

Commune Expands Into Northfield

10-22-70

NORTHFIELD — A college sociology professor today disclosed she is renouncing that profession to answer "an irresistible call to a spiritual ministry" and is also giving to a Warwick commune her home,

Brotherhood is currently appealing in the Franklin County courts a Warwick Board of Health order to evacuate Warwick property given the commune last spring by a Worcester woman.

The Northfield property transfer was filed yesterday at the Franklin County Registry of Deeds in the name of Christopher C. Garland, formerly of Greenfield and one of the original Brotherhood members.

Members and other young people have long been welcome at Mrs. Backman's home. The youngest of her children are in college.

Garland told The Recorder last night that "we are expanding our facilities to further our purposes. Our band, Spirit in Flesh, will require more room, as it is signing recording contracts now.

"The purpose of the band is, of course, to communicate the message of brotherhood.

"The house, as it was formerly a hostel, has the necessary sewage equipment, although we are installing a brand new system anyway."

Garland indicated that the acquisition of the Northfield property does not mean a total move from the Warwick site, rather, it is an addition to the Warwick property, enabling the Brotherhood to handle more people.

Both in her resignation to GCC and in another statement,

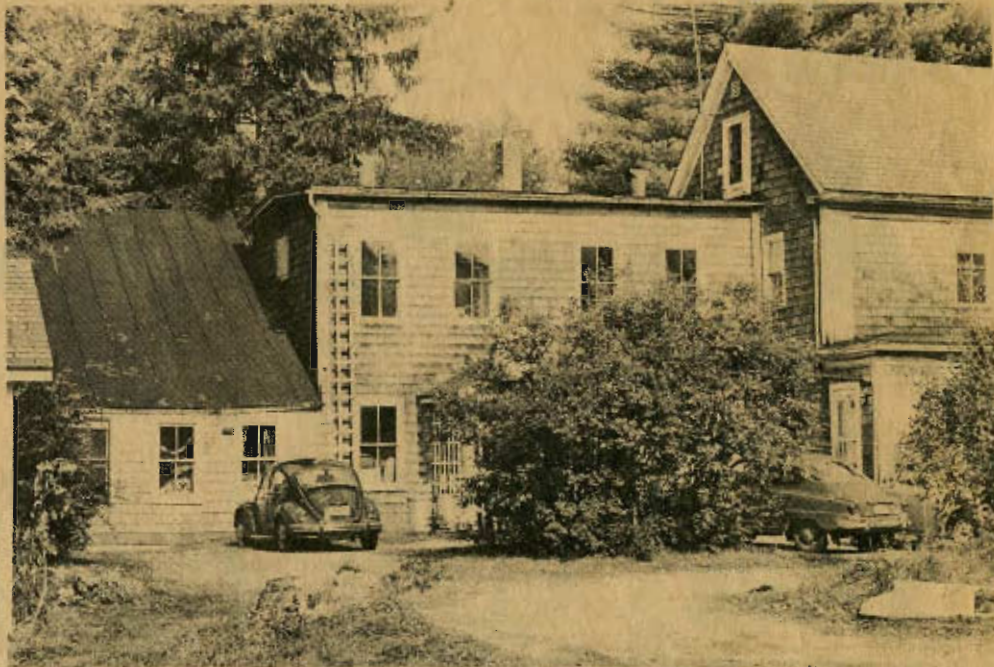


ELIZABETH BACKMAN

the site of the first Youth Hostel in America.

Mrs. Elizabeth H. (St. Clair) Backman announced in prepared statements she has submitted her resignation to Greenfield Community College after seven years of teaching.

Title to the 20-room house at 88 Main St. was turned over to the Brotherhood of the Spirit, a group of young men and women whom some call "hippies." The



THE SPRAWLING PROPERTY that was formally transferred yesterday to the Brotherhood of the Spirit includes several buildings. About 40 commune members and a sign that says "Brotherhood of the Spirit II" appeared last night. —Recorder Photo by Wilkins.

Mrs. Backman noted a "deep concern for the deterioration of the inner fiber of men everywhere.

"Why am I leaving? I view it not so much as leaving one spot as responding to a call to a far greater task that is needed today. As a girl of 15 I wanted already to enter the liberal ministry, though at that time

with little concept of what this meant beyond putting one's whole life behind one's awareness and faith.

"In a sense one's life in any form or circumstance is a testimony and may be a ministry. One of the problems of that earlier year is that I saw specific church ministry too much caught up in creeds,

forms and other institutionalized limitations ...

"At the time I needed much more courage, more training, more multi-level experience — which today is mine."

Mrs. Backman added that her family lineage, both on the Haggood and St. Claire sides, is

(Continued on Page Twelve)

Commune--

(Continued From Page One)

a history of long involvement in social education and reform.

"My work with Opie Mountain Citadel now requires full-time service . . .," Mrs. Backman said.

"It is not one more church with a restrictive creed and institutional boundaries. It is a center, a nucleus, a focal point for any and all who are seeking answers at the inmost essential universal spiritual level.

"It's not a place, not a thing. It's a point of view, a fellowship of people."

Mrs. Backman indicated long interest and support in the Brotherhood of the Spirit.

"From the very beginning three years ago, when the first members were beginning to come together to search for a better way and a deeper meaning and commitment, I have been utterly delighted to watch and share in a spiritual regeneration and service so sorely needed.

"What better place for them to have as one of their bases than a place with a tradition of youth service in a town with a long religious and educational commitment!"

"No, I have no idea exactly where in a material way this decision will take me," she said.

"But I have faith that closing this door to step out into the University of the World will open doors to a wider and freer service to a deeply troubled and searching mankind, and as always I know full well that in this world classroom, as at GCC, I will learn far more than anyone else and the rewards will be beyond all measuring or predicting in material terms."

The house was built in 1795 for Atty. Solomon Vose, the town's first postmaster. Other owners have included Timothy Swan, the first librarian of Northfield, Wright Stratton, owner of the town's first water company, hotelman Charles A. Lindsay, and poet and naturalist John Phelps.

In 1933 the property became the headquarters for the First American Youth Hostel, and in 1952 was purchased by Mrs. Backman.