

**My CLO Story**  
**By Frank A. Shepherd**  
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I thought for posterity, and those who might care years or decades from now, that I might set forth my recollections and the history of my time at the Cooperative Living Organization from 1965-1968, acknowledging that both time and what I might have wished may affect what I record. So, I begin with a disclaimer that any errors in this writing are mine alone.

I arrived at the University of Florida in the Fall, 1964 from Lantana, Florida, a small town in Palm Beach County, which had just begun to grow beyond its long-time population of 500 to something closer to 5,000. According to the 1960 census, Palm Beach County had a population of about 228,000. I believe the University had a student population of about 15,000. UF was the biggest place I had ever seen in my life. I was intimidated, if not scared to death, during my entire four years in Gainesville. Freshmen were required to live on campus during their first year, so I lived in Tolbert Hall.

Because my father was on the Lantana town council during most of my years in Lantana, I developed an interest in politics. When I arrived in Gainesville, I knew (from sixth grade) that I wanted to go to law school, so I joined the Florida Alligator as a reporter and by my second year, was a student senator. In the course of these activities, I met Steve Cheeseman, a Big Man on Campus (BMOC) as we called them. Fraternities and sororities

were still quite strong on campus, but we were self-described “independents.” He introduced me to the CLO.

In Lantana, my father supported my family, including me, my mother and three younger brothers, on the income from a small grocery store business well before Winn-Dixie arrived in town. Publix was a gleam in the eye of its Lakeland founding family. I became a resident at the CLO in Fall, 1965 and graduated in political science in Spring, 1968. All of my brothers, John, Will, and Jimmy followed me to the CLO. Jimmy was the President during his time.

My background did not fit what I remember as the typical CLO student “profile” of the day. My recollection is that most of the residents of the CLO were from smaller towns to the north of where I grew up, and most were in the physical sciences, or engineering, subjects much more difficult than I could handle. I just wanted grades for law school.

While I was there, the CLO had about 55 residents in four houses – the Brick House, Brown House, White House, Chow Hall, and an accompanying garage. Records at the CLO indicate that the CLO was started in the depression era of 1931 by four students who banded together in a house or garage across the street (not being there, I do not know what direction) from the present CLO premises to combine such money as they had to reduce living expenses and get through school.

As I understand it from the records and history presently on the premises of the CLO, Dr. Joseph Fulk, a faculty member in the School of Education, lived across the street from these

students in the Brick House (four-sided red brick), and, because he both admired these students and had no heirs, placed the property on which the four houses were situated in a trust for the use of the CLO for as long as it existed. All of this documentation is recorded in the Office of the Clerk of Alachua County and presently appears on the CLO website. Dr. Fulk dedicated the property to his wife, Nellie Swanson Fulk, and a headstone has long been on the property memorializing that fact. Rumors I have heard are that he met the students because they were a bit rowdy and he crossed the street to speak with them.

I became Secretary and President of the CLO while I was at the CLO. The residents were all males. We had no girls, at least officially. Except for the “Brick House,” the other three houses, which I presume Professor Fulk probably assembled for investment purposes while alive, were all typical southern-style, white, clap-board houses. The “garage” behind the brick house was constructed in brick.

The Brick House had heat, but the other three buildings were heated on cold nights using kerosene heaters. New residents started out in the attic of the Brick House. I understand that there was some kind of access inside the building and a set of (probably) fire stairs at the north side of the building used by the students (about six) who lived in the attic. I am sure we violated some fire codes of the day, but we did not know any better. We had no alumni or other on-site supervision. We also had no air conditioning. Early Sinclair and later a female assistant cooked on an ordinary family stove, as I recall. The CLO did not have a dishwasher. They were still fairly rare in the

United States from what I recall. I made the mistake one time of firing all of the CLO student dishwashers to my discredit. They were reinstated.

Thankfully, the University did not much care about us. We were self-governing. Our affiliation with the University, if there was one, was through the UF Office of Off-Campus Housing, located in another stepped, southern-style clapboard house on the northwest corner of N.W. 15<sup>th</sup> Street across from Anderson Hall. Carl Opp, a paraplegic, was either formally assigned to us or took an interest. To my knowledge, he never came by. We could go to him for advice or if we needed something. I think the main assistance he provided was to keep an eye out for furniture and beds that the University no longer needed. That is how we furnished the place.

Parenthetically, there being no such thing as handicapped ramps, I can distinctly recall Carl Opp sliding himself down the steps of the building where his office was located and working himself into his wheel-chair. I don't know how his disability occurred, but I will note that World War II was only 20 years in the past when I was at UF. On the one or two occasions I saw him slide down the stairs, he refused my offers to assist. There was no Americans with Disabilities Act. Times were different.

While I was there, there was frequent talk of a need for a "new house." Although I am sure we students (not knowing much else) were generally present-oriented, we all seemed to like the idea. For reasons long lost on me, I undertook the project. As secretary, I contacted alumni and collected (as I vaguely recall) about \$7,000 in donations. While a lot of money

for the day, it was not nearly enough. Somehow I heard that the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development was funding new University buildings and the like in the wake of the Russians having beaten us into space. Without any input from the University, I decided to apply for a HUD loan. Jack Turner, an architect from Auburndale (the midget in the group photos presently at the CLO), who lived at the CLO in the early 1950's and who somehow became willing to help, assisted. Together we "applied" and after a couple of trips to the HUD regional headquarters in Atlanta, we were awarded \$280,000 to build a new building, designed to house 80 students. When I graduated in the Spring, 1968, I think the loan was pretty much in place. Parenthetically, we had to change the name of the CLO to the Collegiate Living Organization to satisfy some government agricultural hurdle. It was probably the most controversial topic of the project. But thankfully the original name was restored a decade or so ago, about which more anon.

After that, I understand that a metallurgical engineer, who (as many CLO members of the day later did well and became well-known in their professions) by the name of Walter Tarr did the heavy lifting to bring the "new buildings" to fruition. I remember attending their dedication in 1972. Tarr portrayed himself as a rough cobbler but was as nice a kid as you could know. Few of us had cars, but Walter had an old Chrysler and took us places when we needed to go (including to places where some of us who were under the legal drinking age of 21 at the time could get a drink).

Walter moved the CLO to an empty building near sorority row for a while and, I am sure, dealt with many construction issues, along with our architect Jack Turner. I am sure the project would have failed without them. Jack Turner is deceased, but I hope Walter Tarr will someday finish my story.

I understand, for example, that when at a critical moment, Walter was receiving resistance from the secretary of the Florida Cabinet (acting no doubt as the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund at the time) from getting on its (probably December, 1970) agenda on short notice so that construction could be approved and completed before the coming Fall, Tarr took it upon himself to walk to then UF President Steve O'Connell's office on the top floor of Tigert Hall without an appointment, and asked to see the President. Fortunately for Tarr, President O'Connell was in his office. Tarr was escorted into the President's office. After hearing Tarr's request, O'Connell said he "would take care of it." A few days later, Tarr received a call telling him that the CLO was on the agenda. Knowing Walter Tarr and later getting to know Steve O'Connell, I believe the story.

The last thing of moment I remember is the day I integrated the CLO in the mid-1960s while I was either Secretary or President. My recollection of the situation is that Harold Barnett, a resident who I think had no relatives who were responsible for him (not atypical of CLO members of the day) came to me and said he had a couple of proposed new residents. I was, of course, delighted. Then (I think I remember this fairly-well), he said I need to tell you something. I said "what?" He said they were

black. I will confess that I paused for a moment. However, for context, the reader needs to remember UF was integrated on September 7, 1962, a mere four or five years earlier, and I grew up in the South. Happily, I am able to say, after a few seconds of thought, I told Harold Barnett, that if they were qualified, they were in. It should surprise no one who can place himself or herself back in the time, there was some grumbling, but no one had the courage to object “on the record.”

In recent times, Roger Johnson has done a little research. I attach the information he gave me on these students (and, by the way, Early Sinclair) on a separate page. I have tried to contact them, but have not received a response. There may have been others who joined, but these are the ones Roger could identify. I am told Early Sinclair, our cook of more than a decade, is now 91 years old and lives in Gainesville. I have tried to contact him by letter as well, without success. Perhaps a current CLO student might try to follow up.

Finally, for decades after I left Gainesville in Spring, 1968, I did not think about UF or the CLO. In fact, I will confess my four years in Gainesville were not my happiest for a variety of personal and other reasons. Nevertheless, one night in late January, 2006, I received a call from Roger Johnson, who was at the CLO during my time and was preceded by several of his brothers. He had tracked me down. I have no idea how he found my telephone number. I happened to be in Atlanta at the moment. He advised that the University had told the students (there were just a small number, perhaps fewer than twenty occupants) that the University was going to shut down the CLO because the buildings were a health hazard and the CLO was no

longer performing the function for which it was created decades earlier. The students were given two weeks to vacate the premises.

I had no special, personal interest in the CLO and was, in fact, a Florida appellate court judge at the time. Nevertheless, I was upset by the fact that the University seemed to be wielding a heavy hand. Supposedly, the University was offering to help the residents find new housing, but I thought that was probably a pretext. As it turned out later, e-mails that we obtained from Freedom of Information requests indicated that the underlying reason for the action was that the University wanted the property. This motive was consistent with Professor Fulk's still recorded trust deed, which provides that at such time the CLO ceases to exist, the property was to be sold and proceeds provided to the School of Education where he taught. One could easily see that UF would bid, acquire the property and receive the proceeds to boot.

Whatever may have been the motive, I agreed to drive to the CLO from Atlanta to the CLO on Sunday, February 6, 2006 for a 1:00 p.m. meeting. Roger Johnson managed to have a half dozen or so alumni present, including Joe Waldron (a Gainesville orthodontist from my era), the Liguori brothers, one of whom was a retired Winn-Dixie turn around businessman, Vince Assini, who overlapped with me, but who left UF for Germany with a backpack after graduating from UF business school and returned rich after helping to turn Leica Camera Company into a public company, Robert Peele, an engineer with a serious heart issue who helped put men on the moon from Huntsville, Alabama, a few others, and some students.

By the end of a meeting that lasted two hours, Vince Assini, who displayed his goal for the CLO on a three by five card (clean, safe, and financially sound), became the obvious choice to negotiate with UF. Steve Hull (an Alligator student editor during my time who did well thereafter and understood the press) and I (with some contact with the then Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, Allen Bense, who was the adopted son or something close thereto of 1952 CLO President, Charlie Hilton), did our part. The press, particularly the Gainesville Sun and Florida Alligator, followed the students' plight – first unapprovingly but then changing their mind and supporting the students due largely through efforts by Steve Hull (who wrote an Op Ed that appeared in the Gainesville Sun, as I recall).

I have it from a pretty good source that Allen Bense (who had the authority to make it happen) told UF President Bernie Machen that if UF did not lay off the CLO, the University would not get its annual appropriation. Serendipitously, the state legislature was in session during the kerfuffle period with the University. President Machen got the message, and as a result of Assini's efforts, the CLO survived. I would have bet against it. Returning to their many decade hands-off policy on the CLO, UF ceded the trusteeship of the CLO property to the CLO Alumni Association, presently headed by Vince Assini and for which there is a website linked to the CLO website (for both history and donations as well).

After that, it was a slow revival for a while. However, after about 14 to 15 years, CLO is well back on its feet. The buildings

have undergone a substantial amount of renovation, due to the generosity of alumni who have come forward to support the organization. Before COVID, the CLO was full with a waiting list. It operated just as it has for 90 years, albeit with a little (but not much) alumni-trustee oversight. The students still do details in return for two hot meals a day at a low monthly price. They also means-test entrants. During COVID, a reduction of residents to about 55 and strong student management has kept the CLO open and safe. There is every reason to believe that the CLO will return to a full complement of residents and a waiting list again within the year. Indeed, the same Walter Tarr discussed above, has recently donated \$100,000 to start a scholarship fund for CLO students. The CLO has come a long way since it started with four students in a garage in 1931.

I am hoping to attend the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2031 if I am alive. In the meanwhile, I have been pleased to offer such support as I can to the CLO. Without the CLO, there would be many tens of hundreds of students, if not more, who would not be able to attend the University of Florida. That makes my time worthwhile.

I encourage others to write their recollections of their time at CLO and provide them to the CLO President or Vice-President at either [clo1931@gmail.com](mailto:clo1931@gmail.com) or [vp.clo1931@gmail.com](mailto:vp.clo1931@gmail.com)

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Dated: this 1<sup>st</sup> day of June, 2021.

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