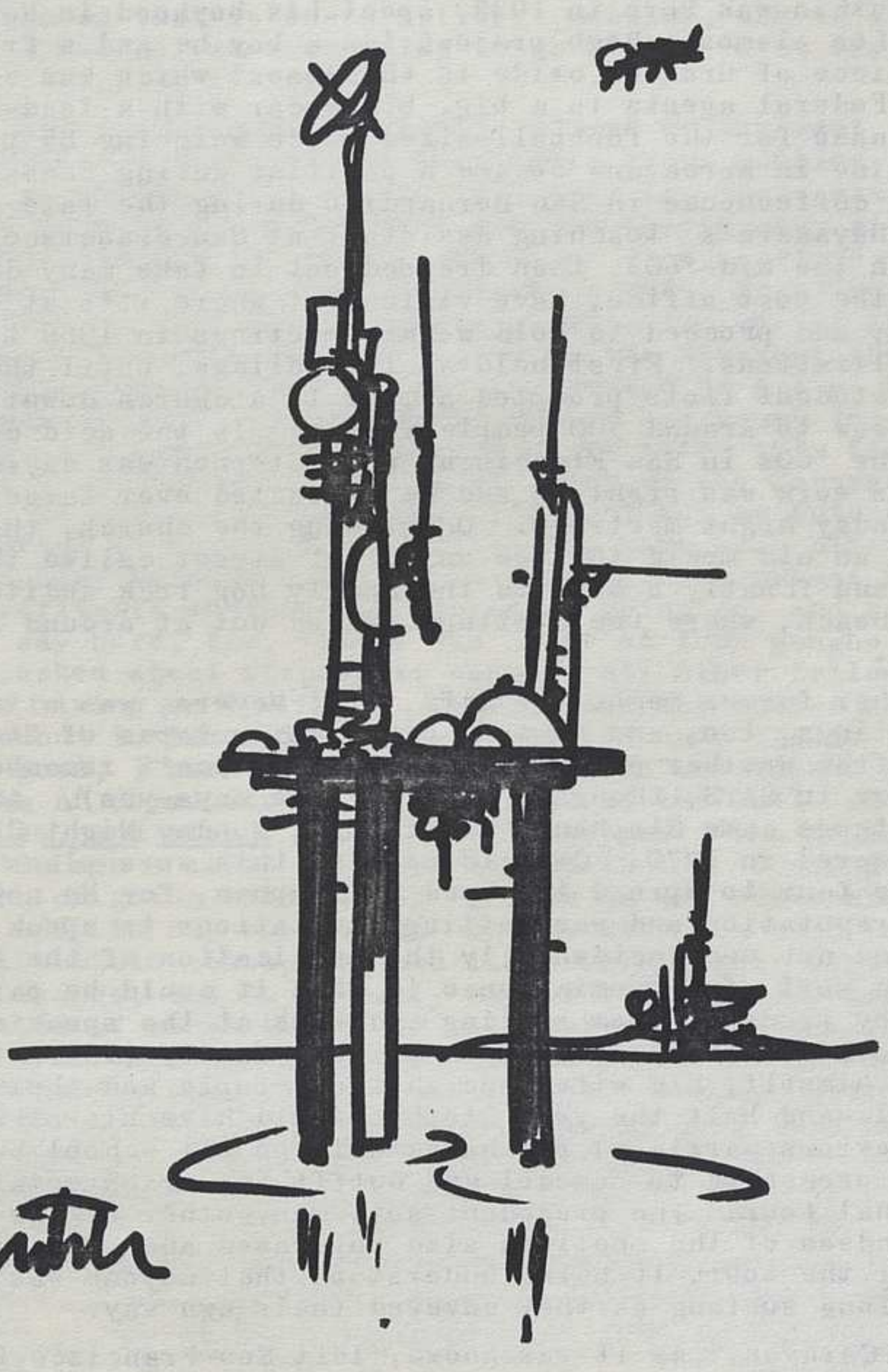
HERE THERE BE SAPS

October 1984
SAPS #149



"...YOU CALL THE FARM an 'intentional' community," said our fearless leader r-tRapp in SPACEWARP #133. "Is that a typo? If not, what does it mean?"

Well, that looks like a hook for me if ever I saw one. Let me kind of roll along with this for a while. "Intentional" means "done on purpose with some preconception" as simply as I can define it. The people who started The Farm in 1971 were acting out of a set of convictions conveyed by and accepted from "hippie guru" Stephen Gaskin (known just as Stephen in his early days) who was the focal point, the nexus, of the starting of the community.

Let me back up a bit for a little Farmish history... Stephen Gaskin was born in 1935, spent his boyhood in New Mexico near the Los Alamos A-Bomb project (as a boy he and a friend found a piece of uranium oxide in the desert which was confiscated by Federal agents in a big, black car with a lead-lined carrying case for the football-sized piece weighing 85 pounds), was a Marine in Korea and became a pacifist during combat, ran a beatmik coffeehouse in San Bernardino during the late '50s, was S.I. Hayakawa's teaching assistant at San Francisco State College in the mid-'60s, then dropped out to take many drugs, work for the post office, have visions of where it's at (with capitals), and proceed to hold weekly meetings in 1966 to convey these realizations. First held at the college, until the vibes from the student riots prompted a move to a church downtown, the meeting grew to around 500 people weekly. In the acid consciousness of the '60s in San Francisco, what Stephen was saying about how things work was right on and he attracted ever larger crowds to his Monday Night meetings. Outgrowing the church, there was a move to an old movie theatre on Haight Street called the Straight Theater, and finally a move to the Family Dog rock auditorium out at Ocean Beach, where the meetings peaked out at around 2,000 attendees.

Another former member of SAPS, Bill Meyers, was attending these meetings, too, and he took over making tapes of Stephen's meetings from another gafiate, Andy Main (I don't remember if he was ever in SAPS, though a little voice says yes), and out of those tapes came Stephen's first book, Monday Night Class, which appeared in 1970. Coinciding with this were plans for a nationwide tour to spread the word of Stephen, for he now had a national reputation and was getting invitations to speak here and there. And not uncoincidentally the publication of the book gave the tour a sort of economic sense in that it could be partially financed by proceeds from selling the book at the speaking engagements. Towards this end, Stephen and his family (which then consisted of himself, his wife, and another couple and their one small girl--and half the year Stephen would have his older girl from a previous marriage) purchased a large old school bus which they then proceeded to remodel and outfit for transportation on the national tour. The precedent set, many other of the hard-core attendees of the meetings also purchased and provisioned busses for the tour, it being understood that anyone was welcome to come along so long as they covered their own way.

The "Caravan," as it was known, left San Francisco from in

front of the Family Dog at the beach after the last Monday night class on October 12, Columbus Day 1970. There were about 40 vehicles, mostly schoolbusses and converted mailtrucks, going on the trip from the outset with a population of around 250. The tour lasted until February 1971, with engagements in over 20 towns throughout the country. It was successful and attracted many new followers who joined the tour as it went along.

In his second book, The Caravan, Stephen says of their returning to San Francisco and leaving again ten days later: "We trucked for four months, and finally we got back to San Francisco and said, 'There's no place to park, man, where we gonna put the caravan?' We had two Sunday Morning Services and one Monday Night Class in San Francisco. On the second Sunday morning I announced that it was a drivers' meeting, and we were going to stow and go, we were going to go find a farm, because we'd become a village on the road."

How do I fit into all of this? Almost by accident, I discovered Stephen's Monday Night meetings. Trina Robbins (never a member of SAPS; our loss) was in town from LA, there was a hot rumor of a free Dead and Airplane concert that Monday night at Winterland, no one would answer the phone at Winterland to confirm or deny, so off we drove to check it out. Negative. But from the distant recesses of my mind I recalled ex-SAP Andy Main telling me of something (?) happening at the Straight Theater. That something was Stephen. I was captivated by his no bullshit common sense approach to things, no matter how heavy the acid references, and didn't miss a Monday night after this first one for over a year. When the matter of going on the Caravan came up for me, it was the wrong time. I'd just met my future wife, we were moving in together and getting to know each other (we met at a Sunday Morning Service, introduced by a mutual friend), I had a profitable wholesaling operation going on, and so forth. I have to say here, too, that I was never as 100% gungho no-questions-asked about Stephen as many of his other followers, even while living on The Farm. Later, when the busses returned and were about to take off again, I waffled once again. Business was still good, I hadn't gone on the Caravan and lacked the intense sense of community to the fullness of the full of those who had gone, and also I thought: "Tennessee! The goddamn' South!" I'd been a civil rights activist in the '60s and the very notion of going voluntarily to live in the south kind of turned me off, to say the least. But my wife was more into it than me, the whole atmosphere and times were highly conducive to sudden change, and so in early May of 1971--having sold off a large portion of those things we call our worldly possessions and stored most of the rest-- we took off to Tennessee in our converted 1952 Dodge former San Francisco mail truck. Built to climb the steep hills of the city that knows how, this truck's gears prevented it from comfortably driving much above 50 mph, and it felt good and relaxed at 45, and anyway we'd never gone on a long trip together and it was kind of a honeymoon.

And so we caught up with the Caravan in Nashville just as it was about to move to 1,000 acres of borrowed land some 70 miles south of the country music capital, and on May 12, 1971, set foot for the first time on The Farm. I remember joking not

long afterwards with Bill Meyers about the Cosmic Circle and the love camps in the Ozarks, but he didn't think it was quite as amusing as I did, I could tell. He was deep in the Inner Circle at the time. (This is an allusion I'll have to let stand for now.) But he did tell me that apparently Stephen had some contact with fandom at some point and alluded to "letters in SATA," a dittoed fanzine published by Bill Pearson (and Dan Adkins, too, I think, though perhaps not for all issues). I have never been able to verify this myself. Does anyone have a file of SATA who could look through them and report back? Thank you.

But I digress and, perhaps, conclude. As you can see from the salient portions of the foregoing narrative, The Farm was definitely started as an intentional community. We did it on purpose 'cause it seemed like the Farmish thing to do....

I have a piece of tofu stuck in my teeth.

I HOPE THAT when, many years from now, someone is preparing their PhD thesis, "Symbology in the Later SAPSzines of Robert 'Bob' Lichtman," they will take into account the following statement:

Hey, posterity! Get a load of this. These ensmalled SAPS rags are done under the joint pressure of procrastination and a quarterly deadline, and with some resistance to Doing Mailing Comments. Any symbolism contained in these pages is strictly accidental, or at least (ahaha) subconscious. The author has a sercon (see FANCY III, "later definition") approach to his subject matter, that's for sure. Analyze at your own risk.

AS WITH the last mailing, a few parting shots by way of mailing comments: Leigh Edmonds: Just want to say I enjoy RATAPLAN a lot (it's my favorite Australian fanzine) and should write you an loc but am good at not doing that. Would you consider TRAP DOOR (you've been sent two so far) a trade for any you don't run through SAPS? Dian Crayne: Knowing the collectors' instinct, I would not at all be surprised if authors' original diskettes got sold at auction for high prices in much the same way original mss. do now. Harry Warner Jr: Having you join SAPS is one of the most amazing events to occur in fandom since my degafiation; welcome. Gem, Tosk & others: Please help to save trees and postage by printing on both sides of the paper, thank you. And finally, Nancy Rapp: It would be immodest of me not to agree with you about the "raw sex appeal" and also the "insomnia." Good night.

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