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Kramer-Mathews-Gyorgy Collection

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1969-1993

1 box (0.25 linear foot)

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ABSTRACT

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Background on Montague Farmers

BIOGHIST sentences

Tony Mathews

Tony Mathews was an activist and self-taught farmer who lived at the Montague Farm commune from 1969-1982.

Tony grew up in LA and, in 1969, was attending the University of CA when he felt compelled to take a larger role in the fight against the Vietnam War. He dropped out of school and moved into a household in Pasadena where members of "The Resistance" were living and working. He was arrested for the first time at an anti-war protest that year, at the age of 19.

Having turned in his draft card, and thinking he was eventually going to be imprisoned for refusing to go to war, Tony took a last hitchhiking trip cross-country. (He had already done this several times as a teenager!) While travelling through New England, he stopped at the Montague Farm to meet activist Marshall Bloom. Marshall invited Tony to join the commune. The next week, Tony was in Washington, DC for the Vietnam War Moratorium when he heard that Marshall had committed suicide. Tony immediately returned to the farm, and while bonding with the folks there, decided to stay.

Tony was curious to try out rural living after being in LA. For a period of time that first winter, the home crew shrunk down to only three people, struggling to stay warm in a wood-heated, uninsulated farmhouse. They had a cow which needed milking every day. Happily, throughout 1970, the household filled with people again. They planted extensive organic gardens and acquired more animals.

Tony's draft evasion case was dropped on a technicality, and he was able to commit to his life at the farm. He began teaching himself the skills he would need, such as carpentry and mechanics. He learned to use a tractor and chainsaw. He was mentored by the older farmer next-door --Rob Ripley-- who had grown up in the house the Montague Farmers were living in. Tony eventually became foreman of Rob's maple sugaring operation.

In 1973-74 Tony took a trip to visit friends in Europe then spent nine months hitchhiking through eastern Africa. (He was proud of the fact that, in one year of travelling, he spent only \$5,000!) Returning to the farm, he found the household energized by a new cause: the fight against nuclear power. A nuclear plant had been proposed for the Montague plains and communitard Sam Lovejoy had knocked down the utility's weather tower in an act of civil disobedience.

In 1976, Tony was arrested, along with 17 others, in the first non-violent direct action against the proposed nuclear plant in Seabrook, NH. Over the years, activists living at Montague Farm continued their involvement in many political issues. Tony supported them by serving as one of the main caretakers of the farm property. (He was also the person who filled the house with music; he always served as DJ at parties, and would try to get people dancing.)

In 1978, Sue Kramer moved to the commune to be with Tony. They spent the next four years farming together, with annual trips to CA (and occasional trips to attend protests in NYC and Wash DC!) Tony sold hay, cordwood, lumber and syrup, and began working on a carpentry crew. In 1980 Sue and Tony welcomed their first child, Phoebe.

In 1982 Tony and his family moved to the Keller Farm in Wendell, where they lived in a small cabin (with no water, and a baby in cloth diapers!) In 1984, Tony and Sue bought a 50-acre piece of land in the nearby farming community of Gill and began to build their own house. (Deciding to build timber-framed, earth-sheltered, passive solar house, they had to rely on a few scant library books for how-to information!) Tony made every piece of lumber used for the building (except the clapboards.) Tony and Sue completed the house just in time for the birth of their son, Cory, in 1986.

Tony farmed his land actively for the rest of his life, doing many of the things he had loved doing at Montague Farm (haymaking, sugaring...) He eventually became a carpentry contractor, and became known for his beautiful cabinetry and furniture. Always generous by nature, he donated time and his skills to the local community -- for example, building shelves for the library and bridges for the nature preserve. Tony served for 20 years on the Gill Conservation Commission (most of it as chairperson) and joined a number of environmental committees in the town and county. He organized the Democratic Party caucus in Gill. He joined in actions against the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant, just upriver from Gill.

In 2009, Tony was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. During the following 20 months, he underwent three brain operations and volunteered for a number of clinical trials in Boston (never failing to bring flowers from his garden to all the nurses). He planted more trees and blueberry bushes on his property, rototilled new gardens for neighbors, gave away lots of homemade furniture, and threw a party for 200 of his closest friends. During the last months of his life, Tony's friends nursed him at home while Sue was at work. His musician friends played their instruments for him and wrote songs about him. It was fitting that a life filled with community ended with so many people around him.

Tony died on Martin Luther King Day in 2011. Cory moved back to the family farm to help Sue take care of it, and Phoebe built a house across the street on land Tony had set aside for her a long time ago.

Scope of collection

FISH HEAD

SCOPE

Inventory

UNIT TITLE

1929

1

SCOPE

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of Susan Kramer and Anna Gyorgy, Kan. 2018.

Digitized content

The collection has been digitized and may be viewed online through SCUA's digital repository, Credo.

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Montague Farm Community (Mass.)

Contributors

Kramer, Susan [main entry]

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