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Experimental Americans: Celo and Utopian Community in the Twentieth Century

George L. Hicks

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Experimental Americans: Celo and Utopian Community in the Twentieth Century George L. Hicks From colonial times to the present, the United States has been home to a steady stream of utopian experimental communities. In Experimental Americans, George L. Hicks takes us inside one of the longer-lived of such communities, Celo Community in western North Carolina, to explore the dynamics of intentional communities in America. Founded in 1937 by Arthur Morgan, first chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Celo (pronounced see-lo) established its own rules of land tenure and taxation, conducted its internal business by consensus, and did not require its members to accept any particular ideology or religious creed. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in Celo and among its local neighbors, consultation of Celo's documentary records, and interviews with ex-members, Hicks traces the Community's ups and downs. Attacked for its opposition to World War II, Celo was revived by pacifists released from prisons and Civilian Public Service camps after the war; debilitated in the 1950s by bitter feuds with ex-members, it was buoyed up in the 1960s by the radical enthusiasm of new currents in the nation. social relations and examines the interactions between Celo and its neighboring community. He considers variations in paths taken by utopian communities, with a look at a close cousin of Celo, the Macedonia Community in Georgia. He also discusses the Community's post-utopian phase, marked by a shift in the late 1970s from social goals to straightforward land management. While utopian communities might hope to secede from American society in varying degrees and to institute new and improved cultural models, nonetheless they express in many ways the attempt - characteristic of the nation itself-to balance individualism and egalitarianism. By providing the context, utopian and conventional, within which Celo and other experimental communities emerge and change, Experimental Americans illuminates an ongoing encounter with persistent tensions and contradictions in America's cultural postulates.

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