Speaker 1:

South of Skinner Butte, wander into old storefronts and peek into well-worn warehouses, looking for clues to the revolutionary dreams and counterculture communities that were born in these buildings. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist collectives sprung up all over Eugene. Women started their own construction companies, bookstores, print shops, garages, and more. Many of these enterprises acted as hubs for the growing lesbian community and places to experiment with egalitarian business models. Maiba Minland explains the scene.

Maiba Minland:

Eugene was a very interesting place at that time. There were worker co-ops everywhere, just everywhere. Jackrabbit Press, Amazon Kung Fu, Women's Press, Crescent Construction, Ho-Dad's, Starflower, just every time you turned around, there was another worker co-op somewhere.

Speaker 1:

Starflower Natural Foods started at the base of Skinner Butte. This worker-owned co-op revolutionized the natural foods industry on the West coast. Sally Shecklow explains the culture and impact of Starflower.

Sally Shecklow:

Gosh, I think it was 1976. I started at Starflower, which was a worker owned and controlled natural foods collective. Starflower, at the time we were on Lawrence Street up right by the railroad tracks in Eugene. We distributed natural foods. This was before you could get a rice cake at Safeway. It was very revolutionary to have unprocessed and natural foods, whole grains, and organically grown foods. Though it was very social change oriented. Workers there ran the warehouse, drove the trucks, bought the food, sold the food, distributed to food buying clubs, and co-ops, and stuff.

Starflower was very out about who we were and that we were mostly lesbians except for dear Chip, our gay man receptionist. It was great, all these dykes lifting bags and driving trucks. And there's Chip. He'd get on the loudspeaker and sing little songs into the warehouse. He'd come out over the loudspeaker. Yeah, he was a very acceptable man. I thought he was great.

There's a Starflower natural anthem I'd be happy to sing for you. << Oh, sesame seed, pinto beans, and brown rice. What so proudly we stock 'til the 6:00 o'clock meeting. Invoices and phone calls handled by the deskies, while the truckers on runs were so gallantly driving. And the purchase beware, bookies say cash ain't there, still margins must rise while our prices stay fair. Oh say, does that Starflowered banner yet wave, o'er the land of the cheese and the home of grain >>

Speaker 1:

Downtown Eugene also cultivated a thriving feminist literary scene, including two feminist bookstores and two woman-owned print shops. The final location for Peralandra Books was at the base of Skinner Butte at Pearl and 5th Avenue. Katherine Harris shares memories of Peralandra books and the lesbian community at that time.

Katherine Harris:

All kinds of people came to the bookstore, from children and young adults, and it was always more women than men. And we carried books on meditation and the major mystical traditions. And we also had fiction and political things, and women's studies, too. And women's spirituality was really big during that time. And I would say that was kind of a meeting of the feminist and the spiritual that was important to me. It was so important to have a lesbian community and that lesbian modeling, I mean a word I liked a lot was woman-identified woman. We were really living our own lives, and people were doing Starflower, and Gertrude's Café, and other kinds of women-owned businesses, which of course I was also participating in that way. And then just the sense of camaraderie and the music we shared, the dancing we shared. It was very rich. And I'm really grateful that I had it, and it was a very rich, rich time in my life.

Speaker 1:

Learn more by visiting the Eugene Lesbian Oral History Project and the Outliers and Outlaws digital exhibit online through the University of Oregon. This project was created by the Sheldon McMurphey Johnson House museum and was made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities.