

Rising Moon: Lesbians Living off the Land in Central Minnesota

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1973, a farmhouse in rural Aitkin County burned down. Firemen were reluctant to help residents of the farm, all women, so the women evacuated and stopped the flames from spreading to their kerosene tank. Throughout the frigid Minnesota winter, without electricity and heat, the resilient women of the farm known as Rising Moon rebuilt their home. Lisyli Hardin and Robin (Selenekore) K. Deeming (pictured) restored the chicken shed, while others repurposed Rising Moon's food co-op as housing, "a three-sided barn," as Rising Moon visitors Meadow Muska and Molly McCarthy recall.

Lesbian activists Jane Stedman, Linda Page, and Trudy Fulton Smith founded Rising Moon in 1972 as a radical and separatist refuge open exclusively to women. Women traveled across the state and the country to create community at Rising Moon during a period of national interest in communal living. Cisgender, heterosexual white men typically owned and restricted access to rural land, aided in part by laws limiting women's—especially unmarried women's—ability to save and access money. Rising Moon gave women an opportunity to take control of their own livelihood on land that was owned, cared for, and worked by women. The women who sought out this life identified as feminists, and many also identified as lesbians.

Unlike the bachelor farmers of earlier decades, whose queer identities had been speculative, women at Rising Moon during the 1970s made it clear they were not heterosexual. This openness caused tension. Writers Dianna Hunter and Kathy McConnell, who lived at Rising Moon before and after the fire, recalled the wary treatment of the openly lesbian farmers by non-LGBTQ people.



Lisyli Hardin, Robin (Selenekore) K. Deeming, and pets in front of a converted building, rural Aitkin County, 1974. (PHOTO COPYRIGHT © MEADOW MUSKA AND USED WITH PERMISSION)

Rising Moon residents also allowed men—queer and otherwise—to visit the farm, purchase from the co-op, and occasionally help with farm labor, which troubled the separatist goals of the landowners and was a persistent point of contention.

Rising Moon marked the beginning of LGBTQ people in Minnesota living off the land as a way to build community with each other. The tradition of LGBTQ-led—especially lesbian-led—land stewardship in Minnesota continues today. Projects like Rootsprings, Webster Farm Organic, the Women's Environmental Institute, and Ag for All support a new generation of LGBTQ farmers who follow in the footsteps of the women of Rising Moon.

—Leila Stallone, Ulysses Swanson, and Luis Valderrama

The Greater Minnesota Two-Spirit & LGBTQIA+ History Map is a collaborative digital storytelling project facilitated by the Minnesota Historical Society. The map features over 125 stories of individuals, organizations, and events in Minnesota's queer history, from the 1790s to the present. Visit mnhs.org/lgbtqia to access the map and other resources.



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