



# The Good Life of Helen K. Nearing

*Margaret Killinger*

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## **The Good Life of Helen K. Nearing** Margaret Killinger

In 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, Helen and Scott Nearing moved from their small apartment in New York City to a dilapidated farmhouse on 65 acres in Vermont. For over 20 years, they created organic gardens, handcrafted stone buildings, and practiced living simply on the land. In 1952, they moved to the Maine coast, where they later built what became their last stone home. Through their 60 years of living on the land in rural New England, their commitment to social and economic justice, their numerous books and articles, and the time they shared with thousands of visitors to their homestead, the Nearings embodied a philosophy that now is recognized as a centerpiece of America's "Back-to-the-Land" and "Simple Living" movements. Although both Nearings wrote a variety of autobiographical works, this is the first comprehensive biography of Helen Knothe Nearing (1904-1995). Killinger examines Helen's spiritual formation as a member of the early-20th-century Theosophical Society, her complex relationship to "old left" socialist Scott Nearing, and their lives together first in New York City and later as pioneer homesteaders in Vermont and then in Maine. Although deeply respectful of her subject, Killinger brings to light some of the central paradoxes of Helen Nearing's life. The Nearings' door was always open despite Helen's impatience with "company." And her abiding belief in living the principles of a simple "good life" did not impede her willingness and ability to market those principles with great success. As Killinger shows, Helen K. Nearing almost single-handedly created the Nearing mythos, still very much a factor in the ongoing interest in this remarkable couple.

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