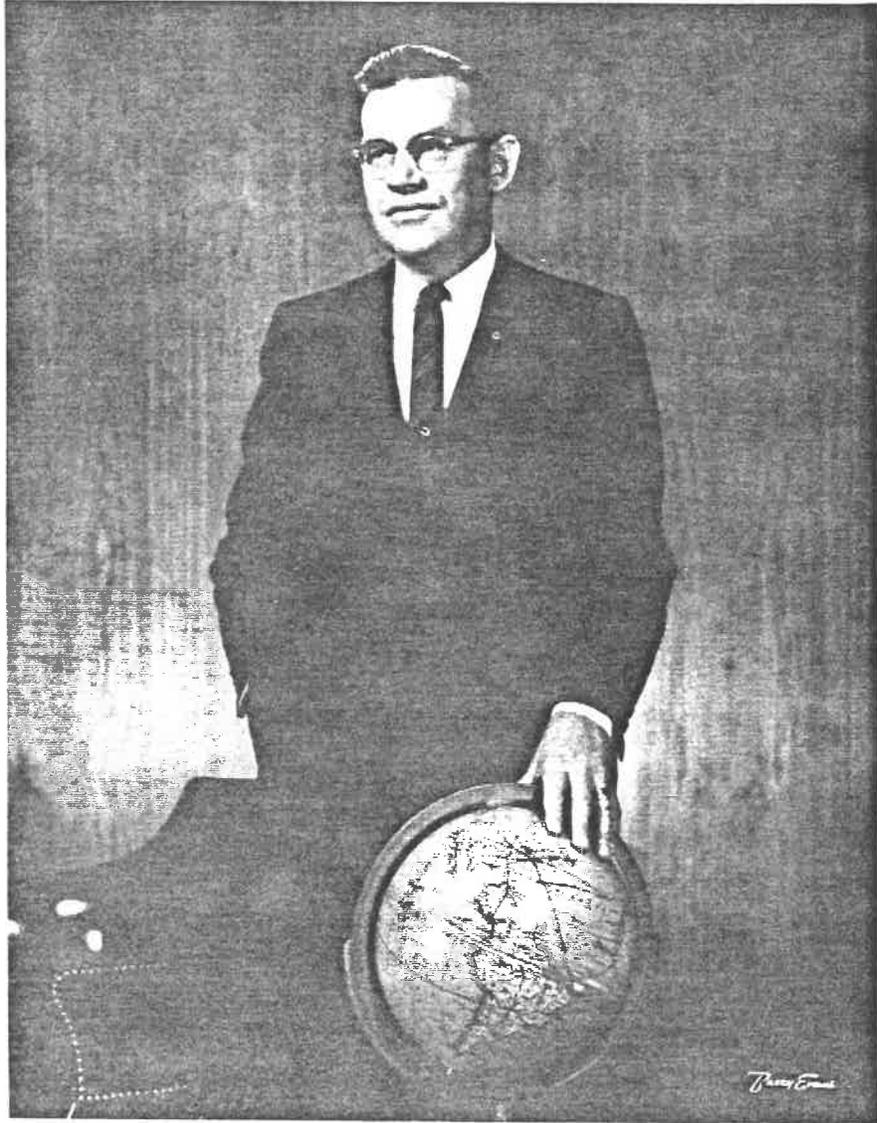


*Eugene Mannila*  
*A Finnish Pioneer of the*  
*Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley*



Eugene Mannila (1967)

## INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1979, Professor of Sociology Herbert Maccoby from the University of Maine in Orono, conducted some exploratory taped interviews with a few Consumers' Cooperative of Berkeley (CCB) pioneers. These interviews were done in connection with his research on the CCB, the largest segment of California consumer cooperative activity and the largest cooperative of its kind in the United States. The interviews focused on sociological and ideological aspects of the consumers' cooperative movement in general, and on the CCB in particular. The pioneers included Tauno Ahonen, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Bush, Mr. and Mrs. Tracy Clark, Eugene Mannila, Mrs. Arvid Nelson (now deceased), Robert Neptune, Catherine Nollenberger, and Rev. Roy E. Wilson.

In the spring of 1981, a grant from the Friends of the Berkeley Public Library made it possible for the Berkeley Historical Society to transcribe oral history tapes that relate to Berkeley history. The Historical Society's Oral History Committee, with the permission of the interviewer and the CCB, decided to review and transcribe several of the CCB tapes. Three have been selected for transcription because of more complete and diversified information on the CCB: Tauno Ahonen, Eugene Mannila, and Catherine Nollenberger. Of these, two pioneers (Ahonen and Mannila) are part of the important Finnish contingent that contributed so much to CCB's founding and leadership. A chronology of important CCB events compiled by Robert Neptune can be found at the front of each transcribed interview.

In addition to the transcripts for the CCB Oral History Collection, supplementary materials are appended here: newspaper articles, photographs, subject indexes of the tapes that were not transcribed, and a copy of a master's thesis on the life of Finnish Co-op activist Arvid Nelson by his son, Allan Nelson. Mechanical difficulties in taping Robert Neptune's interview made it impossible to transcribe. However, Mr. Neptune will provide us with a condensed written version of the tape and bring the information up to date on current CCB activities. His manuscript is in process and will be appended.

Volunteer help was essential for completion of these transcripts. Irene Heller assisted on typing, Beth Wilson on indexing and editing, Patricia Pope on subject indexing, Cleo Stoker and Kathy DeVries on proofreading. Elaine Dorfman, Willa Baum and Karen Jorgensen-Esmaili helped on the fine points of pulling together an oral history transcript. Anne Dorst was invaluable as the liaison for the CCB.

Future plans for this collection include more interviews with additional pioneers and leaders of the Consumers' Cooperative of Berkeley.

Therese Pipe  
Oral History Committee of the  
Berkeley Historical Society  
Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association

February, 1983

Chronology of Major Events in the History of the  
Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley, Inc.

- 1936 Establishing of a depot for delivery service of Pacific Cooperative Services in Alameda. The depot was in the basement of the Methodist minister's home (Rev. Roy Wilson). Bob Neptune was the manager.
- 1937 Delivery service moved to Berkeley, operating from a small store front at 2489 Shattuck Avenue.
- 1938 Store moved from Shattuck Avenue to 1715 University Avenue. Operations continued to provide a telephone order and delivery service, along with the maintenance of regular store hours. Bob March became the second employee.
- Service station opened by the Berkeley Cooperative Union, a cooperative which was organized by the Finnish community and separate from the grocery cooperative, at Bancroft Way and San Pablo.
- 1939 Service station moved to corner of Acton and University Avenues to new facility built for the co-op. Eugene Mannila was an early manager of the Berkeley Cooperative Union.
- 1940 New food store built on property adjacent to the cooperative service station at 1414 University Avenue. Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley was incorporated to own the real property and the assets of the Berkeley store of Pacific Cooperative Services which were transferred to CCB. Employees became unionized.
- 1941 Berkeley Cooperative Union opened hardware store at 1432 University Avenue.
- 1942 Branch food store opened on Ashby Avenue near College. Delivery service was discontinued because of wartime restrictions on use of automotive equipment.
- 1943 Branch food store opened at Colusa Circle to provide additional facility in different part of Berkeley because of discontinuing of delivery service.
- 1946 Branch stores on Ashby and Colusa Circle closed as war ended and all activities were consolidated again at 1414 University Avenue.
- 1947 On January 1, after two years of discussion, the Berkeley Cooperative Union and the Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley were merged, with CCB as the surviving corporation. A new board was elected representing members from both cooperatives. The new organization was then operating a service station, food store, and hardware store. Membership was just over 1400 and sales were just over \$300,000 per year. Eugene Mannila became the manager.
- 1948 Major remodeling of store at 1414 University Avenue provided much larger shopping facilities.
- 1949 Education director employed for the first time.
- 1952 Service station moved to corner of Sacramento and University Avenue. The food store was again remodeled, with the enlarged store covering the area formerly occupied by the old service station.
- 1955 New hardware store built at 1432 University Avenue; the old store was torn down.

- 1956 Property purchased and new store built for second major center at 1510 Geary Road, Walnut Creek. Service station and credit union office constructed at same site.
- 1959 Property purchased on Cedar, Shattuck, and Henry Streets, old houses removed, and new shopping center facilities constructed at 1550 Shattuck Avenue. Facilities included food store, book store, pharmacy, credit union. Book store and pharmacy later moved.
- 1962 Assets of Sids Store chain purchased, with five stores included: 3000 Telegraph Avenue; 3667 Castro Valley Boulevard, Castro Valley; 1295 South Main Street, Walnut Creek; 1484 University Avenue, and 1491 Shattuck Avenue. The Shattuck Avenue store was closed in 1965. The Castro Valley and South Main, Walnut Creek, stores were closed in 1981. The University Avenue store was remodeled and converted to a natural foods store in 1971.
- 1963 Property was purchased and a new shopping center constructed at 1751 East-shore Blvd., El Cerrito. Facilities included food store, bakery, pharmacy, service station, credit union, clothing store (later replaced by bottle shop).
- 1964 Garage opened at 1516 Shattuck Avenue. Moved to 1535 University Avenue in 1968 and closed in 1978.
- 1967 Store facility at 1607 Shattuck Ave. purchased and remodeled for hardware-variety store and pharmacy. Hardware store moved from 1432 University Ave.
- Property purchased and shopping center constructed at 71 Tamal Vista Blvd., Corte Madera. Facilities included food store, natural foods store, bottle shop, credit union.
- Pharmacy added to University Avenue center.
- 1969 Pharmacy added to Telegraph Ave. center. Book store added to Telegraph Ave. center; it was later closed and the space incorporated into the food store.
- 1971 Major remodel and expansion of the Shattuck Avenue food store.
- 1972 Wilderness store added to Corte Madera center (closed in 1974).
- 1973 Wilderness store added to hardware-variety store and to Walnut Creek store. The South Main, Walnut Creek, unit closed in 1974.
- 1974 Garden shop opened in El Cerrito center (later leased out).
- Lease acquired on store at 3660 Broadway, in the MacArthur-Broadway shopping center. Store was operated until 1981.
- Lease acquired on store at 434 E. 18th Street, Oakland. It was operated until 1979.
- 1975 Lease acquired on store in Northpoint Shopping Center, 350 Bay Street, San Francisco, including food store, bottle shop. Later, natural foods facilities were incorporated into store.
- 1976 Major remodeling of University Avenue center to enlarge facilities again.
- 1979 Addition of bottle shop to Shattuck Avenue facilities.
- 1980 Remodel of Telegraph Avenue center to expand pharmacy and add natural foods department.

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Interview with: EUGENE MANNILA  
Date: Aug. 3, 1979  
Interviewer: Herb Maccoby  
Transcriber: Irene Heller

I: Interviewer  
N: Narrator

EARLY FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN COOPERATIVES

I: Well, first what I'd like you to tell me how you got involved in the cooperative movement in general. By the way, I won't be primarily talking about the CCB. I will ask you about them, but I'd also like you to talk about the BCU, so far as you were involved in it, and also we'll be talking about the cooperative movement in general. I will ask you some very broad questions and from time to time I will ask you more detailed questions, depending upon how things go. Firstly, tell us about how you got started in the cooperative movement.

N: Well, I've always said that I was born into the cooperative movement. My father was an organizer of several cooperative organizations in the Middle West, Minnesota to be exact, and they of course did it out of necessity, economic necessity, plus the fact that when they homesteaded grounds, farms and so on, many of the little communities just didn't have any place to do any shopping, or selling a few eggs that they might have left over and stuff. So...so the cooperative became sort of a marketing outlet, and as well as a consumer, as a general merchandise (yes) operation.

I: Customer supplies the store?

N: Yes. Most of those were small. Just to give you an example, the cooperative that I grew up with, that was in my community, today has an annual sales volume of about \$170,000 a year. As compared with Shattuck Avenue, for example, doing \$275,000 a week. (Laughter) So it gives you, you know, some kind of perspective. But it was important, it was the only way that we could acquire goods without driving several miles, and without being at the mercy of the merchants in power, and so forth.

I: How big a community was it? How many families?

N: Oh, I suppose we could have had, maybe a couple of hundred families. It was a rural community, and every rural community had a co-op in those days. And the means of transportation were different, mostly horse and buggy, and don't forget, I'm getting old. (Laughter) So I go back a few years, (Sure,) and even cars didn't travel as far in those days, and so it was important that every community normally had a focal point within the community, had a community hall, and a school, and a co-op store, and once in a while, a privately owned store. So that usually made up the rural community center, and it was at the crossroads, or wherever.

I: Sure. What proportion of the community belonged to... you say about 200 families?

N: Probably all of them. Yeah. If they didn't belong to

it, they certainly supported it, and they became members, and the cooperative in those days, or there, rather, people didn't buy memberships, invest in memberships like the original organizers did. They became shareholders through their purchase refunds. And there, they never paid refunds back to you, they just issued 'em in the form of shares. This was a way of building capital. (Yes.) And to this day...well, we have, finally, after about fifty years of this, we've gotten up to a few shares that Mother and Dad had in their investment, which amounted to \$100 or so--it didn't amount to much, but it was a lot of money to them.

I: Sure. In other words, there were never patronage refunds, in effect?

N: There were, but they were never refunded in cash. They were just issued in the form of shares.

I: And the only way you got...if you wanted to, you withdrew your membership and...

N: You died, or you moved, and then they had a rotating plan by which they paid..so that even if you moved...in Mother and Dad's case, before they died they moved here, we got them to move here, uh...it was several years before they were eligible for the few shares that they had.... Even then, they weren't paid off until both of them had died...because... no, no, that's not true. Mother...Mother was still living,

because we got the shares in their case when Mother was still alive; Dad had passed away.

I: That's very interesting. Had your father had any experience in organizing co-ops?

N: No, he hadn't. He came to this country<sup>\*</sup> as a young man about 19 years old, and he was probably a hoodlum like all of the other 19-year-olds in those days, you know, just wild and woolly, and ready to take on everything. Dad was a...a supporter of the IWW, if you know anything about them.

I: Yes, I do. How'd he get involved with the IWW?

N: Well, he just believed in...in trying to improve the lot of the common man, the working man, and he didn't have very many choices. He worked for a little while in the city, in the mining industry, and then in Minnesota, in the Hibbing, Minnesota, area, and left there simply because he didn't like to put up with that kind of thing, so he wanted to be his own boss. Came out to the country and bought a homestead, for forty bucks, I think it was..I still have the deed downstairs...I have a tape of Dad's history from way back, but I have never played it since Dad died. I have just not...I have just not had the courage.

I: Oh, that would be wonderful.

N: But I have the update from his childhood...from the day he moved here till...he was getting a little bit fuzzy,

\*From Finland

but he remembered all the things, and I've got them, and someday I'll play them all.

I: Did he remember the old country as well?

N: Oh, yeah. He remembers all of that. But he was never involved in the cooperative movement in the old country. Although I suppose he had some familiarity, and I'm not even sure that the old country had that much cooperative movement going then. So, nonetheless, you know, in those days when Dad was growing up, the average person, immigrants and so forth, they banded together in a lot of activities. They had their religious activities, their temperance unions, their, uh, hall, community halls and so forth. And got into the political activities. And the split between the Communists and the less liberal Communists, the Socialists and so forth, whatever they might have called themselves, occurred when I was just a little kid. I remember a lot of the heat going on even between our families, between relatives and so forth, with some part of the relatives going over on the far left side, and Father being, ah, a less radical more practical person, and feeling that maybe we could do it through unions rather than some other method. But nonetheless, he felt that the cooperatives were really the...the solution to our problems, and they have been. In Minnesota, for example, when I was a youngster, cooperatives were the way of life for every community. I graduated from high school in 1934, and shortly

after that I think I went to work for a cooperative organization, driving a gasoline truck, delivering gasoline to farmers, and I think it was in about...I think it was about a year or two after that, though, 1936, it seems to me, that I went to the, a training school. They had training schools for cooperative employees, you know...it was about 3 months in length, or 4 months, and the purpose of it was to train managers, future managers, and bookkeepers, and whatever else, for cooperative stores, because that was one of the shortages that the cooperatives had. They had a very, very good education program in those days, and a very aggressive education and training program. For cooperatives.

I: Where was this held?

N: In Superior, Wisconsin. (Yes.) And I don't recall whether we had to pay for going there or not. It's vague... it wasn't much, in any case, if it was. I did go there... and...after that I came back on the farm and stayed for another year or whatever and...cleaned the chicken houses and whatever...during the World's Fair I came here.

I had...earlier I had also gone to what was called the Work Peoples' College, which you may not be familiar with. It was a college, school sponsored by the IWW. And that was in a place called New Duluth, which is toward Gary, outside of Duluth itself. Now they had their own school grounds there, and they had instruction, qualified professors, all of 'em, very good. They taught accounting, history,

labor history, of course, and,...nothing pushy, nothing real radical, it was just the labor college. And I went to that in 19...it must have been in '34 also, because I did that after I got out of high school, it seems to me. (Uh huh.) But anyway, there I met my current wife.

I: Oh, she was active in that, too?

N: Well, she had...those were depression years yet. (Yes.) And things were tough. Jobs were scarce and so forth, and she had...she was from a totally different community...several...many miles away...tens of miles away, but had earned a stipend or scholarship to come to this college through some activity of hers. She was active in the community groups, in play acting, that sort of thing. And she had earned a stipend to come there, and so we met there. And then this of course went on for several years before we got married--I think we had known one another for about seven years. But she was already here (Bay Area)...she'd given up on me.

I: Oh, I see. She'd....

N: A friend of hers was here and coaxed her to come here, so they could get jobs here, so she came out here. Of course, the following...about a year later, a cousin of mine and her husband came out to see the World's Fair and invited me to come along on a share-the-gas basis or whatever. We slept in tents across the continent and so forth. Nice trip. And my very first trip away from home.

- I: That's interesting, how you, in effect then, you moved into the co-op almost because you were a part of it, almost from the time you...
- N: Oh, yeah. I worked in the rural cooperative. I did odd jobs there, drove the truck, hauled the feed to the farmers, clerking and that sort of thing.
- I: Sure. Did you ever...did you ever think of the philosophy of the co-op at that time, or did you just move into it because your father'd been active in it?
- N: Mainly because I needed a job. At that age, I didn't need any philosophy, and philosophy meant nothing to me. Dollars and cents were the thing. You know, if you had 50¢ a week, it was a great thing.
- I: Certainly. You went to the IWW labor school because it was an opportunity, a practical opportunity to get a job later and so on?
- N: Not because of that. That was philosophy training. At that time I began to have some interest in things and my dad had an interest in seeing that I would be getting into something other than just being idle and not...just shifting around aimlessly. And that worked out to where I began to get some handle on life, and began to get an understanding...there they also, incidentally, made many references to the cooperative movement, even though they were not necessarily supportive, but there, it was a very good four-months' school. That's all it was.

I: Did you...did you pretty much find the IWW philosophy amenable to you, something that you think that you fit into, that you accepted it?

N: Yeah. Mainly because of my parents', my dad's philosophy. (Sure.) He was...he was a very, very active person, he was involved in everything and I...I just have to say in all modesty, that everybody admired him...because he was...he was a very knowledgeable person...he was just.... He knew where his head was.

I: Would you call him somebody who was pragmatic, or somebody who was an ideologue? Or a combination?

N: No, I think he was a pragmatic person. Ideology entered into it, to some extent. But...a good combination of both. Ideology simply because...if he was going to develop this feeling, he had to get it onto others. (Sure.) And, of course, he espoused...

I: Did he talk with you much about this?

N: Oh, on occasion, and not too much. But just family conversations, and that sort of thing. (Sure.) And would read to me from the various journals that he got, and papers, and so forth, and particular things that might be of interest, and..from him, for example, I learned, long long before I ever came to Berkeley, that there was such a thing as equal opportunity. For people. Whether they were blacks or whites. And, you know, curiously, I've been accused of being racist

and everything else in my job in the Co-op, and I sort of have to laugh inwardly about this because I...I probably have had a longer understanding of this thing than many people. It hurt many times to be called that. Something that...that wasn't really so. (Sure.) But, you know, you just have to...you just have to grin and bear it.

I: Was your father a socialist at that time?

N: No. Never was.

I: Never supported the Socialist Party?

N: No. Well, I guess he may have been on the fringes of it before...before he became involved with IWW.

I: But, when he became involved with the IWW, the IWW didn't have any political party?

N: No.

I: So whom did he...sup...what kind of...

N: Well, then he was a Democrat all...

I: He was a Democrat all his life?

N: Yeah.

I: Well, I was just curious, because there is, there is this constant interweaving between the cooperative movement times and socialism. (Yeah.) And when one talks or reads about socialism, invariably there is a chapter or so about the cooperative movement as leading to it.

N: Yeah. I don't think Dad really believed in socialism as such. I think he would rather have seen the cooperative movement and the IWW being a better meld than the

socialistic movement.

I: Yes. Well, of course that's true in some countries, where the trade unions and the cooperatives are hand in hand. (Yeah.) But I've...the United States has never...

N: Well, he felt that the worker needs to get a break, and the consumer needs to get a break, and this was the way you could get it done...and of course, the IWW was the one big union, there, that was the big dream, many, many years ago.

I: Ah, well, when you came to Berkeley, what happened then? On the West Coast?

N: Well, when I came to the West Coast, I lived in San Francisco. I stayed here because of my wife...then girl friend. And Dad, curiously, when I left, for some reason knew that I wasn't coming...I had no plans for not coming home...but I had saved up \$100, in those days, a lot of money...and, he said, "You know, there's nothing I can do to help you financially, but if you need a ride home, I can always scrape together that ticket."

And it always surprised me...it surprised me at the time, why he said that. But it turned out that that was exactly what was to happen; I stayed, and I was here by myself. My wife, then girl friend, was here, of course, and working, and she helped support me...you know, gave me a dollar or two whenever it was necessary, until I got on my feet with a job, and I worked in San Francisco for odd jobs: carpentry,

general contractors, whatever...they called themselves general contractors. I had a jackknife and a paint brush, and that was the extent of my tools, and I did reversing of rugs, painting jobs, and that kind of stuff. But then I... that wasn't good enough, I felt...so I had a couple of dollars left, and I put an ad in the Chronicle, or Examiner, one or the other, and...and...I got seven job offers. Boy, jobs were tough, and I selected one in Oakland, at the corner of Castro and 7th Street. There was an old Golden Glow Brewery there, and a service station. Well, I knew something about gasoline and that sort of thing, so I hired as a manager there, and it was a steady job, at \$19 a week.

I: Well, that's pretty good. (Laughter)

N: GENE MANNILA AND THE CCB  
And then I was, you know, now I was stable, economically, had some stability, so I subscribed to the Co-op Builder, which was a paper published by the cooperative movement back home. I still wanted my ties. I wanted to know...keep in touch with what was happening even though I was now out of it. And, lo and behold, one day they were looking for a manager of this co-op service station in Berkeley, and I hadn't even the foggiest idea of where Berkeley was, even though I was living in Oakland...that's how new I was. (Sure.) And I thought, it's got to be close by here, somewhere in California, and I made application, and out of 35 applicants, I was the only one that spoke the Finnish language.

I: That was important?

N: And that was important because the Finns were the ones that organized the Berkeley Cooperative Union, and they wanted someone who could converse with their customers in the Finnish language. I remember that interview very well...there was one non-Finn, Carroll Melbin was his name. He was on the Board of Directors, and he was the only one who asked me, "Can you speak any Finnish? Let's hear some." And he could no more understand it than the man in the moon. And the next morning, Mr. Nelson, who is now dead and gone, he was Member No. 2, he called and said, "Well, we've decided to try you out for a couple of months." That was the beginning of my...of my career with the Co-op here.

I: How was your salary in comparison with the one you'd been earning?

N: Oh, then I got, I think it was \$30 a week, which was almost double, yeah, and that was a big increase and then, we had already married, my wife and I before we came here. She--this was so much salary that she could stay home now and be a housewife, and she's been a housewife ever since. Which I'm happy of...

I: That's very nice. As you think about the Co-op, it's clear that you got involved almost because it was a family type of thing...

N: And economic necessity. I think if I had had an

opportunity to enter private business when I was in the formative years, and the needy years, that I could just as easily have gone in that direction. And, of course, later on, as you got into it, then of course you became particularly involved in Berkeley Cooperative Union work. No, this was my responsibility.

I: Were you the first manager after the organization...

N: No, no. I was the second one. Arvo Jacobson was the first manager, He's dead now. But he was there six months, with the Berkeley Cooperative Union, and he also spoke Finnish. But he was...he and the Board just didn't get along, so...either they terminated him or he resigned, one or the other. I've never asked, and I...it's never been important to me. But anyway, the philosophy and the ideology of the cooperative movement of course has grown in that role, and it became a way of life for me from then on. There's no question, I had all the background, from my home, from my training school days, all the rest, so that none of it was foreign, and I just knew how it could be applied. I had the basic principles, and knew how it should be applied, (Sure.) what good could come from it, if we could just apply it.

I: As you came to...in Berkeley in particular,...would you say, were your friends members of the Co-op? Once you came to Berkeley, for example? Personal friends and...

N: No. In fact, when we came to Berkeley, we didn't have any friends...we just didn't know anybody. We made friends,

but many of the friends we made became members of the Co-op through our, you know, association with one another. (Sure.) In the evenings, and they knew me, and we knew them, and so they became supporters and...and ardent supporters, many of them. And believers, and many of them to this day are good strong members of the Co-op.

I: Today, for example, you're retired from the Co-op, would you say most of your friends are still members of the Co-op?

N: Many of them are, some of them have left in the last few years, because of some of their private views and dislikes for how the Co-op has been operating.

I: Talking about that, under what conditions, for example, would you leave the Co-op?

N: I don't think there is a condition that I would leave... I'd stay till the last straw.

I: (Laughter) Even though you might not agree with the kinds of things that are going on?

N: Even though...I still see...I keep hoping that, you know, someday the pendulum's going to swing completely the other way, and that it can be a total revival. Now, there is another aspect that should be said, for me at least; I'm no longer financially in a position to be able to gamble, so I'm going to be wary of that, and if I see that the Co-op is, and I have had the opportunity and I don't mind even the tape hearing it (Sure.) that I have withdrawn, or not withdrawn,

but have not renewed my certificate investment because I need it now for my old age (Sure. Sure.) ...and I am not any longer in a position to...to gamble these kinds of things. Had the situation been as stable as it once was, it wouldn't have been the gamble, and I could have counted on another some years and say, okay, I won't need that money until then (Sure.) and I could have just as well left it. And now I can't afford to do it. I have to...I have to know where my money's going to be. And maybe I'm still making a mistake, but at least I...I'm trying to protect it.

I: Right. Do you...do you still...what percentage of shopping do you....

N: 100%. My wife is a very ardent...she is...she was brought into the cooperative movement through me. She had no exposure to it, and she'll defend the Co-op to the last nail. Some people...I sometimes get into conversations socially about products, for example, and she can get real heated about some of the remarks some people make. 'Cause she feels that they're not true, they're not just, they're not fair, they're not everything, anything, you know...that they're doing it sort of out of malice, and she just...she just doesn't go for it. (Sure.) As a matter of fact, she's shopping at the Co-op now.

I: Well, it's clear, you know, I know this Co-op was so much a part of your life, you hardly had time to do anything else.

N: That's exactly right.

I: Within that period, certainly. But as you...as you think about the Co-op now, what significance do you see in it? Why is it so important to you? I realize that...that the fact that you've lived your life...mostly...in fact, most of your life has been lived in the Co-op...

N: That's exactly right.

I: Working with it. But, aside from that, what do you see is the importance today?

N: Of the Co-op?

I: Yeah, to you? What needs does it fill for you?

N: Well...Well, I suppose there's an ego need, for one thing, that anyone who spends a working lifetime doing something would like to believe that he leaves this world having accomplished something, and I certainly look on the Co-op as being something that I have participated in and contributed to, and I would feel very badly if during my lifetime it would collapse, you know, because there, it...just poof! it disappeared. I hope it doesn't happen. I don't think it will. But more than that, I guess, or just as much as that, I...the Co-op now in our case is such a strong organization...

it's now over 90,000 families, and it's a potent...you know, it's a tremendous force of people if it's used right. From a consumer point of view, and Lord knows, we need a lot of things in the consumer's best interest. And the Co-op does, and it can do even more...the potential is just fantastic, you know. It's endless, actually, if we applied ourselves constantly in those areas, and to the extent that we have finances for...we can't do everything of course. The Co-op has done so many things; whatever people want to say about the Co-op, they should try also to remember the good things they have done over the many years. The Co-op has affected our consumers in this area in so many ways that are now forgotten. Just as a...just petty examples. It used to be, as an example, that in the supermarket industry, advertising was a 3-day affair...there'd be generally Thursday, Friday and Saturday...but the irony was that the ads never appeared until Thursday night, so you actually got the benefit of two. I can remember in our staff meetings we discussed ads many times and, you know, things the competitors were doing and we should do differently. We decided once that we were going to start our ads Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, just like everyone, but they were going to run on Tuesday nights, so people all had the benefit of Wednesday as well. This in itself was a big change, just that one day. And then finally we changed them so it was an all-week thing,

and now, everything is all week. Rain checks, there're just little things like this, that all are...are...one could go back through the records, I suppose, in the history...the various copies of the News that are all there, in bound form, and pick out things that have happened, plus the milk that has...the milk program that has just gone through, recently gone through. There're just...legislation of all kinds, and everything...the influence that we have in Washington, for example, to have our home economists and people from the staff going there and being recognized as a viable force...somebody to be listened to. You know, all these are important. The consumers never had it and never would have had it, unless there was somebody with 97, or 90,000 families, as members.

I:           These are some very practical things that the Co-op has accomplished. If you were...if you think about the co-op, not simply the Berkeley Co-op, but the consumers' co-op in general, what do you think has been significant--has it had any broad significance at all? What has been its most important contribution to people? For our society?

N:           Well, from a social point of view, I suppose the fact that the co-op has been there, and sometimes I...and I have to confess that I think that the matter has been pressed a little bit too fast and because the co-op has been there, our equal opportunity programs are...all these kinds of things and the things that are of great concern today have, well,

even before they were being pressed by Federal government or other agencies, the co-op was already into them. We practiced it, certainly, in my time. Although I've been accused of not having done anything in that area, I know we have. And again, I think because the co-op was there to do it and sort of lead the way in an area like the San Francisco Bay Area, for one thing, that it has opened many, many more doors in other business. I know for a fact, that I remember once when...when this was beginning to be something of a push on other industries, some of the supermarket operators privately owned, that I had relationships with through other organizations, they would come to me and ask me about these kinds of things. How do customers react to this...if you have a black, and so forth...how do they react? What kind of problems do you get into? They had no inkling of these. And it was always amazing to me that they should even consider it a problem...but, here it was...but...if they had the opportunity to talk to someone who had the experience, it made them a little less...uh...reluctant to take the step... and it has helped in that sense. I suppose there are many other things like this...in the social needs of people that have occurred. I can't think of others offhand.

End of Side I of tape.

Side 2:

- I:        Would you want the consumers' cooperatives, for example, to be, to have 90% of the retail business? Some people talk of the cooperative commonwealth where, in effect, all of the business in all of the country would be organized cooperatively. Others would like to see less than that. Or some would even like to have socialism, where the state would run everything. And as I've mentioned to you, in some countries in effect the cooperative movement...in most countries, in fact, the cooperative movement is part of the socialist movement. What are your thoughts?
- N:        Well, I don't think I'm really intrigued with the idea of an 80-90% or anything else. You can go to the foreign countries, Sweden and Finland and some of these others...
- I:        England's 41%, for example, in the...
- N:        And you can see some of the effects, or non-effect, or whatever. I am surprised that in some of the countries like Finland, for example, where they're that heavy...where you don't, at least we don't care, and maybe we don't read enough and see enough, maybe we're not active enough, where they don't affect their total government structure even more. You know, one would sort of expect it. I'd kinda like to see, I'd like to see more cooperatives, yes, I would. Absolutely. And all throughout our country. In every community. Because I think it's an excellent balance for private industry.
- I:        In what way?

CHANGES TO AND DIRECTION OF COOPERATIVES

N: Well, it puts, if you can get the organization to be... even as strong as ours, and even a little stronger, you become a yardstick for some of the chain operators, like in the supermarket business, you become a yardstick, uh, so that they just don't run havoc with what our consumer needs are. And it's just not the supermarket business; we can get into all kinds of business, you know. There's the funeral business, there's the automobile business, there's insurance, you name it, and you've got it, and you mean, we can become a yardstick and that's what we should be. But I think competition is healthy, because I...from my observation, the little observation that I've had personally with some of these others... in Finland, for example, they sort of become almost like corporate cooperatives; you know, their people have individual.... They feel something like this is mine, and never mind the people below...the membership don't mean all that much. And that's one of the things I often wonder about and think that maybe even in our case, if each of our cooperatives, instead of being centralized now, could be decentralized... each one be an individual cooperative, belonging to a federation...

I: How about the CCB?

N: I'm talking about the CCB. So that Walnut Creek\* would be separate, South Main, Shattuck Avenue. Maybe the Berkeley stores could be one and the same...I'm not even sure of that.

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\*Addendum. See p. 22a- b

## Comments on closing Walnut Creek Co-op

N:           The continued lack of adequate sales volume and gross margins to pay for operating expenses were the reason the Board of Directors gave for closing the store in 1981. And I have no doubt in my mind that this was so. South Main was originally acquired as part of the Sid's chain purchase and it was then a losing operation. In considering the purchase of the Sid's stores, we were aware of that, but also probably naive in believing that we could dispose of it, along with other undesirable locations of the Sid's stores. Such was not the case, however, so we finally decided we would try to make it go as another co-op in the Walnut Creek area. And to do that, our immediate emphasis was to attempt to build substantial new membership which would have to come from the Danville-Alamo area. Membership did grow but not nearly enough to create its own supporting volume. We did, however, achieve break-even for a while, but it wasn't to last. One of the main reasons that volume was hard to develop was because it was a downtown location, and within a radius of about three or four blocks of one another there were four large supermarkets in competition with one another, which got pretty fierce at times.

          And the reason it was closed now instead of earlier, I would guess, is because now there was someone else ready to take on the lease obligation. During my time we never had that opportunity, even though we tried, so the result, all

things considered, always was, we will continue to operate. However, our losses in those days were considerably smaller.

My personal view is that closing South Main was a good move. Doing so did not leave the area without a Co-op nor did it terribly inconvenience those members in the Danville, etc., area--only an extra minute or two more by freeway to Geary Road. In fact, it should strengthen the Geary Road operation as a result--and also the total Co-op.

El Cerrito, Marin, San Francisco, and so on. They'd be separate entities, separate boards, and separate everything, but they'd work through a federation, and that would permit each of these...because, you know, the communities are different, after all, and that would permit these cooperatives then to reflect the circumstances in their communities. And my feeling, I could be wrong, I don't want to argue that too hard, but I...I certainly have felt that for a long, long time...that sometimes our Board of Directors becomes a, more like a local board, like a Berkeley board, you might say. It's been said, although it isn't, really, we had representatives from elsewhere, but I don't know, there's something about that makeup that doesn't seem right. And it doesn't represent the people as they would really want to be, and that...it doesn't...maybe it would put the spirit into the cooperative locally to go out and do a little grubbing, as we did once upon a time when we were just a single store, two stores, to try to meet our competitors on their terms, and on their own grounds, in the same circumstances. You lose some of that when you get into that shared and combined picture.

I:            Would you...if you were to pursue that...would you say that each of the units of the cooperative then, should... have enough capital to support themselves?

N:            Yes. And that was, when we first branched out and

had some and had...well, Walnut Creek, Geary Road, was our first branch, and then we set up the Center Council, and I guess the Center Council idea mainly evolved from my own notion and we just set it up, and suggested to the Board we got it...the feeling I had was, is that we needed to have somebody there that was sort of a second board of directors that would reflect the needs of that community. Well, it hasn't quite ever worked that way. They've sort of been second cousin people all the time, and they keep arguing about this, you know. (Yes, I know.) And somehow, someday, if they could resolve that much, at least, and if they had enough control and...and determination over there at the local level, and be responsible for it, also financially...the economic outcome of it...it might be better, and there are still tremendous savings to be had by pooling, through a better agent, where we can have...centralized economy, centralized general management, centralized education, centralized buying, centralized many, many things that can be centralized... home economist and whatever, but, break it down to a component that lay people can handle. I'm not convinced that many of our board members, for example, are capable of looking at financial statements and understanding a damn thing about them. And this used to bother me very, very much at the board meetings. Their only concern at board meetings was a private interest of theirs...uh, and I won't name individuals,

even though sometimes I'd like to, but I won't. And, you know, these things came first to them because that's what they understood. But they didn't understand a damn thing about the economics of a business operation, nor did they make any effort to really find out.

I: Gene, I want to come back to another question that I got off of, namely, if you had your druthers, about what per cent of the grocery business in the country would you like to...would it be a desirable percentage for the co-op to be involved in? We talked about Sweden, which I think there's about 41% in Sweden, pretty close to that...how large a percentage of the business would you...

N: I've never thought about that, really. I don't think it needs to be that much to be effective--we have here in Berkeley, in the Bay Area, what have we got now, about?

I: Three per cent, I think.

N: 3% or 4%, something like that. (Right.) And we're being pretty effective. I'm saying, that's not enough, we could have more, but let's say that we got even as much as 10%, that gets to be a pretty vital force already, and a lot of people're going to listen when you talk.

I: How would you feel about state ownership? Would that be a desirable thing? Some state ownership, some private enterprise, some co-op, or would you rather not have...?

N: No...I don't...No, I don't buy that.

I: Okay. Would your father have?

N: No. No.

I: Okay. Some unions, IWW, I thought, might really have been closely identified to some extent with state ownership.

N: I don't think so. I don't remember. No, no. They had no quarrel with private enterprise, I don't think. At least, I don't recall anything...I had ever learned. They...all their concern was to have the...the working person organize to the point where they became a part...could even become a part of the management group somehow, but never state ownership.

I: We're talking about the possibilities of local, more local direction of our own cooperative units, one of the questions that I wanted to ask you...every co-op is always torn between various demands upon its resources. One obviously is in terms of...of patronage refunds, another clearly in terms of services, education, nutritional, and kiddie corrals, whatever you want to...and all these cost money. If there were a choice, for example, and there is a choice always, between something that would benefit the members of the co-op as against trying to expand the cooperative idea to other people who may not as yet be entirely receptive, where would you, if one had one's choice, where would you advise putting the effort?

N: Well, education is a very important part of the growth of a cooperative. There's no question about it.

I: Education of your own members? Or education...of...?

N: Education of the public...education of the community... and an example of this is the middle west, again...where cooperatives were a way of life in every community, and today you barely find one any more. They once had a very strong education program. They dropped the education program and then started going downhill. But the generation that developed the cooperatives there died off, and they no longer have the need, but the new generation that was growing up after them weren't being educated into what the cooperative was about...to them it was simply a facility that was there, ready for them to use, but they didn't understand what it was, why, or anything else. Never got any involvement. And that's when...that's when it began to taper off. The same thing could happen here, and if we have, and there obviously is a limit to what you can expend, and that's why we've had many arguments about what should be expended. But if it...if it came down to just having one choice, education of the...of what a cooperative is about, and that leaves out home economists and kiddie corrals and everything else, just the one thing that you have, education of what a cooperative is, what it can do for you, what it can mean to you, what it costs, and so forth, and so on, to the community at large...

that would be the thing I would opt for, and I think we should continue...for just as long...if we don't, we become an indifferent organization. Somebody has to be there always, reminding and expounding the fact that we are different, and if we haven't got that, then we just become another institution and nobody has an understanding of what that co-op is, even though they may have had some, they've heard the word somehow, it's different, but they don't really know.

I: How do you...well, again, how do you feel about something like helping another co-op, another co-op that doesn't have the strength of the Berkeley Co-op, and needs to have some funds put into it, hopefully so it will expand the cooperative movement in its own community and so on. Contrast that with providing patronage refunds for the members of the CCB, for example.

N: No, I...Yes and no...I'm for supporting and helping other cooperatives. But I don't believe that it should be at the expense of the members, unless the members themselves have elected to do it. I mean, it could be conceivable that we have a...a small enough group, or a large enough sampling of our members to be meaningful to, say, let's just...just forego patronage refund and spend it this way. That's okay, but that's not going to happen, very likely. But on the other hand, struggling cooperatives

should have help, because many of them start on shoestring capital<sup>w</sup>ise nowadays, particularly, and you can't do that, you know, you can't start in immediately today on a shoestring, and some of them don't even have any understanding, complete understanding, although there are a lot of sophisticated people around these days..the younger group now are particularly so. And we should be in a position to help them, but sort of like a...you know, a lending hand, but to be repaid.

I: Well, the intent would always be to repay, but one never knows, you see.

N: But well, but at the same time, when we...when the cooperative makes that kind of offer of assistance, it should also know that it's not getting into a bad risk, just for the sake of...making...in other words, if people call themselves cooperatives, I've seen that, and they have no more chance of success than, I was going to say, the man on the moon, but of course that's... (laughter) ..

I: We now have a man on the moon!

N: We now have a man on the moon, but it's not likely that they'll succeed, unless they begin to learn the basics. For example, I've spent time in the Philippines, on consulting on cooperative efforts, since I retired. And there, in their efforts, they've done a basic education program. Among the farmers, you know. They've...the land

reform came about, and these people needed a place to sell their things, and they wanted to do this through cooperatives, and so I'm not going into long detail on it, but they did an education program that was just unbelievable, really. Of course, all of this is government-financed. And it's amazing how much cooperative understanding and education of all sorts, you know, credit unions or credit cooperatives, insurance, and all the rest of their needs, exists among the various Filipino communities. (Sure.) And the same kind of thing needs to happen here. It has to be a constant effort, so that when a new group gets started, they have a better understanding of what they're into.

I: Well, I was thinking, for example, did the Co-op provide loans to the Ft. Bragg Co-op, and also the Monterey?

N: Yes, Santa Rosa, Monterey...

I: Well, I assume at the time there was the thought that these could be successful.

N: Well, Santa Rosa is an example. Here has been a fine club in existence for, I don't remember how long. They were doing a very, very good job. The people that were in the leadership of this were very knowledgeable...they were... they were just doing everything right. They...they got themselves into a...into a state where now they were ready

to open a store, and...and perhaps our involvement should have been even earlier, to start guiding them into the next steps of getting involved. Now maybe we wouldn't have done it any better, but certainly we could have tried...and we did...and they...they got themselves in over their heads. So we loaned them capital for their equipment and ended up giving that equipment then to Ft. Bragg because Santa Rosa went belly up and we took that out to recover our losses, and sold it to Ft. Bragg and got...whether or not we got completely paid off in Ft. Bragg I don't remember now...or know. And Monterey has had...I know it has had financial assistance. We've certainly given assistance to students' co-op and have always been repaid. Books Unlimited has had that kind of assistance. Arts and Crafts Cooperative has gotten assistance from our Co-op. All these have been repaid. For example, Arts & Crafts bought their building; they were leasing it. They didn't have enough money so they went to Twin Pines Savings & Loan, got them to commit a big chunk of it, and they needed a little more, 'cause Twin Pines ran out of authorized limits, so they went to the Co-op as kind of a second mortgage thing, explained it to them, got the money and were able to buy their own building. And have in the...have since repaid the Co-op off. And now have just a plain straight first mortgage on the...

I:           Very good.

- N: And you know, it's things like this. But these were organizations that...that had been in existence for some while, and there was reason to feel that they should succeed. It wasn't too chancy. I don't suppose that every organization...every situation can be a...solid one, but...
- I: Right. You would suggest that possibly, in these kinds of circumstances, that one would perhaps try to bring in more people than the board to make those decisions, in other words, to ask the Co-op membership about this, even though there may be advantages and disadvantages...obviously one of the disadvantages is how many people would be involved...in 90,000 members, perhaps, what, 10,000 vote?
- N: And...and the other problem is, how do you get some kind of meaningful understanding across to them so they can do an intelligent job of voting? It's a...I don't see it as a possibility.
- I: So it really evolves upon the board?
- N: Right. And they have to be knowledgeable people. (Right.) And they should be asking the hard questions. And that's...that's where the whole thing...if you have a very good board, oh, how I wish we could have Aaron Gordon type boards...Aaron was...I don't think, well, I'm just going to say it...Aaron has done more for our Co-op than anyone I can think of. And we've had a lot of good people.
- I: Yes. I became a member in 1956. I remember him well.

N: Boy, he's the guy that asked the hard questions. And if we got off onto any tangent, I...you know...topics outside of the business first, he'd simply look at the clock and tell them, we've got this much business and we've got all this to go through. And we haven't even started on the manager's report. And he was...oh, I used to dread those nights, but they were constructive nights. We did our homework, and he had done his homework, and he got the others to do their homework. And that's what a good board is.

I: COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT'S IMPACT ON SOCIETY  
 Sure. That's very nice. Let me see, what other kinds of questions I can ask you...I guess the broadest one I can probably ask you is, what kind of consequences do you think the cooperative movement has on its members, on the society, the people around it? Even thinking back to the co-ops in your home town, it had a very important effect economically, obviously, as a means by which they could buy goods together and sell the market, and so on, but did it have any other consequences for them in terms of their own lives...the way they related to each other?

N: Oh, sure. It was a social center. You know, it became the focal point of their lives, their community living, and through even the community hall; if the community hall couldn't gather up enough funds, the co-op was the place where we went to see if we couldn't somehow get some assistance there, because, you know, it was all one and the same... the community was one...one thing. They had all these things,

and that's how we supported them, in fact, (Sure.) in my community. The community hall became the property of the co-op ultimately. Because the community no longer was able to support the two kinds of things as separate entities, so they made it just one organization, and it still was available for both needs, the sports fields, and the basketball games, and whatever else that we needed.

I: I think that the Co-op in Berkeley is always thought of as a very important institution. It's become to Berkeley... aside from having almost a quarter of the grocery business... isn't that about right...22%...or something like that?(Yes.) Aside from that part of it, how do you think the Co-op has affected the community? Has it had any impact?

N: Oh, I think so.

I: In what ways?

N: Well, I think that...I used to be a member of Rotary, when I was in the Co-op...I was a member of Rotary for 17 years, and of course obviously got questioned a lot by the Rotarians about the Co-op, and had an opportunity to promote the Co-op. I would always remind some of these politicians that, "You fellows could use the Co-op as a yardstick as to how your city politics are going to go. As you observe our politics, so goes the city politics." That has been true. (Laughter.) Because when we were beginning to have any turmoil, there was none of that happening in the city level

yet, but it wasn't till about a year or two later, and it reversed itself likewise, so it has an effect in that...the Co-op is sort of a testing place for a multitude of interests, and it affects the lives of certainly everybody. I think everybody in Berkeley...and this whole Bay Area...and the East Bay Area, certainly, outside of maybe far out in Oakland, knows that the Co-op is composed of just everything and anything imaginable on this earth. We used to be a place where we'd have the different cultures, the different ethnic groups, the different everything, political thing, but they all got together, and got along together. Very nicely. And this was...I can even...I can even recall when people used to remark about this, how different we were, from, you know, it was different. You didn't see that anyplace else. But here...everybody just, well, practiced cooperation...we're all equal, and that was it. And it's had that effect, I'm sure, in the communities in many, many places and groups.

I: One of the difficulties of any organization is if it has a variety of goals, and it is sometimes difficult to try to reach all of them, and there're always disagreements on this. How do you...how do you feel about the cooperative as an organization getting involved in various kinds of... of social issues? I think you've indicated something of that. But what I mean, for example, in terms of, for example, of quality goods, and labelling and so on. These are things

which are most closely related, but when you go somewhat beyond that, into such things...and even nutritional requirements, but what about broader social issues of one kind or another?

N: I've always said, and will always say it, that the Co-op has two responsibilities: one is the economic responsibility, to first make it operate as a business, but very closely related, it has a social responsibility. Because it is the only organization that can and will become involved socially, in the social needs of our people...of our consumers. I have a problem, however, as to how far we go on the social needs and which ones have the priority and that's where my conflict comes, because I don't agree with the things that sometimes get the priority. And it's pretty hard for anybody in leadership...or in management particularly...to... where you're supposed to be an absolute neutral, and try to do things in...in accordance with the policy of the board... and yet you have your own views that you've lived with all your lifetime and gone through many boards and have...have seen...sort of a policy level grow and then have it suddenly shifted in another direction...it's...it's hard to swing with it. I have to say that...and...one of the most difficult things that I had with the Cooperative, in fact, one of the causes for my retirement, I just couldn't take any more, I was physically at the point where I just had to quit. If I hadn't, I wouldn't be here now. But...I couldn't see staying

till age 65, I just wouldn't have made it. But I...it was such a tearing thing when you knew...when you thought you understood the cooperative movement and the principles... and I felt that I did, I'd spent a lifetime at it. And some of the people who have spent much less time...have somewhat different principles, and applied them differently, and... and...and interpreted them differently, certainly, in many ways...uh...it became very, very difficult. The Co-op has a social responsibility, no question about it in my mind... but I...I also am one, and perhaps wrong in that, but I feel that we need to go slowly sometimes, and faster as the need dictates, depending on the issue; and certainly on consumer issues I have no qualms at all about going just as fast as we can, but on some of the other issues that we've gone beyond the real consumer dollars and cents issues on, I think we've gone far too fast and in...in the process have... alienated many of our membership and the support of the cooperative. Now, all you have to do is, think of these 97,000 families and what they could spend in a year's time, and what are the Co-op sales currently? They don't come close.

I: Yes. Now the survey showed recently that very few people are spending a substantial part of their budget at the Co-op.

N: Yeah. And there was a time when...when...if my memory serves me correctly...when we used to keep these records...

that we had something like 60% or was it 70% of the purchases were made at the Co-op, and that was a fantastic amount.

I: Now, wouldn't that be true of a very small per cent... I say small, the suggestion is that it might be somewhere... probably under 25% that spend...

N: Well, what do we have...sales now of about \$80 million, into 90,000 families, and a family would spend something like (a family of 4?)...yeah, maybe \$3,000...let's just say \$3,000, to round numbers, that's 2...that's \$2,700,000,000, would it come to? It gets up there, and we don't come nowhere close to that.

I: In terms of...I recognize one thing you're saying is that we should move slowly on social issues other than those related to consumerism as such...it's difficult sometimes to make that distinction.

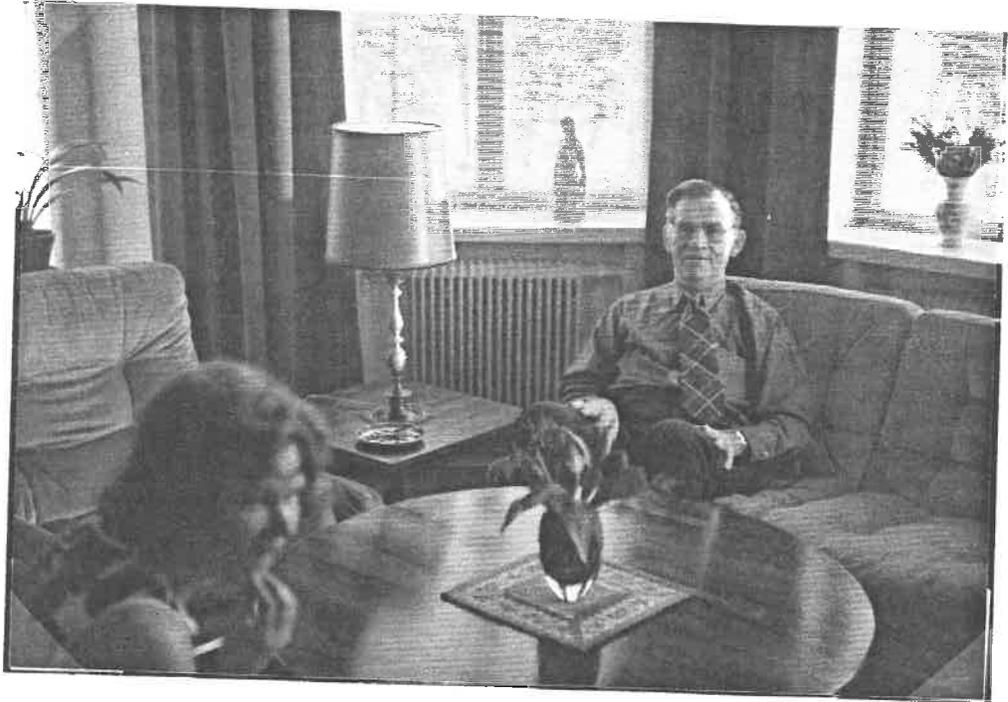
N: Yeah. And I feel that for this reason, even though I privately may have some reasons that we should want to move fast on other issues that are not related to the consumer, well, one thing we sometimes...that some people fail to remember...is that this Co-op is made up of people of all kinds of points of view...religious and political and otherwise. And if we're going to continue to succeed, we have to respect that. They're here because they have the same interest we have. And we should tackle the problems that

are of mutual concern to all of us...that's number one...the social issues...that's the consumer issues...the legislative kinds of things, and even there we'll run into some disagreement, because somebody happens to be employed in something that is, you know, will make him, or her, feel differently. But...but those are the things that we ought to have our emphasis. Then when we get into the fringe issues, and I'm not going to start identifying what fringe issues, we start to isolate a lot of feelings and that has happened, well, I don't have to tell anybody, it's...it's there, for anybody that wants to reason all about it. Even those who I am sure are proponents of the various social issues have to recognize it, I'm sure. And...but...I hope that...I hope that we can outgrow that, and even those... Everybody will begin to see that it is going to be the demise of our organization in the long run if we don't get out of that rut.

I: I can't think of...there are no other questions at the moment that I want to ask you...well, maybe I should ask you one more question. The Cooperative is a democratically run organization in terms of the membership, in terms of one vote, one member, regardless of patronage, and so on. There might be some changes we should make in these respects. Should we perhaps change things so that the more patronage a person gave to the Co-op, the more power he had in the Co-op, or if he had more shares, he should have more power?

N: I see nothing wrong with the basic principle of the Co-op. I suppose that what you're suggesting maybe would be a way of controlling some of the political issues or devisive issues that the Co-op has experienced from time to time.

End of Side II of tape.



Eugene Mannila

(Taken in 1975 - while visiting  
relatives in Helsinki, Finland)

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APPENDIX

**THANKS**  
for a job well done  
and  
**Happy Retirement**

**G**ene **M**annila  
General **M**anager

from your many friends at

**COIOP**



*Making a weighty decision*



*Gene and his parents - December 1957*



*An early picture of Gene and Sally*

# On Camera with Gene

*CO-OP employees Christmas party 1951*



*At the sales front*



*An Urban Managers group in 1954*



## Thumbnail sketch of Gene Mannila

Gene began his career with Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley in 1940. His first job: pumping gas at the station at University Avenue and Acton Street. From there he quickly rose through the ranks, eventually leading the CO-OP from a one-store business to the bustling nine-Center operation it now is.

He was appointed general manager in 1947 and served in that capacity through December, completing 24 years.

In addition to his chief of operations role, Gene has served the CO-OP in many other activities. He has long been on the board of Associated Cooperatives, our wholesale affiliate. He helped to organize and has been president of Gold'N Rich Corporation, our dairy supplier. He has served on the board and has also been president of the Bay Area Food Dealers Association.

He helped to organize and was charter member of the CO-OP Credit Union. He has long been a member of the nationwide Consumers Cooperative Managers Association, and this year was chairman of the Host Planning Committee for the association's meeting in San Francisco.

Gene has been active in the University Avenue Merchants Association. And he is presently on the board of directors of the Berkeley Red Cross.



## A Tribute . . .

*(By Robert A. Gordon, professor of economics at UC-Berkeley, and former CO-OP Board Member)*

As the CO-OP grew, so did Gene Mannila; and this twenty-odd year process of determined, cumulative self-education is one of the most impressive examples of self-development devoted to a cause above and beyond oneself that I have ever had the privilege to observe.

It is not only that Gene learned to be a sophisticated business manager — aided by self study, a six-month program at Golden Gate College, attendance at selected seminars, and absorption of all that he could learn from those with whom he dealt, inside and outside the CO-OP. More important was his devotion to Rochdale principles, to the basic idea of serving the consumer within a democratic framework. Most important of all was the human being who was always there — a man of complete integrity, quiet and somewhat self-effacing, and born with a virtue with which most of us are not as well endowed as we might be. This is the virtue of warmth, sympathy, and understanding.



## He exemplified CO-OP for 31 years . . .

*(Says CO-OP President Lew Samuels)*

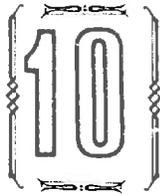
If you were to ask a store employee or a member aware of the CO-OP's day-to-day operations who exemplified the CO-OP to them, the answer would most probably be "Gene Mannila, the general manager."

Ask any member who the general manager was when he or she joined, the answer again is almost certain to be "Gene Mannila."

Gene has served the CO-OP for 31 years. To most of us, CO-OP is the store with a conscience. Gene is responsible for much of that feeling. He has shepherded the CO-OP through good times and bad into the top position for successful consumer cooperatives in the United States.

The fact that the CO-OP is still strong and growing after 35 years is testimony to Gene's skills as a manager, especially in these times of ever-stiffer competition. But what always shines through is a real caring for the welfare of the buying public and the over six hundred employees of the CO-OP.

I have worked with Gene for many years now and my respect for him has continued to grow. The whole experience has been rewarding for me and largely because of Gene's basic way of operating. The CO-OP is losing a valuable manager and a great human being.



## CO-OP Milestones during the Gene Mannila Stewardship . . .

- APRIL 1940** Gene Mannila joins Berkeley Cooperative Union service station staff.
- JANUARY 1947** Berkeley Cooperative Union merges with Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley. Gene becomes its first general manager. Annual Volume: \$314,000. Net Savings: \$14,400. Membership: 1,500.
- DECEMBER 1953** CO-OP remodels. First supermarket is at 1414 University Avenue, Berkeley. Service station moves to University and Sacramento.
- OCTOBER 1957** First expansion outside Berkeley to Geary Road in Walnut Creek. Annual Volume jumps to \$6,600,000. Net Savings: \$231,700. Membership: 11,900.
- DECEMBER 1959** Grand opening of Shattuck Avenue Center.
- SEPTEMBER 1961** Fiscal year ends with new highs: 4.1% Patronage Refund; \$11,100,000 Volume; \$664,000 Net Savings; 19,600 Membership.
- FEBRUARY 1962** Acquisition of Sid Stores, bringing Telegraph, South Main and Castro Valley Centers, together with future Natural Foods Center.
- MARCH 1967** CO-OP crosses Bay and develops \$1,100,000 Marin Center. Volume soars to \$26,500,000; Net Savings \$474,000; Membership 43,000.
- FEBRUARY 1970** CO-OP converts completely to the Instant Patronage Refunds Low Price Program.
- DECEMBER 1971** Gene Mannila retires after 25 years as general manager. CO-OP Volume at record \$40,200,000 and Membership 63,000.



# MAIL CA

"... I cannot adequately express in words how much it has meant to me to know you and work with you through the years, or the extent of my own gratitude for the outstanding and exemplary job you have done as General Manager of the Berkeley CO-OP. I know something of the trials which you have endured throughout the years and through all of which you have come with flying colors. You have built an enduring monument which those of us who care about the advancement of the cooperative movement of our country can never forget. I am sure you will be available to all of us for consultation and advice in the years ahead, and that thought is most comforting."

-- Jerry Voorhis

"... You have kept a steady hand to see that our Berkeley CO-OP has survived and in fact made progress. For this you have our commendation and sincere gratitude..."

-- Carroll E. and Florence Melbin

"... Long may you thrive, Gene, the man who kept it all together. My greatest admiration and love goes to you. Through it all shines a great soul, a tough, stubborn, sensitive and forgiving man -- the man who really practices cooperation."

-- Larry Collins

"... The growth of this has been matched by Gene's as a person... There are comparable contributions..."



"I've known Gene for about 25 years. As I've told him, he is one of the few people I have known who never seemed to stop growing. Who would ever have thought that a young man with only a high school education, who started out with the CO-OP pumping gas, would at a relatively young age take over as general manager and lead the CO-OP into a multi-million-dollar operation, with shopping centers all over the Bay area? That is what Gene accomplished, and I think it is a record unmatched anywhere in the CO-OP movement, and one of which he should be justly proud."

-- Walker Sandbach

"... He was a man who cared. He has innately understood everything. There was always a warmth about him that spread out. Anyone who met Gene and worked with him was a better person because of it. He always spoke softly but he spoke softly, because that was his nature. He walked the same way -- softly, and with what could be called humility. He had a depth in his thinking -- and always the humility of reasoning, as he shared his great experience with us as fellow managers..."

-- Ray J. Theisen, General Manager, Consumers Cooperative Association of Eau Claire



# LL for Gene



"I have worked with Gene for 12 years, six on committees and six on the Board. During this time the CO-OP has grown and changed enormously. Attitudes and pressures of the Board and the membership have changed -- rapidly and sometimes inconsistently. It is to Gene's credit that he has managed to bridge gaps, and to respond to these changes in a smooth and continuous manner. I believe that his inner resource has been his total dedication and commitment to the CO-OP movement. It has not always been easy, and has taken a heavy personal toll. I like him, I respect him, and I want to thank him for his service and dedication. I wish his successor well."

-- O. H. Gilbert, Jr.

"... It has been a privilege and a pleasure to have been able to work with you in so many areas of CO-OP development over the past twenty-five years. You can be rightfully proud of what has been accomplished under your leadership. I sincerely appreciate the time and loyalty you have given to make our CO-OP what it has grown to be. We will miss you, Gene."

-- Earle C. Fuller

"Institution in the last 25 years has personal growth as a manager and a few among us who have made a difference to a community or to a movement."

-- J. Richard Johnston

"There are many frustrations in working for cooperatives, but also some pleasures and feelings of accomplishment. One of the pleasures for me has been the opportunity to associate with people like yourself. You can retire with a real sense of accomplishment. Your efforts have resulted in the creation of one of the finest cooperatives in the United States, and for that matter, in the world."

-- Robert E. Morrow  
Executive Vice President  
Cooperativa Consumidores  
Unidos de Puerto Rico

"You, Gene, have dedicated your life to the cooperative movement, and we appreciate what you have done. . . The whole Finnish community together joins me in wishing you good health and happiness during your retirement years. . ."

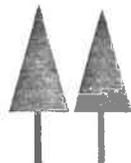
-- Tauno Ahonen

"California has produced more than a hundred consumers cooperatives in the last 30 years. Only a handful are still operating. Of these, the outstanding one is the Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley. One of the major reasons for its stability and continuity has been its general manager. You have maintained a position of integrity and responsible leadership, in spite of much buffeting and abuse. The organization you head has a nationwide reputation for its many innovations, for its informed membership, and for its strong consumer conscience. . ."

-- Bob Neptune

"I have feelings about Gene that just can't be expressed with him. I spoke authoritatively and I am proud to be his friend. There was great understanding and touch in his words and thoughts."

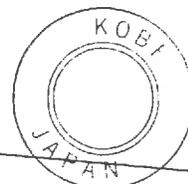
General Manager  
re





"I have had the privilege of associating with Gene Mannila as a fellow consumer cooperative general manager during his entire tenure as general manager of the Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley. Gene developed the balance of skills essential to the guidance and direction of the sound development of a dynamic cooperative with a large vocal and sensitive membership, which is an accomplishment beyond the ability of most chief executives. Gene has won the personal admiration and friendship of a host of cooperative leaders who have had the opportunity to know him. I am honored to have his friendship and may his retirement be peaceful but still challenging and exciting."

-- Gib Spencer  
General Manager  
Hyde Park Cooperative Society



"... Gene and I grew up on adjoining farms in Little Swan in Northern Minnesota. Our interests through the years were almost always the same. Life at that time consisted of putting in long hours helping to make a living off sub-marginal farms... I'm sure Gene always felt, regardless of how hard he worked or played after he left the farm, that he got a good basic training during his early days..."

-- Paul Lindfors  
Mutual Service Insurance

"... His accomplishments over a 31-year span in the consumer cooperative movement have served as an inspiration to myself and a host of other Canadian cooperative leaders. It was a privilege and honor to have known Gene personally and to have associated with him many times at international cooperative conferences. I wish him well in the years ahead."

-- J. Suits  
General Manager  
Calgary Co-operative Association

"Among cooperative managers, Gene Mannila is known and respected by literally thousands of people in the United States. He is one who believes in cooperatives and their meaning for people. Gene has inspired leadership and shown selflessness as a co-op manager. He has created the conditions which help bring about cooperative growth. The best wishes of the Cooperative League, its member organizations, Board and staff, go to Gene upon his retirement, and we trust that he will compliment us by his willingness to make his counsel, advice and commitment available to the cooperative movement from time to time."

-- Stanley Dreyer  
President  
The Cooperative League of the USA

"We felt we were losing a great man in cooperative development from our sister CO-OP, when we heard you were retiring at the end of this year after 31 years of service with the Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley. These 31 years were in an era of ups and downs in all aspects, due to the war, inflation and economic instability, social struggles between races and generations and so on, all of which raised mistrust, antagonism and even hatred among the peoples of the world, in nations and in cities, jeopardizing the world and splitting it into pieces. These 31 years were the years when love and cooperativeness among the people were needed most under an influential leadership as you rendered to your beloved cooperative..."

-- Yukinori Tsuguie  
President  
Nada-Kobe Consumers Cooperative Society  
Kobe, Japan

Gene Mannila, to me, has come as close as anyone I know to personifying the IDEAL cooperative manager. Among his unique attributes have been the rare combination of unwavering dedication to cooperative principles, coupled with skill, the judgment and the persistence to apply them most effectively. I have always admired Gene's keen awareness of what cooperatives can and ought to be and what they should not attempt to be. He surely will be missed when he retires from the active cooperative scene, but his fine record of achievement will stand as a great tribute to him and his good work. Thank you, Gene, for your outstanding cooperative contribution and the very best of wishes to you and Sylvia for a happy and rewarding future."

-- F. F. Rondeau  
Cooperatives Unlimited, Inc.