment of the cooperative youth summer camps during the Cold War. Because of the extreme anti-communist fervor of American culture during the 1950's, any individual suspected of radical ties was at risk of both social and legal persecution. This was especially true of individuals working with youth; because educators were viewed as directly

influencing the ideological foundations of children, those facilitating educational programs were highly scrutinized.<sup>8</sup> Because of the anti-communist ideology, conformity was highly regarded and valued within the 1950's; one's reputation, job, and family was safe from scrutiny if one conformed to dominant ideology. Along with anti-communism and conformity, dominant culture promoted mass consumerism. Due to an increase in the country's wealth post World War II, mass consumerism and private enterprise was highly valued; patriotism was expressed as consumption within the capitalist economic model.

In regards to women's position within Cold War culture, the ideology of the time emphasized the importance of the domestic roles of wife and mother; because family was viewed as refuge from the ever-present threat of communism, women were expected to maintain the well-being of the home while men engaged in the public sphere as wage earners.<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that activity of white, middle-class women was accepted in the public sphere if the women were perceived as working within an apolitical, domestic framework aiming towards the betterment of the nation.<sup>10</sup> Women's participation in the public sphere was justified through an appeal to national motherhood; women could in the public sphere in their role as wives and mothers.<sup>11</sup> Thus, because the cooperative youth summer camps emphasized educating youth in an alternative economic model, the camps would have been viewed as suspect by dominant society. Additionally, as facilitators of the education of this radical ideology, the women of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild would have been viewed as suspect as well.

The history of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild (NSWCG) is one rich in social activism and cooperative association. Comprised of women's cooperative clubs

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era In Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 161.

<sup>9</sup> Elaine Tyler May, "Pushing the Limits: 1940-1961," in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 492.

<sup>10</sup> Marlene LeGates, *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 337.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 337.

throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin, the NSWCG acted as a resource for women's cooperative activism throughout its existence. Though the NSWCG was the first independent women's cooperative association within the United States, it is important to recognize its role within the larger cooperative framework of both the United States and Northern Great Lakes area. The Cooperative League of the United States (CLUSA) functioned as the overarching cooperative institution throughout the 1950's, beginning with its conception in 1916.<sup>12</sup> In 1920, the CLSUA re-envisioned the structural framework of its existence through localizing membership through district associations; the districts themselves had representatives who were in communication with the CLSUA, in addition to facilitating the cooperative board structure within their localized areas.<sup>13</sup> The Northern States Cooperative League functioned as the localized CLSUA structure responsible for all cooperatives in both Minnesota and Wisconsin. It was during the Northern States Cooperative League's annual convention in 1929 that the idea for the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild came into existence; inspired by the separation of the cooperative movement and its communist members, the founding women decided to take action for themselves and organize.<sup>14</sup> The structural organization of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild closely mimicked that of the Northern States Cooperative League; a central board of elected women was created to oversee the direction and progression of the individual women's cooperative clubs. This central board remained as the governing structure of the NSWCG throughout its existence; with some members remaining active on the board for over 25 years, the central board acted as the lifeline for the women's cooperative movement within the Northern States.

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<sup>12</sup> Chambers, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Chambers, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Maiju Nurmi, Ed, "10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Album: A History of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild" (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1939), 2.

The first cooperative clubs associated with the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild were solely Finnish; while English-speaking clubs eventually followed, the originating Finnish cultural identity's influence remained throughout the club's history. The education of youth in cooperative ideology was a goal which originated with the foundation of the organization; with the first camp held in 1930, it is evident that the women of the organization viewed their primary responsibility to the larger cooperative movement as the facilitators of education.<sup>15</sup> The NSWCG facilitated activities in addition to cooperative youth summer camps, such as the publication of a cookbook, testing cooperative label products and themed social gatherings; however, it was claimed by the women of the NSWCG themselves that throughout their history as an organization, the most significant contribution of the guild was that of youth cooperative education.<sup>16</sup> It was recognized by both the greater cooperative movement and the NSWCG that women within the cooperative movement had the unique ability to provide cooperatives with the necessary social context to prevent the movement from becoming purely economic; it was claimed in cooperative pamphlets published by the Cooperative League of the United States that through an emphasis on the social aspect of cooperatives, women could utilize cooperative ideologies to become influential in the public sphere.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the existence of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, the women worked closely with the Central Cooperative Wholesale's Educational Division. The Central Cooperative Wholesale was an organization based on local cooperatives within the Northern sections of Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin; the educational division provided both funding and ideological materials to cooperatives throughout the area to support organization and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>16</sup> Vivian Ronn, "Visiting CCW Representative Describes Guild", Newspaper clipping, (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

<sup>17</sup> Ida Lauri "Children Too, Lived and Learned Cooperation in CCW Land in 1945" (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1946).

sustainment of cooperatives. The NSWCG received support for their activities through both the funding and propaganda provided by the CCW; the CCW provided monetary sponsorship for the cooperative youth camps throughout their existence.<sup>18</sup>

In the early 1950's, cooperative summer camps sponsored by the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild were held throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota, including Camp Co-op-a-gan at Perch Lake in Chisholm, MN; the Iron Range Co-op Camp at Lake Vermillion, Minnesota; youth camps at Brule, Wisconsin; and the teen camps at St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin. Camp itself consisted of a week's stay at one of the cooperative locations staffed by women of the NSWCG, in addition to hired counselors, cooks, and other instructors.<sup>19</sup> It seems as though every aspect of the camp's planning was infused with cooperative ideology. In addition to the roles and responsibilities of the central board of the NSWCG, responsibility of work was also handed to a camp committee composed of delegates of guilds and clubs from the local area where camp will be held.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the structure of the organization of the committees was consistent with the greater cooperative structure of the time. Just like the greater cooperative movement during the 1950s, the women of the Northern States Cooperative Guilds and Clubs utilized slogans to remind themselves of the work they had ahead; for example, the slogan surrounding camp work in 1954 was "Let's build with our juniors!"<sup>21</sup>

Every aspect of camp life was carefully planned; members of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild even researched proper dining menus based on nutrition guides published by the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Health to ensure that the cooperative

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<sup>18</sup> "Annual Report of Board of Directors: 1953," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

<sup>19</sup> "Annual Report of Board of Directors: 1953," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

<sup>20</sup> Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, "Counselors Guide for Co-op Junior Camps," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

<sup>21</sup> "Annual Report of Board of Directors: 1953," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

food items chosen would be of the utmost nutritional benefit to the campers in attendance.<sup>22</sup> Students attending the cooperative camps came from all over Minnesota and Wisconsin.<sup>23</sup> With registration for campers typically closing a month prior to the beginning of camp, all children who were interested in attending a camp session were expected to collect 50 co-op labels from cooperative goods to illustrate their commitment to the cooperative brand.<sup>24</sup> This requirement illustrates the camp's intended audience; because women were expected to be in charge of all household duties during the 1950's, it is clear that a child's household would already have to have knowledge of the cooperative lifestyle in order for the child to attend camp. Thus, cooperative camps were not intended to recruit children to the cooperative lifestyle, as camp attendance was dependent on a child's family values; rather, the camps were intended to deepen cooperative ideology in children previously familiar with the cooperative model.

The actual cost of a week's camp was dependent upon the amount of money raised by the NSWCG, but in the early 1950's the price per camper ranged from \$15.00 to \$17.75.<sup>25</sup> Insurance was also included in the price of camp tuition, covered by the area of the camp's local cooperative insurance company. To give a general picture of the size of the cooperative camps, in 1954 Camp Co-op-a-gan served 140 campers from over 20 communities; camp was held from July 3<sup>rd</sup> through 30<sup>th</sup>, and summer tuition was reduced to \$16.25 per camper (including insurance) after the NSWCG donated the Guild's remaining cash balance to make camp more affordable.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, "Counselors Guide for Co-op Junior Camps," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

<sup>23</sup> "Section Secretaries Reports: 1955 Annual Convention," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "Minutes of 1956 Annual Convention," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

<sup>26</sup> "Section Secretaries Reports: 1955 Annual Convention," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

The ideological foundations of the United States cooperative movement which informed cooperative activity during the 1950's were the same as the movement's founding principles. These included open and democratic membership, fair distribution of earnings made, one vote per member, gender equality, neutrality in political and religious affairs, the expansion of trade, and educational development through ideology and propaganda.<sup>27</sup> Though the basic founding principles of cooperatives remained consistent throughout time, the model upon which American cooperatives were based shifted in the mid-1940's due to a decision made by the board of the Cooperative League of the United States. The new model focused on the Swedish cooperative model of "the middle way," in which the aim of cooperatives was not to overtake all economic and social functioning of the nation, as had previously been emphasized, but rather aim to control a significant portion.<sup>28</sup> Beginning with this major ideological shift, changes occurred in the cooperative movement during the 1940's when the Cold War was developing, which reflected the necessity of distancing cooperatives from radicalism and suspicion of communism. These shifts included the discontinuation of criticism of the American capitalistic economic model to prevent any harmful comparisons to communist ideology and a focus on the rejection of any radical thought.<sup>29</sup> This shift in national cooperative ideological focus is consistent with the country's response to the emerging threat of totalitarianism within the world.<sup>30</sup>

This rejection of radicalism is clearly visible in the cooperative ideological material utilized by the Northern State Women's Cooperative Guild at the time; in a pamphlet entitled "Today's Children," it is claimed that the cooperative *way of life* is one that is directly in

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<sup>27</sup> Chambers, 59-60.

<sup>28</sup> Chambers, 78.

<sup>29</sup> Chambers, 77.

<sup>30</sup> Robyn Muncy, "Cooperative Motherhood and Democratic Civic Culture in Postwar Suburbia, 1940-1965," Journal of Social History 38, no. 2 (2004), 288.

opposition to “all forms of dictatorship- whether Nazi, Communist, or Fascist.”<sup>31</sup> Even though cooperative activity comprised 2-3% of total economic engagement in the mid 1940’s, it was recognized that an ideological shift was needed to sustain the movement in the face of the general American ideological shift towards conservatism with the looming Cold War.<sup>32</sup>

From its conception, the cooperative movement sought to function not only as an economic model, but also as a model for a holistic way of life. This notion is illustrated in the perceived moral superiority of the cooperative model, and the justification of participation in cooperatives based on a framework of human nature which necessitates cooperatives to bring about full human flourishing. Because cooperation was an essential aspect of human nature which was suppressed by the rigid competitiveness of American capitalism, the spread of cooperative ideology was deemed necessary by the United States Cooperative League to strengthen America’s democracy.<sup>33</sup> Thus, this moral framework of the cooperative movement acted as justification for the spread of cooperative ideology.

In accordance with the general cooperative ideological framework, the Northern States Women’s Cooperative Guild promoted “an understanding of the cooperative way of life, cooperative education and training for youth, membership loyalty and participation, healthful recreation, cultural and social activities, and world peace.”<sup>34</sup> The lack of radical language is apparent within the NSWCG’s mission statement. While the women may have been working for a goal which could be viewed in the 1950’s as politically radical because it challenged the capitalist status quo, the ideologies of the cooperative movement structured the self-definition of the organization in such a way that protected the women from suspicion in the Cold War climate.

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<sup>31</sup> Cooperative League of the United States of America, “Today’s Children,” (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1950).

<sup>32</sup> Chambers, 80.

<sup>33</sup> Chambers, 65-66, 79.

<sup>34</sup> Northern States Women’s Cooperative Guild, “1950 Northern States Women’s Cooperative Guild Membership Card.” (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1950).

By defining the goals of the organization in a non-radical way, the women also protected the existence of the cooperative camps; if the women had included language around the cooperative movement's goal of positing an alternative economic model, or acknowledged the exact ideology taught to children at the cooperative camps, they would have been more vulnerable to being seen as communists and thus unfit for the facilitation of youth camps. Thus, the NSWCG's internalization of the cooperative ideological shift of the 1940's towards a less overt critique of capitalism helped to sustain the existence of the organization itself and the cooperative camps it facilitated.

In the national cooperative ideological pamphlet distributed by the NSWCG, "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Rules the World," it is claimed that in the atomic age, it is necessary to recognize that cooperation starts in the home, and it is through the domesticity of women that the education of future cooperative citizens emerges.<sup>35</sup> It is suggested that through the study of cooperative values, women of the time are able to improve themselves in their wifhood and motherhood. Additionally, the active role of domestic woman as educator is used to keep the home stable; it is stated that after a woman joins a guild or club she has found a way to keep her husband interested in her, whereas prior she would be considered "just a toy."<sup>36</sup> In the crafting of the women's self identities as educators and club members, the cooperative ideology established a framework of the women's self-definitions as domestic builders of a new cooperative society. Ida Lauri, a longtime member of the Guild, referred to this pamphlet at the annual meeting of the NSWCG in 1951, thus highlighting the significance of this ideological basis to the organization. The similarities between national cooperative ideological views of women's roles and normative society's view of women during the Cold War are striking; both suggest that women's self

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<sup>35</sup> Cooperative League of the United States of America, "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Rules the World," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1949), 2.

<sup>36</sup> "Ibid., 2.

definitions ought to stem out of the value of domesticity and relation to one's home. It is thus evident that the internalization of national cooperative ideology by the NSWCG helped sustain the existence of the organization, and thus the existence of the cooperative summer camps, due to the ideological similarities to Cold War views of women.

The philosophical cooperative view of children is also significant to the women's self-definition as educators. In an essay pasted into a scrapbook entitled "Treasures," Lydia Jura of Brule, a Finnish member of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, wrote about how children ought to be considered people, and that kids are "born clean and will remain so if given half a chance."<sup>37</sup> Based on the larger cooperative ideology which viewed cooperatives as morally superior frameworks, this view of children would morally obligate action on behalf of adults to make sure children are being educated properly. Thus, it is evident that members of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild internalized this larger ideological framework, and utilized cooperative ideology as justification and motivation for their activism in the public sphere.

It is evident that the women's identity as educators was truly motivated by cooperative ideology in their emphasis on the sustainment of youth cooperative education. In the annual report of the guild committee and executive secretary in 1950, it was claimed that the necessity of carrying on the facilitation of youth cooperative education did not stem from "the idea that there will be someone to take our place when we are too old to carry on," but rather stemmed from their interest in teaching general loyalty to, and understanding of cooperative principles.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the education of cooperative youth by the NSWCG was clearly motivated by an understanding of national cooperative ideology.

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<sup>37</sup> Lydia Jura, "Delinquency is Old Fashioned," in *Treasures* (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota), 1.

<sup>38</sup> "Annual Report of the Guild Committee and Executive Secretary, 1950," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1950).

Cooperative ideology can be seen in all elements of the camps run by the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, from the camper's daily activities to the ways in which the women of the NSWCG went about planning and organizing the camps. One significant way in which ideology can be seen being put into use is through fundraising efforts of the women. As previously mentioned, the women of the NSWCG spent a significant amount of time fundraising in order to help keep the cost of the camp low for those in attendance; one important way they did this was through the facilitation of a fair booth at the Wisconsin state fair.<sup>39</sup> At this fair booth, the women of the NSWCG sold cakes, pies, and hamburgers made from items from local cooperative stores; women of the Guild staffed the fair booths themselves, attempting to draw attention to their cause of youth education.<sup>40</sup> Other forms of fundraising for the camp included the sale of books, rummage sales, raffles held in Minnesota, dances, and other social events sponsored by the NSWCG.<sup>41</sup> The ideological basis of these activities can clearly be seen; the women of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild utilized the cooperative ideology which defined their roles as domestic caretakers invested in youth to successfully fundraise in the public sphere; as previously mentioned, because ideologies held by both the cooperative movement and dominant society during the Cold War regarded women's primary role as housewives and caretakers, the NSWCG was protected from suspicion of communism due to their domestic method of fundraising, despite the organization's intentions of raising money for their radical youth camps. Thus, the women's internalization of cooperative ideology paired with their adherence to women's Cold War social roles enabled them to sustain the existence of cooperative summer camps through fundraising efforts.

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<sup>39</sup> "Northern States Co-op Booth Committee Statement of Cash Receipts and Payments: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1952-September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1953," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Vivian Ronn, "Shorthand Note: 1950," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

The camps themselves were taught around a three-year curriculum plan developed by the women of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, with each year focusing on a specific aspect of the cooperative story. A slogan accompanied each theme, so that the children attending camp would have a clear vision for what they ought to be learning. The first year's theme focused on cooperatives working together locally, with a slogan of "co-ops build better communities;" the theme of the second year was telling the story of how neighboring communities can be strengthened by cooperative groups working together with a slogan of "working with our neighbors strengthens us."<sup>42</sup> The theme of the third year was how cooperation brought together people all over the world and how cooperation abroad can bring about peace for all of human kind, with a slogan of "we can make it a wonderful world."<sup>43</sup> These themes are perhaps one of the clearest ways in which cooperative ideology strengthened and sustained the camps. With an understanding of cooperative ideology, the curriculum plan and slogans reflect the cooperative emphasis on bringing about a new economic model; however, because cooperatives comprised an extremely small amount of the nation's economic activity, if one was ignorant to the cooperative movement the curriculum plan and slogans appear to be uncontroversial. One could potentially argue that a significant reason why the cooperative summer camps were not viewed as suspect within the context of the Cold War was due to society's ignorance of the radical aspects of the cooperative movement; the consideration of language used within the curriculum structure of the camps is evidence of this.

Additionally, by focusing the youth summer camps on cooperative values supported by the national cooperative framework, the members of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild prevented any direct hostility or accusations of communism which and could have arose as

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<sup>42</sup> "Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, "Counselors Guide for Co-op Junior Camps," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

a reaction to the cooperative camps or from their roles as facilitators of youth education; by making the camp themes explicitly match themes within the greater cooperative movement, the women aligned themselves with an overarching movement which had previously expelled communist influence, thus keeping their roles as educators and the camps themselves protected despite the Cold War climate.

In 1953, members of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild composed a counselor's guide for the co-op junior camps; comprised of the experiences and notes of the leaders of the camp, namely Ida Lauri and Aune Kettunen, the guide attempted to serve as a way to provide continuity of the cooperative ideology throughout all of the camps.<sup>44</sup> We must consider the reasons why, after 30 years of the camps' existence, the counselors guide was crafted in 1953. With a heightened awareness of the political climate of the Cold War, especially the potential persecution of organizations viewed as having radical aims, perhaps the women wanted to fully cement the ideological basis of the camps as to prevent any accusations of communism.<sup>45</sup> The objectives of the camps were clearly outlined within the counselor's guide; "the objectives of the youth summer camps included the promotion of growth in friendship and cooperation, learning shared responsibilities and enjoyed privileges, learning to practice the fine arts of living, drawing out the best in each individual camper, developing sound philosophy of life, learning self-reliance and self-care, and gaining an understanding of the rights of others."<sup>46</sup> As we have seen in other documents crafted by the NSWCG, the language surrounding the aims of the camps do not articulate any ideology or goals which could be viewed as suspect in the Cold War era, despite the infusion of cooperative ideology in all aspects of camp life; as

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<sup>44</sup> Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, "Counselors Guide for Co-op Junior Camps," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

<sup>45</sup> Fried, 158.

<sup>46</sup> Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, "Counselors Guide for Co-op Junior Camps," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

previously mentioned, the ways in which members of the NSWCG crafted the language around cooperative camps paired with a general societal ignorance of cooperative ideology can potentially be seen as a reason why the existence of the camps continued throughout the Cold War. The language used to describe the camp objectives can be credited to the internalization of national cooperative ideology by the NSWCG; for it is through the reliance on cooperative ideology's rejection of any potential radicalism that the aims of the cooperative camps would not be viewed as radical.

Further, the relationship of the individual camp counselor to the ideological foundation of the cooperative movement was clearly defined within the counselor's guide. Rather than the counselor individually taking on the task of educating the youth, it was suggested that the counselor rely on the larger cooperative movement to facilitate the education of campers. In the counselor's guide, it is stated, "this story can be brought out in song, in a game, pictures, stories of people, etc. These can bring out ideals of pulling together, helping one another, love of fellowman, love of that which is good and beautiful, and a hope of better life for all people."<sup>47</sup> Through an emphasis on the full dependence on cooperative ideology rather than personal opinion for the education of youth at the camps, the NSWCG sustained the existence of the camps due to their elimination of any potential digression from the acceptable ideology. If a camp counselor used their own ideological basis to educate the youth, the potential existed for their views to be more overtly radical than the ideological foundations of the cooperative movement; by suggesting full dependence on the cooperative ideology, radical individuals would be unable to bring about unwanted Cold War scrutiny to the camps sponsored by the NSWCG.

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<sup>47</sup> Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, "Counselors Guide for Co-op Junior Camps," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

A significant way in which the women of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild utilized cooperative ideology to help sustain the existence of camps in the Cold War climate was through the daily cooperative studies program. Dependent on which year of the curriculum the camp was focusing on, the cooperative studies aspect at camp stressed different parts of cooperative history and resources; regardless of the year, the students at camp were expected to walk away with a greater understanding of the national cooperative structure and the principles on which it was founded.<sup>48</sup> Cooperative studies topics included the structure of cooperatives from a local to international level, the history of cooperatives generally, why it is necessary to have a cooperative way of life, and cooperation in general.<sup>49</sup> These lessons were taught by camp counselors, in addition to guest speakers. According to one camp attendee, "we had co-op studies in the morning from 10 to 11, and in the afternoon at 1:30. We discussed co-op [values] and were divided into separate groups. Each group had a secretary who made a report to the entire group. Mr. Simpson came to tell us about the Virginia coop and range Federation."<sup>50</sup> The cooperative education portions of the summer camp can clearly be seen to have connections to greater cooperative ideology; the women of the NSWCG used this ideological basis to their benefit. Even though the women wrote all of the cooperative lessons themselves, they utilized respectable public figures to supplement the lessons. Not only did these guest speakers help explain the cooperative ideology to the youth in a different way, they also brought legitimacy to the camp run by cooperative women. By not teaching the cooperative lessons themselves, the women of the NSWCG who were present at camp were able to maintain their background facilitation roles, which was more acceptable for women within the Cold War era. Teaching

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<sup>48</sup> Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild, "Counselors Guide for Co-op Junior Camps," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1953).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Penny Nichols, "Co-op Studies," in *Range Co-op Junior Camp Newsletter, Lake Vermillion: August 20-26, 1950*, (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

children about cooperative ideology, which was radical within the conservative context of 1950's America, would be deemed inappropriate for women by normative society. Thus, the intentional decision of the members of the NSWCG to refrain from teaching cooperative ideology themselves, due to their adherence to both Cold War and cooperative ideological gender roles, enabled the camps to remain in existence throughout the 1950's

It was asserted by the Cooperative League of the United States that cooperative ideology was best learned in a particular way in order to best fit with the cooperative view of human nature; the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild adhered to this cooperative ideological standard. It was proposed by the League that the discussion and teaching of cooperative views ought to follow a recreational program. In this recreational program, participants were encouraged to sing songs, play games, and engage socially; thus, by recognizing the social nature of humans, participants would better engage with cooperative ideals due to the contextualization of the ideology within a social framework.<sup>51</sup> This ideological basis is evident in the cooperative camps themselves. Looking at a particular week of the St. Croix falls camp, held June 10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, 1952, the daily cooperative studies program was held right after the children participated in singing the cooperative theme of the day, which lasted from 9:00 to 9:30 am.<sup>52</sup> The daily cooperative studies program lasted from 9:30 to 10:30 am, followed by a period of organized recreation, which included "hikes, nature games, sports, and folk dancing."<sup>53</sup> Thus, the ideological view that cooperative studies ought to follow a social period is evident within the structure of the cooperative camps.

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<sup>51</sup>Chambers, 72.

<sup>52</sup> "Daily Schedule," in *Co-Capa co-op Camp Paper, St Croix Falls Youth Camp: June 10-16 1952*, (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota), 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

This cooperative insistence on the learning of ideology being surrounded by social activity can be seen as another way in which the internalization of cooperative ideology by the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild enabled the sustainment of cooperative youth summer camps during the 1950's. While normal camp activities such as baseball, hiking, swimming, volleyball, and arts and crafts had always been a regular part of cooperative camp since its conception, the continued emphasis on healthy outdoor activity can be seen as a way in which the women of the NSWCG and the camps themselves were not viewed with suspicion despite the Cold War context.<sup>54</sup> With a rise in patriotism in the 1950's, sports and other traditionally American activities were viewed as activities which conformed with Cold War ideological views of children; by placing cooperative ideological lessons between outdoors activities and sports, the camps' radical message of aiming towards a new economic model was softened and viewed as less threatening. Because of this, the camps would not be seen as warranting mistrust despite the radical nature of their message.<sup>55</sup> Even though the children of the camps were learning alternatives to America's capitalistic economy, the camp itself seems less focused on ideology through the emphasis on sports and other recreational activity. Thus, by relying on the national cooperative standard which claimed that cooperative discussions should take place after a social hour, the women of the NSWCG were able to sustain the cooperative camps through placing the cooperative lessons in the midst of recreation.

Other general activities of the cooperative summer camps also reflected a significant dependence on national cooperative ideology. At the beginning of the camp week, children organized their own cooperative stores, often called the camp canteen, to sell cooperative

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<sup>54</sup> "Co-op Camper: Program of the Inter-regional Co-op Youth Camp, 1952," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

<sup>55</sup> Fried, 79.

products such as candy, soda, and hairpins.<sup>56</sup> Shares were sold throughout the camp to purchase goods; for example, stock sold at the 1951 Brule camp was available for purchase at twenty-five cents a share.<sup>57</sup> This method of organization exactly mimicked the traditional structure of consumer cooperative stores. Additionally, one child from each cabin would be chosen to serve on a camp board of directors which oversaw all activities for the week; here, cooperative campers could decide what to write about in the camp paper, chose the theme of the final night's banquet, and any other activities in which the children would like to participate.<sup>58</sup> For example, at the 1950 Range camp, campers set up a library system at the camp using books from the Virginia public library.<sup>59</sup> These activities can be seen as the children taking the cooperative ideology into their own hands; by being placed into a situation where they were able to make their own decisions, children who attended the cooperative youth summer camps expressed autonomy in a way different than their daily lives in the 1950's. Because both ideological and social conformity were an essential part of American life in the 1950's, the children's decision making at cooperative camp can be seen as extremely unique for the time.

Because the women of the NSWCG internalized cooperative ideology in their view of children as cooperative builders of the future, the cooperative camps were structured in such a way that allowed for campers to fully experience the holistic cooperative way of life. This led to the continuation of the cooperative camps throughout the 1950's due to sustained enrollment; because the campers were able to experience a new level of autonomy unmatched in their daily lives, campers attended cooperative youth summer camps year after year.

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<sup>56</sup> "Brule Ko-Op Kamp Newsletter: July 9-13, 1951," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> "Range Co-op Junior Camp Newsletter: Lake Vermillion, August 20-26, 1950," (Papers of the NSCG+C, IHRC, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

As we have seen, the women of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild rose to the challenge to become lady cooperative vigilantes through their role in sustaining cooperative youth summer camps throughout the 1950's. Despite the social and political emphasis on anti-communism during the Cold War, the cooperative youth summer camps were not viewed as suspect even though the camps aimed at teaching cooperative ideology, which emphasized an alternative economic model to capitalism, to children within the context of the Cold War. The sustainment of cooperative youth camps can be attributed to the ways in which the women of the Northern States Women's Cooperative Guild internalized and utilized national cooperative ideology, in addition to the women's adherence to socially accepted gender roles. Through the sustained existence of cooperative youth camps, the women of the Northern States Cooperative Women's Cooperative Guild successfully embodied the spirit of lady cooperative vigilantes in their education of youth in cooperative ideology throughout the 1950's.

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