

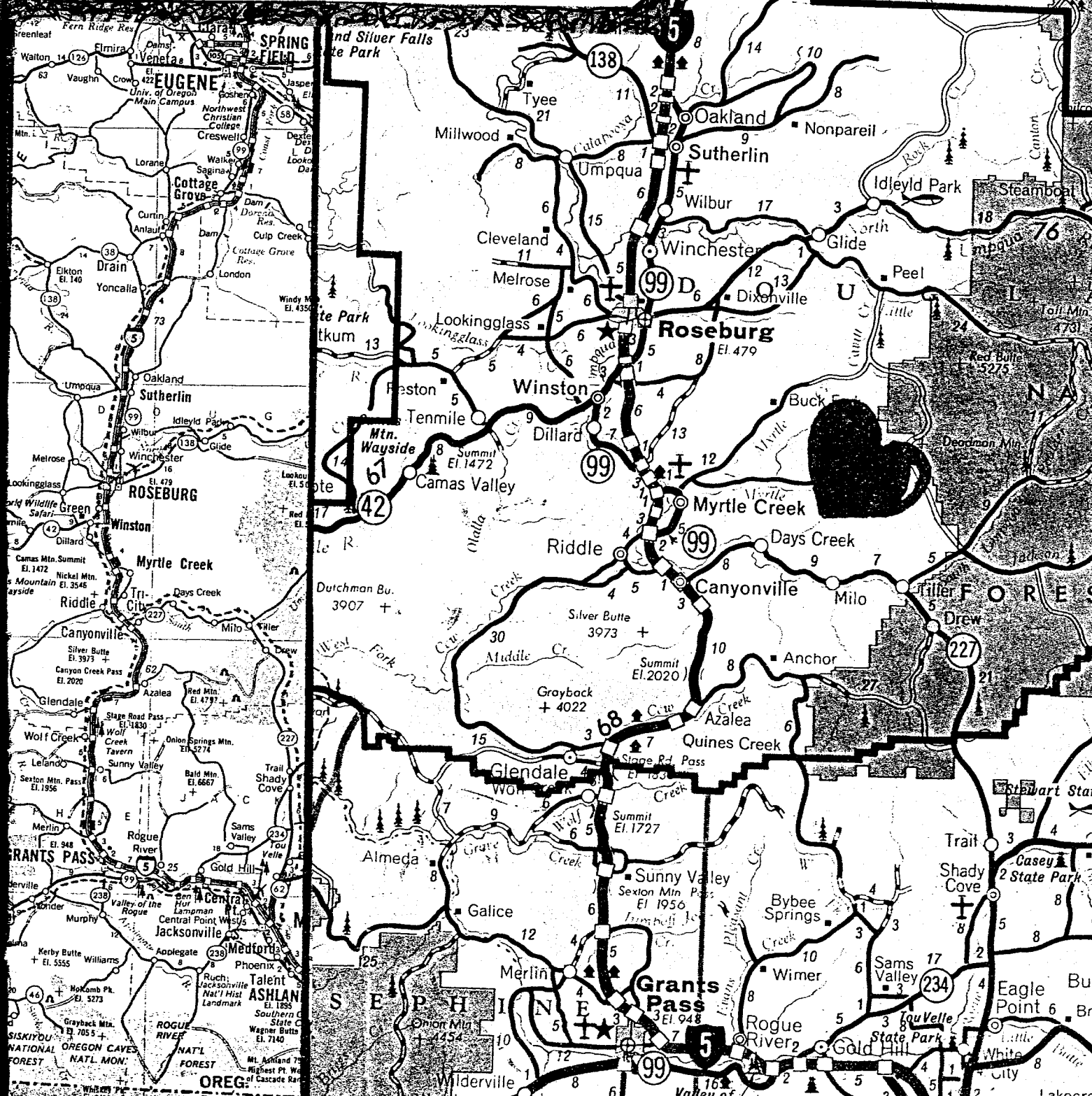
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OREGON WOMEN'S LAND TRUST

- A RESOURCE BOOK -

August 1991

Revised August 2004



THE OREGON WOMEN'S LAND TRUST AND OWL FARM

a booklet in transition
August 2, 2004

Tee A. Corinne, editor

"OWL land is international women's land purchased by donations from women all over the world." (Julie Weber, e-mail, Sept 17, 1998)

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THE OREGON WOMEN'S LAND TRUST

"The Oregon Women's Land Trust is a unique organization with little precedent...We believe the land exists by her own right; we claim no ownership; our purpose is to be sensitive to the land's needs, to carry out a long range program to protect, revitalize, and restore land in the name of nature and ecology." (Guthrie and Roz, *WomanSpirit* 11, Spring 1977)

"OWL, Oregon Women's Land, was bought in 1976. Its stated purpose is to provide access to women on land, especially to those women who would otherwise be denied access....OWL Farm has been the home for many women on a long-term basis; a place of rest, recreation and retreat for other women; as well as a night's shelter for women who travel. [It is a place] where women have come together to share skills and labor; where women have come to heal and grow; where women have come to be at one with Mother Earth...OWL Farm is a special place given by women, to women, for women." (From Maize #7, Winter 1986)

ORIGINAL ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION:

- 1) *To acquire, administer, and hold in perpetuity land and other assets in trust for the benefit of women who would otherwise be denied such access.*
- 2) *To promote, explore, develop and maintain the spiritual, physical, and cultural well being of women by:*
 - a) *providing women access to land,*
 - b) *encouraging self-sufficiency and the means to attain it,*
 - c) *fostering and exploring new patterns of human relations, and*
 - d) *providing other experiences to promote the well-being of women.*
- 3) *To encourage thereby the development of harmonious and ecologically sound land-based communities.*
- 4) *To preserve land and protect it from speculation and over-development, and to foster the recognition of land as a sacred heritage and resource belonging to all.*
- 5) *To serve as a resource for individuals and groups of women with interests in any of the above.*

June 1975, Murphy, Oregon. Three day meeting at WomanShare on "Money, Class, and Power." Commitment by each woman present to donate ten percent of her money toward getting an Oregon Women's Land Trust started. Out of this money, Spes, Guthrie, and Mary Lois were to be paid to do research.

As a group, the women made a commitment "to help get land for women other than just those who could afford to buy it." (Sierra, A Herstory..., *WomanSpirit* 11, Spring 1977)

July 1975. Workshop on land trusts at the WomanSpirit Festival.

October 1975, Vida, Oregon. First formal land trust meeting of the Oregon Women's Land Trust attended by seventy women. Reports on research, discussion of legal practicalities, vote on articles of incorporation, discussions of tensions about non-lesbians and men. Visions and ideas. Dancing, singing, massage, meditation. \$4,000 in unnamed pledges received at meeting.

March 1976, Grays Creek. Second meeting of the Oregon Women's Land Trust. Discussion of agreements and principles of unity. discussion of tensions, differences, boy children. Some women volunteered to look for land.

May, 1976, Estacada, Who Farm. Third meeting of the Oregon Women's Land Trust. Discussion of 147 acre piece of land in Days Creek (included photos and slides) available for \$65,000 plus interest of 7-1/2 to 9% to be paid over 15 years: large log house, hay barn, chicken barn. Discussion of legal research. A small amount of earnest money had been given to the realtor to hold the land until after the meeting. A conditional decision to buy the land was made.

Conditions

1) that the land trust would come up with specific ways to reach out to third world and working class women

2) that efforts would be made to acquire the next piece of land near a city and that efforts would be made to look for a large piece of land for the establishment of a matriarchal village.

3) that the Land Trust would research problems concerning BLM and the Days Creek land and deal with the problems.

pay \$250 (\$200+ according to Pelican Lee) a month for six months and a figure less than that for one year. Discussion of women who wanted to live on Days Creek land, matriarchal village idea, and fundraising. The land was to have a revolving group of caretakers, would be used for festivals, workshops, gatherings, and camping, and would be open to all women.

Summer 1976, contract signed to buy Days Creek land for \$18,500 down with monthly payments of \$365.

June, 1976, Eugene, OR. Meeting of women who wanted to live on the Days Creek land.

July, 1976, Days Creek. First meeting of the Oregon Women's Land Trust held on Oregon Women's Land. Caretakers had 2 days on the land to prepare for a gathering of 100 women. Legal reports given. Discussions about the matriarchal village idea, outreach to third world and working class women, women who wanted to live at what was by then being called "OWL Farm, fundraising, and a singles workshop. After the meeting ended, there were 17 women 2 girl children and 5 homeless goats living at OWL farm.

September, 1976, Labor Day weekend, OWL Farm. Meeting of third world and working class women. Another meeting of third world and working class women took place on Labor Day weekend in Covello.

October 1976, OWL Farm. Land Trust meeting. Discussion of fire that had destroyed a cabin at WomanShare and a 185 acre fire at the Covello land. Discussion of how to deal with tensions, power sharing, interpersonal problems, and childcare. By-laws voted on and passed. Third world women met separately. Discussion of how other pieces of land would come into the land trust.

November 1976, Roseburg, Rainbow's End. Meeting to discuss land ownership attended primarily by women who lived on non-Land Trust land that they owned individually or collectively. Discussion of community and community responsibilities and accountability.

January 9, 1977, Portland, Mountain Moving Cafe. Sunday brunch fundraiser for the Oregon Women's Land Trust.

January 15, 1977, Portland, Mountain Moving Cafe. Fundraising evening event.

January 28, 1977, Eugene. Financial meeting.

During the early years, celebrations occurred on most full moons and every Solstice and Equinox, Halloween, Candlemas and Beltane.

OVERVIEW

According to La Verne Gagehabib and Barbara Summerhawk, writing in *Circles of Power*, "Women had profound experiences of creating community together, in various combinations, for periods of months or years. Throughout OWL Farm's first twenty-five years, hundreds of women visited from all over the world. There was the exhilaration, as one ex-resident had shared, of learning how to use a tool one day, and teaching a newly arrived woman how to use it the next...As of 1999, no one permanently resides at OWL Farm and the Oregon Women's Land Trust is looking for a group of women who are dedicated to creating community and furthering women's culture to take stewardship of the land. Perhaps some group, such as a team of women cob-house builders or herbalists, will take on the responsibility for OWL Farm. Meanwhile, the more permanent members of the larger community hold things together for OWL Farm. In June 1998, members of the Land Trust made a decision to "close" what had been open women's land, looking ahead to a new type of experiment by actively seeking a caretaking collective. Ní Aódagáin, [former OWL Farm Caretaker] living in Eugene, supports this decision, but said, "*Open women's land is critical in terms of a women's movement that said it's for all women; women without resources have to be able to go back to the earth, not just women who have financial privileges.*"

After 2000, women began again to reside at OWL Farm.

From Bethroot Gwynn: Summer 2004, there are now 3 residents at OWL Farm, one of whom celebrates her first birthday in August, 2004. The garden has been cultivated for the past several summers, and produced abundantly for a Garden Party at OWL Farm in September, 2003. A 2004 Garden Party will be held at OWL Farm on September 8.

The road is in fairly good repair; the Main House is clean and cool on the hottest summer days. The orchard and grounds are being mowed by hard-working caretakers Cory and Rae Milecar.

In summer 2003, Cory and Rae did a major renovation of the West end of the Coop, creating a cozy living space for themselves and new baby, Maradaya - including a full kitchen.

THE BUILDINGS OF OWL FARM by Ní Aódagáin, 1998

In the beginning of OWL, (1976) the only

buildings were the Main House, a large log cabin, built in 1900; the 52 ft long chicken coop; the log barn, and a small tool shed that sat to the left of the Main House, as you approached the Main House. This small woodshed was the site of the first renovation made on Owl. It would become what was called the Quiet House. Basically, a square box, 12 by 16 ft., in which women built two lofts, added windows, and re-sided the east exterior wall. It was designated as the place for sustained quiet activities, as well as the home space for 4-6 women at a time, in the years '76-79. In later years, this structure would be home to couples and/ or moms with kids, as it was the largest of the small structures on the land.

The second building project was the construction of the Little House, located to the east of the Main House, in the meadow above the barn. Built mainly by Spes and Pelican (??) in 1977-78, this is a one-room cabin with a loft. The original intended purpose of this building was to provide a place for the children of OWL Farm and Cabbage Lane (the children went between the lands) to play, sleep, be schooled in. Thus, its original name, the Kids' House. this building was built with discount wood from local mill for \$150.00

The third new "building" was the Tree House, built mainly by Pelican, who wanted to create a space to get away from "downtown" OWL (where upwards of 30 women could be gathered in and around the main house). this very unique space sits high in the arms of a beautiful immense madrone tree in the forested area north of the Main House. It is perhaps 8ft by 4 ft by 4 ft. An adult woman cannot stand up in it.

Most of the major building at OWL was done in the years 1976-1979. In 1989, Boa, Wyrda, Ní Aódagáin,, and lots of drop-in help, added a room onto to the Quiet House. This 8 by 12 ft space provided Felicé Ana, Ní Aódagáin's, daughter, with her own bedroom, as well as almost doubling the size of the Quiet House.

In 1989, as well, major reroofing of the chicken coop was undertaken and in 1993, the foundation of this 52 ft building was totally redone. In the years 1985-95, the interior of the chicken coop was partially renovated, in order to create two resident living spaces, and two resident work spaces.

Mara Lambert added the following information.
"Wyrda had electricity in the East end of the "coop" at OWL for about 18 months (91-92) by way of a solar panel and battery. She ran a radio plug and 2

lights. I installed it for her."

GARDEN PARTIES

In 1999, Fran Carroll came up with the idea of Garden Parties as a way to raise money for and awareness about The Oregon Women's Land Trust. She organized three in 1999 which raised around \$1,100. Since then, several have taken place each year. -- Tee

Renée Côté, July, 2004

from the OWLT newsletter August 2003

Garden Party Report - Success!

For our 4th year of Garden Parties, we had our first of the season at Brimstone's End in Sunny Valley on July 26 [2003]. As co-organizer, in all humility, it was a success! Financially, we made \$370. That represents half of the property taxes. Hurray! At a deeper level, I, for one, thought: this is, as in the past, the kind of garden party I like, this continues well our new tradition.

Dana started the gardening discussion with the theme of irrigation, watering. etc. With her help and knowledge, we all got involved with the various aspects of keeping our garden moist, as needed, according to ground, what is growing, etc. We hope that some of that info will be distributed on e-mail, as soon as someone sits down to write it! Most of us shared something we knew. As usual, Beverly knew a lot on the topic and I believe all of us learnt something we did not know. Thanks Dana and thanks to all of us.

In addition to the produce, both fresh and frozen, we had plants, quality yard-sale items, drinks and food. Tina and Barb brought art and photocopies of painting, and Barb showed how to make origami lilies. Too bad, my photographic equipment and abilities do not allow the inclusion here of a picture of 5 or 6 women focused on their flower making. It was wonderful! (Tee was taking pictures so I hope we will get to see some of her photographs somewhere!)

The weather was beautiful, we had some trouble following the direction of the sun to remain in the shade (next year, we will remember!) but we were able to stay in the shade and it was quite comfortable. The company was great and I want to thank everybody who participated, especially Marianne who came back from California in time, Tina and Barb who arrived early in the morning with tables and chair and helped set up, Karen who not only cleaned the house with her magical vacuum, but led the making of blueberries turnovers the day

before, brought sushi, chairs, table, etc. and even donated same-day very fresh bread made by her husband (after checking with us that it was PC!), and Sandi who sent all those fascinating objects for our bazaar table. Thanks also to Dana, Jemma, Bethroot, Tee, Beverly, Jean.

Louise and Morocco who brought themselves, their knowledge and a whole bunch of stuff. Marjie even drove down from Portland for her first Garden Party and she does not want to miss the next one, she said. (I apologize in advance if I forgot someone.)

Mark your calendar for the September 13 [2003]at OWLF, 11 to 4. It will be different because a garden party is always unique! See you all!

INVISIBLE HISTORIES

Tee A. Corinne

On April 2, 2000, a discussion took place at Poppyseed (Tee & Bev's) to discuss gay men, communes and related issues in So. Oregon (1969-present) with Joseph Bear Wilner, master's degree candidate at the University of Oregon. Those present included longtime area residents Assunta Femina; Ed Brett, Beverly Brown, Tee Corinne, La Verne Gagehabib, Jean Mountaingrove, Len Richardson, Omann (Fred Treible); archivist Linda Long from Knight Library at the University of Oregon; Lori A. McGilchrist and Pat Young from the Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest; and researcher Catriona Sandilands, Assistant Professor on the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University in Toronto, author of *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism & the Quest for Democracy* (1999).

After the meeting I went to the local store for a video and told the owner that we had just finished a discussion with archivists and researchers about the history of communes in the area. In a voice heavy with sarcasm, she said, "Well, that will make you very popular around here."

I said, "But it's part of the local history."

She said, "Most people would rather forget that."

Knowing that she is very involved with the preservation of local pioneer history, I suggested that it was a continuation of the "frontier spirit."

Not quite as hostile, she acknowledge, "Well, you're right about that."

For a long time I have felt baffled by the "invisibility" of the rich communal history of the area. I now feel distressed that this appears to be not

only benign neglect but an active interest in suppressing this history. I am also concerned at the ongoing loss of materials and of those whose memories are rich sources of information.

Currently the U. of O. Archives are collecting information about Women's Lands. I hope that Linda Long will consider extending the active collection policy to include all communal activities and intentional communities in Southern Oregon. After all, the back-to-the-land movement went public in 1969 with a feature on the Mystic Arts Commune, about 7 miles from my home in Sunny Valley. I think the histories of men's, women's, and mixed communities are intertwined and each gives a fuller picture of the other and of the area as a whole.



A History of the Oregon Women's Land Trust

In 1975 the southern Oregon Women's community consisted of Cabbage Lane, Root Works, Womanshare and two other places in Wolf Creek. There was a need for understanding and communication with each other about money, business and class. A meeting was held at womanshare in June 1975. Each woman talked about her background and attitudes about money, where she got her money and what she spent it on. There were exchanges and barter made. There were discussions on open land and land trusts. Each woman committed ten percent of her money to the beginning of the land trust idea. Spes, MaryLois and Guthrie were to be paid with this money to do research. Out of that meeting came a commitment from women to help get land for women other than just those who could afford to buy it.

At the WomanSpirit festival in July 1975, there was a workshop on land trusts.

The first formal land trust meeting was held in Vida in October 1975. Reports were given on the research that had been done. The legal practicalities were discussed, the articles of incorporation voted on. Women talked about tensions concerning non-lesbians and men. In small groups and workshops women talked about their visions and ideas, the by-laws and how to raise money. There was \$4,000 pledged in unnamed pledges from the women at this meeting.

The second meeting of the Oregon Women's Land Trust was held in Grays Creek in March 1976. Some women volunteered to look for land. Agreements and principles of unity were discussed. Tensions, differences and agreements about boy children were heard. In small groups landed women met to talk about their relationships to the Land Trust, what they had to offer the Land Trust and what the Land Trust had to offer them. Landless women talked about their needs and how to raise

The third meeting of the Land Trust was held at Who Farm in Estacada in May, 1976. By this time there was a lot of energy going toward getting a piece of land. A lot of women from southern Oregon had seen some land in Days Creek. They came with excitement and information about buying this piece of land. Different women had done legal research, talked with the realtor and taken photos and slides of this 147 acre piece with a 10 house on it. A small amount of earnest money had been given to the realtor so the land could be held until this meeting. A decision had to be made.

There was a lot of excitement about the Days Creek land. Reports and research had been done, and there was much discussion of the pros and cons. We went around the circle many times, each woman saying her feelings about the land, the needs of the Land Trust and if this piece would meet these needs. We went around the circle again to see who wanted the land and who didn't. The majority of women wanted it. We went around again to the women who felt strongly against it and those women said they didn't feel strongly enough to stop the group decision. The decision to buy the land was made on three conditions. 1) that the land trust would come up with specific ways to reach out to third world and working class women, 2) the efforts would be made to acquire the next piece of land near a city and that efforts would be made to look for a large piece of land for the matriarchal village idea. 3) that the Land Trust would research problem concerning BLM and the Days Creek land and fight them if necessary. Ten thousand dollars was given at this meeting and enough pledged to pay \$250 a month for six months and a figure less than that for one year. There were four small groups who discussed women who wanted to live on Days Creek land, the

matriarchal village idea, and fundraising. We now had our first piece of land. It would be open land with a group of revolving caretakers and would be used for festivals, workshops, gatherings and camping.

In June 1976 the women who said they wanted to live on the land at Days Creek met in Eugene.

In July 1976 the members of the Oregon Women's Land Trust met for the first time on Oregon Women's Land. The women who were going to be the first group of caretakers had access to the land only two days before 100 women showed up for the largest meeting since the beginning of the land trust. There was a lot of work to be done, despite the fact that the energy was one of celebration and festivity. In large groups legal reports were given. Lawyers agreements were still being worked on right up until the time of the meeting.

In small groups there were discussions about the matriarchal village idea, outreach to third world women, working class women, women who wanted to live at OWL farm, fundraising, and a singles workshop. A weekend for third world women and working class women was planned and scheduled to happen at OWL farm on the Labor Day weekend.

Women met and were excited to see each other. Third world and working class women met separately. There was also a third world and working class women's weekend at Covello that same weekend.

In October, 1976 there was the next land trust meeting at OWL Farm. It had been a hard summer. There had been two fires, one destroying a cabin and its entire contents at Womanshare. Another that destroyed 185 acres of the Covello land leaving many women homeless. There was a pregnant woman at OWL Farm who had been in institutions a lot and women were concerned with how to deal with the problem in a way that would ensure that she would not be put in an institution again. The women at OWL farm didn't feel ready to take on the responsibility of this woman and her baby. Many women were tired and discouraged. Women who were living at OWL farm wanted help in dealing with the problems of power and control that were connected to living on open land. There were a lot of new women and a lot of talk about politics and money. Much time and energy was put into finding a solution to the problem of the pregnant woman and a decision was made that she would go to Who Farm in Estacada with a group of women who would be a healing circle. Who Farm made a proposal this meeting to become a part of the land trust. The by-laws were voted on and passed. In small groups third world women met separately. We discussed how to do better child care. Frustrations were heard from women who were living at OWL Farm. There were discussions on how other pieces of land would come into the land trust.

In November 1976 there was a meeting held at Rainbows End

land ownership. Most of the women who came to the meeting lived on non-land trust land that was either owned individually or collectively. Women talked about how they felt about community politics and the different kinds of situations they were living in. There was talk about what we were doing or wanted to do to be more responsible and accountable to the women's community. There were discussions about power and land.

In September, 1976 there was a meeting near Hillsboro and much work was done on articles of incorporation, by-laws and agreements. Many legal and business women put a lot of energy into making things legally correct.

In November, 1976 there was a land trust meeting at Who Farm. The decision was made that Who Farm would become part of the land trust, and we discussed ways to do this legally. We discussed fundraising and allocation of money. It was decided that we needed to have a financial meeting to deal solely with financial issues.

On January 9, 1977 there was a womens Sunday brunch held at the Mountain Moving Cafe in Portland. The proceeds went to the land trust. Women gathered to cook, eat delicious food, make music and see films. The atmosphere was warm and gave a chance for city women and country women to exchange energy.

On January 15, 1977 there was a land trust benefit at the Mountain Moving Cafe on women's night. There was a great turn-out for an evening of theatre and music.

January 28, 1977 the financial meeting was held in Eugene. At that meeting it was decided to donate \$100 to the Portland Women's Resource Fund, to look into the possibility of applying for CETA grants, and explored several other possibilities for fundraising. The next land trust meeting will be held around easter at Womanshare.

Sierra
Portland

