

***John Ruskin's American Utopia:
a Survey of Ruskinite Intentional
Communities, Colleges, and Universities
in Tennessee, Georgia, Missouri, Illinois,
and Florida—1894-1967***

by

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CHAPTER ONE: RUSKIN, TENNESSEE

The proposals for social and economic change uttered by the British critic of art and economics, John Ruskin (1819-1900), may seem to have found an unlikely resting place on the central west coast of Florida. Nonetheless, from 1909 to its legal dissolution in 1967, the Commongood Society of Ruskin, Florida, stood as sole survivor of the loosely linked group of Ruskinite experiments in America.

Beginning in 1894¹, with a communalistic venture in Ruskin, Tennessee, these experiments are linked by a small cadre of concerned social theorists, editors, educators, and even investors. The venture in Tennessee collapsed after five years, but regrouped itself briefly in Ruskin, Georgia, just south of Waycross.² In 1903 Ruskin College in Missouri became Ruskin University in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, and affiliated with the Ruskin University Alliance in Chicago. A form of economic warfare undermined the midwestern Alliance, and in 1906 the President, the vice-president, and several faculty members of the former Ruskin colleges joined with the Dickman brothers from Sedalia, Missouri, to found the Ruskin Homemakers' Association (later the Commongood Society) of Ruskin, Florida. From 1910 through 1918 Ruskin, Florida, had a degree-granting work-study college. Although the college did not survive World War I and the death of its president, the Commongood Society of Ruskin, Florida, remained active through the Depression Era; not until 1967 did the Commongood Society grant its lands to Hillsborough County. Continually in search of a viable format and locale, those who shared John Ruskin's communitarian ideals in America moved vaguely southwards. Their sources in the thought of the British sage, however, had less direction and even more diversity.

Before the decade of intermittent silence, brilliance, and mental collapse that closed his long life, Ruskin had been among the most prolific of Victorians. His early theocentric aesthetics, manifest in the opening volumes of *Modern Painters* (1843, 1846), helped establish

his posture of almost feudal authority, even as they assured the reputation of the painter J. M. W. Turner. As late as his addenda to *The Political Economy of Art* (1857), revised and published as *Munera Pulvis* in 1872, Ruskin claims “the Divine authority as the only Paternal power” that makes men “brethren.” He continues, “All human government is nothing else than the executive expression of this Divine authority.”³ Even when the rigor of Ruskin’s evangelical Anglicanism relaxed into a more diffuse and benign religion of humanity, his high sense of mission remained. His social conscience is more memorable in the chapter titled “On the Nature of the Gothic” in *The Stones of Venice* (1852). Individualism and craftsmanship, he asserts, must be reconciled in the modern workplace, for:

You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions On the other hand, if you will make a man of the working creature, you cannot make a tool. Let him but begin to imagine, to think, to try to do anything worth doing; and the engine-turned precision is lost at once.⁴

As the later phases of the British industrial revolution brought the working-man’s plight more into the public consciousness, Ruskin turned to theories of economic reform, to educational ventures for workers, and to small-scale social experiments to ease his increasingly painful sense of responsibility for public life. Urging the wealthy to feel responsible for human life beyond the “cash nexus” decried by his friend Thomas Carlyle, Ruskin wrote in *Unto this Last*, “Just as the soldier’s profession is to defend the country, and the pastor’s is to teach it, the Merchant’s is to provide for it.”⁵ By defining a merchant as capable of an honorable mission beyond the interests of mere cupidity, Ruskin became an early spokesman for humanitarian economics. Even questioning Sir Kenneth Clark’s judgment that *Unto this Last* is one of the great prophetic books of the nineteenth century, one must recognize both the sheer power of its rhetoric and the purity of its motive:

THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.⁶

Urging the educators of England to follow his example, Ruskin himself taught at the Workingmen's College, and donated much of his extensive private collection of paintings, drawings and mineral specimens to public museums, including the small museum he founded at Sheffield. By word and example, urging men to create a more humane society, he spent thirteen years writing letters to the workingmen of England. Tucked among the vast digressions of *Fors Clavigeria* (1871-84) are his suggestions and rules for the utopian Guild of Saint George. Communal ownership of land, an emphasis on cottage industry, and enforcement of purity in manufactured products and personal life are ideals which Ruskin's utopian plans share with those of his contemporary Tolstoy and his distant pupil Gandhi. Although Ruskin's Guild of Saint George was a very small venture (32 members by 1879, 54 by 1884)⁷, Ruskin had long contended that a social experiment had no inherent problem of scale. "Laws of human action," he wrote, "are precisely as authoritative in their application to the conduct of a million men, as to that of six or twelve."⁸ Problems of scale, of course, certainly are factors in the evaluation of social experiments. But Ruskin's miniscule Guild in rural Great Britain was far less influential in America than were "the Master's" voluminous works urging society to reform. Quixotic and paradoxical as ever, Ruskin late in life became his own publisher—printing fine editions often too expensive for his presumed audience of "workingmen." Ruskin's prose was far more influential than his utopian Guild, and his own fine editions were less circulated in America than were the pirated editions. By the time American intentional communities assumed Ruskin's name, the Victorian sage was in his long years of decline; his American emissaries were international travelers like Walter Vroom⁹, who helped establish Ruskin College in Missouri, and

John C. Kenworthy¹⁰, an ardent Ruskinite and Tolstoyan who lectured on “Best Means of Promotion of Social Progress” at Ruskin University in Glen Ellyn, Illinois¹¹.

Among the American-born disciples of Ruskin, few were more influential than Julius A. Wayland. Wayland grafted Ruskinite ideals to his own brand of midwestern socialism¹² and—through a subscription-building scheme for his newspaper *The Coming Nation*—raised money for the first Ruskin in America. Utopia was to be in Tennessee; to become a utopian, one had to add 200 names to the subscription list of Wayland’s newspaper. Although Wayland and his group had sought an ideal site for the colony since May, 1891,¹³ their first location at Tennessee City, some fifty miles west of Nashville, was not auspicious. Controversy over choosing the site had aggravated dissension among the editorial staff, and the land was not suitable for farming. As a devotee of John Ruskin’s economics, Wayland should have remembered the Master’s insistence on agriculture, along with his dictum, “The best and simplest general type of capital is a well-made ploughshare.”¹⁴ Early colonist Earl Miller remembered Wayland’s selection of Tennessee City as the first of three mistakes that proved fatal to the colony” “The colony needed timber for its building, but even more it needed agricultural land. It was unfortunate that Wayland did not foresee the need and the value of farming in such an experiment.”¹⁵

Wayland may well have counted on a continued increase in subscriptions to fund the community. Even after he left Tennessee, his inflated goals remained. Grace Stone records, “With a goal of 100,000 subscriptions, the profits estimated at \$23,000 a year, would be turned over to the association to buy land, the home of the co-operators.”¹⁶ But when the Ruskinites arrived in Tennessee City, they were thousands of subscriptions short of their goal.

After one and one-half years in Tennessee City, the colony was moved to an even more isolated location—Cave Mills—several miles farther from the railroad. Although the new location would be better for farming, the community was about legally to lock down two of these

mistakes which, according to Earl Miller, destroyed Ruskin, Tennessee. Wayland's next step was to secure a charter under which to do business, "This charter," as Earl Miller noted, "was taken under the Mining and Manufacturing Laws of Tennessee This charter would have been all right for a purely publishing business, but not a cooperative business."¹⁷ Some five years later, that faction of charter members which Isaac Broome called the "Injunctionists" was able to obtain a series of injunctions against the Ruskin Cooperative Association (RCA), claiming that the original charter did not allow the RCA to build new buildings, to pay for the maintenance and collective lodging of its members, or to operate a school and lyceum.¹⁸ According to the "Injunctionists," then, the Ruskin colony was authorized to hold land—but to do little more. *The Coming Nation*, of course, was J. A. Wayland's focus of attention; but it is far from clear that the "old gang's" challenge to Ruskin's charter could have withstood review by a court higher than that of the local "court house gang." As recorded in the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville, the by-laws of the charter form a versatile and comprehensive plan, allowing a full range of community activities.

A necessary, if not sufficient, cause of the downfall of the Tennessee RCA was Earl Miller's "mistake number three." All but one of the original colonists, those who earned their membership by raising 200 newspaper subscriptions, were given two votes—one for the husband and one for the wife. Newer colonists could buy into the colony for \$500 a share, but only the shareholder could vote. The core of charter colonists, then, had two votes—automatically—per family.¹⁹ Later colonists had only one vote for each \$500 invested. As they saw it, "seven men practically cast 14 votes."²⁰ Earl Miller noted that this mistake "caused more ill feeling among the later arrivals than any other one thing. In fact, the situation became so intolerable that it was the direct cause of breaking up a notable and noble experiment."²¹

Other explanations for the failure of this colony may be more eloquent or more generalized, but—in context—colonist Earl Miller’s three causes are accurate and succinct; whereas Isaac Broome’s *The Last Days of the Ruskin Co-Operative Association* (Chicago: 1902)²² is prolix and fiery. Walter G. Davis’ “Failure of the Ruskin Colony” in *Gunton’s Magazine* blames, among other causes, the alleged fact that “the communal life made the people lazy.”²³ This slur brought a defense of Ruskin from former colonist and composer of the “Colony Notes” for *The Coming Nation* in Tennessee and Georgia, H. C. McDill. His article “Why Ruskin Colony Failed” in *Gunton’s Magazine* is a spirited paean to the colonists’ industriousness.²⁴ This defense was disputed in an anonymous editorial statement of eight pages set immediately at the end of McDill’s article titled “Why All ‘Ruskin Colonies’ Fail.” The utopian scheme, contends an editor of *Gunton’s*, is “ill-adapted to an embryonic state of civilization like the present.”²⁴

As the “non-injunctionists” in Tennessee attempted to correct Wayland’s original charter, they clipped a further link into the chain of events that was to loop among the Ruskinite experiments from England, through Tennessee and Georgia, from Missouri to Illinois, and finally to Ruskin, Florida.

To combat the first injunction filed in November, 1898, the newer Tennessee colonists sought the legal advice of a Chicago attorney soon to be president of Ruskin Colleges in Missouri, Illinois, and Florida—George McAnelly Miller (1857-1919).²⁵

The contentious and eccentric Alfred S. Edwards forms a further connection between the social experiments in Tennessee and Florida. He had disagreed with Wayland and had left the staff of *The Coming Nation* before it moved to Tennessee. Hearing that Wayland had argued with the new colonists about his own low salary,²⁶ Edwards returned—“to stir up dissension among the

charter members of the establishment of the colony.”²⁷ In the new utopia, all were to have the same salary. The fact that Wayland was founder and editor, even the fact that he had to pay for the newsprint, should not entitle him to more than \$7 a week, said Edwards. After only one year in his utopia (July 1894-July 1895), Wayland left Tennessee, leaving the colonists with the presses and *The Coming Nation*. Soon after, A. S. Edwards assumed the editorship. Although his term as editor was brief, Edwards and his son stayed with the Tennessee colony.²⁸ His son, Ray G. Edwards, a gifted violinist and woodworker, would later move to Ruskin, Florida, and marry a daughter of Ruskin College president G. M. Miller. A. S. Edwards then moved to Ruskin, Florida, where he retired so thoroughly that he became “a fellow who wouldn’t look down at a snake.”²⁹

Undaunted by expulsion from utopia and \$2000 richer for having returned four shares of stock to the colonists, Wayland went back to Kansas to establish *The Appeal to Reason*, another socialist reform paper that soon became the “most popular and widely circulated in the United States.”³⁰ Eugene V. Debs, who as a young man had been influenced by *The Coming Nation*, was among the early subscribers of *The Appeal to Reason*. After Wayland’s conversion to socialism, even after his experience in Tennessee, the editor remained a lifelong controversialist and advocate of the ideas of John Ruskin. Had Wayland lived another seven years to celebrate the centenary of Ruskin’s birth, he would have savored George Bernard Shaw’s pungent praise of Ruskin’s influence among reformers:

I have met in my lifetime some extremely revolutionary characters; and quite a large number of them, when I have asked, “Who put you on to this revolutionary line? Was it Karl Marx?” have answered, “No, it was Ruskin.” Generally the Ruskinite is the most thorough-going of the opponents of our existing state of society.³¹

The Ruskin Cooperative Association of Tennessee lasted nearly four years after Wayland left. Relocated in Cave Mills, renamed Ruskin, the community grew to some three hundred members. It attempted to meld Bellamy's prescription for social harmony in *Looking Backward* with Ruskinite ideals of educational and economic organization—all under the provisions of the Mining and Manufacturing Acts of Tennessee. John Ruskin had contended, in theory, that all workers, regardless of skill, should be paid equally. The RCA by-laws specified, "All members of the Association shall receive the same compensation for each day's labour performed, or a proportional amount for each fractional part thereof."³² Although essentially feudal in design, John Ruskin's Guild of Saint George was to allow for freedom of religious preference. Similarly, the RCA by-laws specified, "The Association shall in no way interfere with the free exercise of individual tastes, desires, and preferences in all private, religious, and domestic affairs."³³

Although Ruskin had specified that a "Master of the Guild" would be the arbiter of his social experiment, he conceded that "government is always necessarily by council."³⁴ The RCA by-laws stipulated an Executive Board consisting of President and first and second Vice-Presidents—all positions to have a one-year term, with provisions for re-election.³⁵ John Ruskin's original scheme for the Guild was more autocratic than the elective process of the RCA in Tennessee; still, the RCA by-laws allowed strong centers of authority; "All orders of foremen and superintendents must at all times be obeyed."³⁶ In his essay "Nature of Wealth of Labour," John Ruskin had contended, "All cost and price are counted in Labour."³⁷ Without considering Ruskin's caveat that the relation of currency to available labor is "far other than simple,"³⁸ the Tennessee Ruskinites issued scrip—negotiable within the colony—in denominations of hours. Even the RCA's de facto discrimination against women (if the husband bought the share, the wife was not automatically enfranchised) had some basis in John Ruskin's thought.

Repeatedly, Ruskin's emphasis on educating all classes was echoed in the RCA by-laws. On paper, at least, education was to be universal and community-supported: "The Association shall furnish all teachers, books, apparatus, and necessary appliances for the most thorough instruction of the children of the members in such lines as they show the most aptitude."³⁹ More succinctly, the by-laws state, "No member of the Association shall be permitted to allow his children to grow up in ignorance."⁴⁰

Looking only at the community's by-laws and at the purity of its intentions, a reader of *The Coming Nation* might well have foreseen success for Ruskin, Tennessee. And for a while, the RCA showed strong signs of prosperity. "The Printery," a sound three story building 50 by 100 feet, housed the communal dining hall and theatre on the third floor, a composing room, mailing department, barber shop, and library on the second floor, and *The Coming Nation* business office, reform book center, stockroom and pressroom on the first floor.⁴¹

In the dining room, the Ruskin Brass Band often played during supper, and a sense of high spirits pervaded even the menus. For July 26, 1896, for example, the meal featured Potatoes a la Debs, Boned Turkey a la Imperative Mandate, Sliced Tomatoes a la Ruskin, Green Beans a la Socialiste, and Co-operative Salad.⁴² As factions among the colonists split even wider, however, the edges of festivity wore thin. Such, at least, is the report of Isaac Broome, an artistic designer and educator, whose vitriolic book *The Last Days of the Ruskin Co-operative Association* (1902) is the most detailed and ideologically outraged account of life in Ruskin, Tennessee. As Broome saw it:

The Ruskin dining room is common. It is the great arena where you can see at a glance the good or ill breeding of the people. The first move they make is enough. The way they jerk out the chairs, or slam them on the bare floor, three hundred of these slammings at a time, or in rapid succession, furnished the senses with considerable delight. In addition we have a number of babies in cribs whose mothers have to wait on tables. These are not trained to quiet and maintain a

vigorous protest against lying alone. To this may be added the concentrated top voices of the majority and the clatter of dishes; children pounding the table with spoons, often on trays to amuse them, and you can imagine the hellish din of a communal dining room in Ruskin Colony.⁴³

Beyond his mere fastidiousness, Broome had professional reasons to be unhappy with the RCA; he is a less than reliable narrator. A quite different but just as biased impression of the communal dining room in Ruskin comes from Harold J. Shepstone's article for *The Wide World Magazine*. "It is, indeed, a grand sight to watch these hardy pioneers of labour partaking of their midday meal, with a kindly, frank courtesy towards each other which plainly bespeaks their full confidence in their belief that equality alone brings true happiness and contentment."⁴⁴

Broome's bitterness at the failure of the RCA stems largely from his role as resident educator for the colony. As he saw it, school age children in Ruskin simply ran wild; the colonists were in clear violation of their own by-laws.⁴⁵ John Ruskin, of course, had stressed the role of the arts in education. Broome's most concrete emulation of Ruskin's theories seems to have been the bust he carved of John Ruskin. It adorned the east wall of the dining room, which—in the latter days of the colony—was also used for country dances, which Broome deplored. Broome's patrician dismay at the low culture of Tennessee hill-folk, which he assumed to have corrupted the colony, heightens one's sense of a community divided. His outraged account of a disturbance in the "great hall" of the Printery, drives home his point that the trappings of high culture do not reform the masses:

The dance had become a mob of howling dervishes. The orchestra was broken up. A country fiddle furnished the music. A tough was in command. Some of the native toughs worked in. Floor battering and yelling drowned the fiddler. The girls were swung off their feet and men fell on the floor in the wild melee. Terrible would be a mild term to describe the disorder. The ignorant majority would not be better than its parts. When left to itself it only increases its disorder and vulgarity. The large portrait of Shakespeare looked down from the proscenium above the stage on this maniacal co-operative joint and John Ruskin from the other end of the hall. A dream of sub-tropical landscape, with banks of

flowers that glowed with light. Ideal palaces and cultured people painted on the large drop curtain that shut off the stage, richly decorated bronze columns that doubled up the proscenium supporting a lovely Corinthian architrave and embracing art trophied panels with damasked grounds, looked sadly incongruous with the disgusting scene on the waxed floor of the great hall.⁴⁶

Broome's ideal, like Ruskin's own, was hierarchical rather than democratic. Ruskin's proposals for his Guild of Saint George were, he admitted, modeled on the state of 14th century Florence. Broome's ideal of social organization was that of the Masonic Order.⁴⁷ And the Masons did help lay the cornerstone for the "College of the New Economy" in Ruskin, Tennessee. Although *The Coming Nation*, according to Broome, collected \$900 for the college, and continued to solicit funds for it, the building never grew beyond its cornerstone. Whatever funds came in, it seems, were needed elsewhere. In the spacious valley of Yellow Creek, land dedicated for use by the college was used for other purposes; Broome notes that "the breeding pens for pigs were built on the campus of our proposed college."⁴⁸ Broome, its architect, was crushed. Broome's hope then turned to a proposed alliance with the People's University of Chicago. Its representatives Walter Thomas Mills and George M^cA. Miller had visited Ruskin, Tennessee, during the last two weeks of November, 1898,⁴⁹ proposing, according to Broome, "They would come to Ruskin with \$12,000 and pay off all our land indebtedness, build the college and put us on our feet. We to consider the adoption of the university system the following September, and if not agreeable to separate."⁵⁰ Neither the source nor the stability of the proposed financial assistance is known. It is likely that backing would have come from the Vrooman family, whose Trenton-Ruskin Manufacturing Company in Missouri was allied with the Central Western Cooperative Association in Kansas City.⁵¹

G. M. Miller, who had held the chair of Ancient Languages at Avalon College (soon to be reorganized as Ruskin College in Missouri), joined W. T. Mills in promoting the People's University; according to *The Coming Nation*, they "succeeded in raising quite an interest in its

behalf.”⁵² Eight weeks after his first visit, Mills returned to Ruskin, Tennessee, this time considering the purchase of nearby land for the “People’s University colony.”⁵³ Broome’s account, which thinly disguises names of the charter colonists, is highly partisan:

A second attempt of the friends of education in Ruskin to get the people’s University located near us in an abandoned college and village, brought its advocates back to visit the place. Their reappearance was worse than a red flag to a bull. The financier ran around the colony repeating, “The skunks are back again. The skunks are back again.” The Bishop was pale with rage. He posted “No Admittance” on his door. We will draw a charitable veil over his manners for the sake of Ruskin.⁵⁴

The furor is best explained, not as enmity to education (as Broome would have it), but as one set up colonists’ aversion to the legal advice these visitors from Chicago had offered another set. Redrafting Ruskin’s charter was the central issue. Changes like those proposed by Miller and Mills, shifting from a capitalistic to a co-operative charter, would be adopted by a majority of Ruskinites before the colony’s move to Georgia later in 1899; but in Tennessee, the chances for Ruskinite higher education—whether “People’s University” of “College of the New Economy”—were effectively blocked. Each new American Ruskinite colony attempted to found a college. The first attempt, in Tennessee, was the most definitive failure.

As if the colony’s problems with its charter, enfranchisement, and educational policies were not enough, the Tennessee colony was to endure yet another controversy: free love and bloomers for women. Fifteen years later in Ruskin, Florida, “bloomer girls” would be attired acceptably; but Bloome and the cultural conservatives of the Tennessee colony contended that bloomers were a visible manifestation of the free-love philosophy. Several members of the colony were accused of being “Free Love Party.” A. S. Edwards, who had become editor of *The Coming Nation* after J. A. Wayland, threatened to lecture on “Anarchy and Free Love.” According to Broome, Edwards “also threatened to black-ball applications for membership [in

Ruskin Colony] of orthodox Christians.”⁵⁵ After this tempest, Edwards left the colony for Chicago and for the second annual Social Democracy Convention. From there, Eugene V. Debs’ faction developed into the Social Democratic Party, and Edwards was elected to editorship of *The Social Democratic Herald*.⁵⁶ Although Edwards never rejoined the Ruskin Colony in Tennessee, he did appear later in Florida.

Social problems in the RCA of Tennessee are put into perspective by the brief reminiscences of Grace Gordon, who was in her teens during the Tennessee days of the colony. Reminiscing during World War II, she cited seven reasons for the break-up of the community. Her first contention was that Ruskin (the community) did not fail; instead, the people failed Ruskin. Her points may be paraphrased: first, that women came to the colony only because the men said to, not because they wanted to; second, that \$500 was too small a membership fee to finance the colony; third, that the land occupied by the colony was too small to allow for discovery and surprise; fourth, an inequality of income among families, due to private fortunes or to size of families; fifth, lack of flexibility requiring all women to do five hours public work for the colony; sixth, inflexibility of social codes; and seventh, the individual colonist’s lack of skill in achieving compromise.

Of these seven points, numbers four and six require some elaboration. Grace Gordon’s emphasis on inequality of incomes among families is an interesting corollary to Earl Miller’s finding fault with the de facto granting of a vote to men but not to women. Even though later colonists had only one vote per \$500 membership, each child in the family (from birth to age 18) got the same paycheck, and each adult—also under the By-laws—got a larger check. Large families, accordingly, drew more income.⁵⁷

Grace Gordon's sixth point, inflexibility of social codes, puts a more modern perspective on the Ruskinite concern with anarchy and free love. In the 1940's, she writes, remembering her girlhood:

In the light of present day ethics and moral standards it is comical to think of that terrible Bugaboo which frightened so many of the Ruskinites nearly into hysterics: "Free Love!" Knickerbockers!! Horrible! A Sunday afternoon walk on which A walked with B's husband and vice versa. Unthinkable! Vulgar!! Outrageous!!—Terrible on[l]y because it was out of line with the times.⁵⁸

The Ruskinites social experiment, itself, was "out of line" with the dominant social structure of the times. That lack of alignment—a community versus the larger social world—is often fatal if the smaller community fails to provide "commitment factors" sufficient to hold the group together.⁵⁹ For the Tennessee RCA, misalignment was both internal (dissent among members) and external (alleged illegality of its activities under the charter); this made it easier for dissenting charter members to use the court of Dickson County, Tennessee, as a weapon against their fellow colonists. The legal weapon, itself, was so powerful that both factions lost in the end and the community failed.

Acrimony in the RCA was so intense that Dr. McDill, whose "Colony Notes" had for years been a chatty and a-political column in *The Coming Nation*, finally made the details of the legal battle known to his readers in late April, 1899:

For over 15 months Ruskin has been the victim of a merciless persecution at the hands of a gang of unprincipled demagogues, with legal proceedings whose successful outcome means ruin to the colony and confusion and injury to the cause. . . . Ruskin has in the past fifteen months had nine injunctions served upon it, covering almost every Socialistic point we have in our colony.⁶⁰

The same number of *The Coming Nation*, now edited by J. K. Calkins ran a front-page history of the legal battle, titled, "Injunction and Receiver."

Seventeen stockholders, most of whom secured their stock without money and without price, have formed a conspiracy for the purpose of ruining the colony and its paper. . . . We believe that the time has now come when our friends throughout the world should know just why all this litigation has been instituted. . . . In October, 1897, a studied effort on the part of three or four advocates of “free love” and “anarchy” to disseminate their theories called forth a vigorous protest. . . . An obscene article on “Promiscuity in the Sex Relation” and other licentious matters were posted in public places in the Printery Building. . . . it became evident that their real definition of free love was “free lust.” . . . This malodorous cult was stamped out at the election of January, 1898, and not one of those who advocated the principles had held a place of trust in the colony since. . . . These people sued out an injunction restraining the association from carrying out its by-laws which provided a plan for the wives of the members to acquire a vote in and a legal standing as members of the association. . . . The injunction was dissolved and stock was issued to our wives. So that we can now say we practice what we preach—equal suffrage.

But the “injunctionists” appear to have fully made up their minds to rule or ruin, and suit after suit was instituted in rapid succession.

On Oct. 12, 1898, 13 members applied to the court for a receiver to wind up the affairs of the association, alleging insolvency. . . . Fearing the association would institute expulsion proceedings against them for violating their obligations as members, the same parties sued out an injunction, one week later, restraining such action.

On Nov. 30, another injunction was secured to restrain the colony from trying several of the same members for insubordination.

Again, on Dec. 7, another injunction was served to prevent the association from suspending or expelling certain members for refusing to work.

March 1, 1899, still another case was filed by one of the same crowd asking for a receiver to wind up the affairs of the association. . . . Promptly dismissed. . . . it was appealed to the supreme court. Another case was dismissed on the 22nd of the same month.

In the meantime, W. J. Ribley, one of the injunctionists, had sued for recovery of \$500 on a share of stock he purchased from a lawyer for \$105. . . . During this time W. W. White had also brought suit to recover money he had voluntarily turned over to the association. . . . There had also been a number of petty and frivolous cases filed in the justice and the circuit courts by persons connected with the conspiracy for ruining the colony, all tending to create animosity and foment internal dissension.⁶¹

During the weekend injunction “locking the wheels of industry,” the anti-injunctionists gathered in Ruskin Cave on Saturday, April 22, 1899, “to ascertain how many. . . would go into a new organization in case Ruskin had to disband, and as an evidence of their eternal gift, 92 of our 93 loyal stockholders on the grounds signed the agreement.”⁶² This agreement, framed along the lines suggested late in 1898 by G. M. Miller and W. T. Mills, became the basis for the new

Ruskin Commonwealth to be established in south Georgia. As printed on the front page of *The Coming Nation* for May 20, 1899, the agreement accurately described itself as a “change from a capitalistic stock company to a fraternal trust.” Optimistically, the paper went on to advertise Ruskin Cereal Coffee, Ruskin Leather Belts, Ruskin Leather Suspenders, Ruskin Chewing Gum, the Ruskin Bath Cabinet, and the mail order book list which included Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, and a new book of political verse in the galloping meter of Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall”—*Uncle Ike’s Ideas* [sic]⁶³ by G. M. Miller, one of the two legal advisors and “People’s University people” from Chicago.

All property of the Tennessee RCA was to be liquidated at a public sale, but the “non-injunctionists” put on a brave face. H. C. McDill’s weekly column noted, “It looks like clear sailing for the Ruskin Commonwealth. The sale will probably be advertised about the 20th of June.”⁶⁴ All but one of the stockholders (“dissenting members not being present”) then voted to sell the RCA assets and pro-rate the proceedings among the members.⁶⁵ The strategy, of course, was for the anti-junctionists—by far in the majority—to close out the old RCA, pay off the injunctionists, and purchase the colony assets at public sale. This may have been good strategy in theory, but foolish tactics in practice. Having compelled a public sale, the anti-injunctionists would be at the mercy of local lawyers and receivers, the machinations of chancery, and the law’s delay.

To raise more cash for the intended purchase, the colonists invited nearby communities to a fund-raising Fourth of July party in Ruskin Cave. Looking back in 1932, J. T. McDill compared his first Independence Day celebration in Ruskin Cave with the final one for Ruskin, Tennessee:

When we first came to Cave Mills we celebrated the Fourth of July with a bran dance. Maybe you dont [sic] know what I mean by a bran dance. We leveled a space in the big cave and made a kind of circus ring and filled it about three

inches deep with bran from the mill. You have no idea how slick it is. Everything was quadrilles. The fiddlers sawed away for hours and they danced until sunset. . . . Everybody was suspicious of the first celebration. About one hundred and fifty men, all armed, and a few women folks came. They thought we were remnants of Sherman's army and they did not propose to let any damned Yankee massacre any good rebel in that cave.⁶⁶

The later Ruskinite colonies often grated against earlier settlers in their areas, but in Tennessee, the country folk seemed eager to help the desperate utopians. Their plight was immediate and grave, for the court would not allow the "paper" pro-rate payments to be applied to the purchase of the RCA assets. Consequently, the treasury of the RCA was some \$90,000 short of being able to buy its own assets. J. T. McDill continues:

The memory that is most dear to me is the way the Natives, as we called them, rallied to support and comfort us. It makes the tears come every time I think of those grand people. Even after thirty years in which I have known many sorrows.

We outraged their religious beliefs. We reviled their politics. We had mocked their simplicity. And they forgave all. . . . But our last Fourth of July. We were going away as soon as possible. They would never see us again. We had lost everything.

We charged a quarter for admission to the big cave. The tickets show five thousand admissions. But every man bought two or three tickets. For there were not more than fifteen hundred people there.

DeVries pumped water out of the lake into a tub with one hand and ladled sugar out of a jug with the other while Charlie Smith squeezed lemons and my Dad attended the citric acid and red color. All day long they worked and all day long those people drank up that red lemonade as fast as it could be served.

I had Dad Stoll and Hiram Wallace make me a special twenty gallon ice cream freezer. I started with three freezers full in the morning. I had the freezer hooked onto the machine shop lathe. I managed to run my thumb through the gear wheels. But I couldn't stop for a little thing like that. The crowd caught up with me and the last freezer full was just cold slop. No matter. They paid for it. They bought everything we had to sell. They went out in the garden with Kemp and Miller and bought all the melons and berries. Van Fleet was manager of the flower garden. They bought all of his magnificent roses and gladiolas and cannas. They came back in the cave and bought all the decorations.

They still had some money left. They threw it all in a hat and donated it to us. It makes me cry even as I write this.⁶⁷

The Fourth of July celebration had netted \$915. That swelled the treasury to \$4,200 “with which to buy \$94,000 worth of Property.”⁶⁸

The court receiver’s assistant was named Leech. As colonist J. A. Kemp put it in a letter to his “old comrade” Earl Miller, “When the leeches got control of the property they had no interest in it aside from getting all they could out of acting as receivers for the property and to hell with the Injunctionists and all the rest of us.”⁶⁹ Earl Miller then notes that the main receiver was “on the job one or two days and left it in the hands of an assistant. His comment was that it was “too raw a deal for him.”⁷⁰ It was a raw deal indeed. The anti-injunctionists managed to buy the printing press of *The Coming Nation* for \$1,975,⁷¹ but the balance of the property—houses, land, and chattels—were “bid up” by the acting receiver, who later defaulted on his bid, but only after the colonists had left for Georgia.⁷²

Although the press had been saved, its steam engine had been sold separately. To print their next issue, the colonists borrowed a threshing machine, rigged power connections through the Printery window, and spread the word in headlines: “PRINCIPLES NEVER DIE! . . . THE COLONY AT RUSKIN STILL EXISTS.”⁷³ In a more somber tone, the writer continues:

It would be impossible to give an idea of the feeling of mingled sorrow, indignation and sense of wrong that swept over our people. . . . No feeling of despair was in it, no thought of giving up, but a feeling that the result of years of hard labor, self-denial and rigid economy had been unjustly taken away from us. . . . Night came, another meeting was called; the first thing done was to take stock of our courage. A motion was made to the effect that we intend to stand by Ruskin. This carried by a rousing unanimous vote that made the dining room ring; afterward a vote of confidence in the committee was passed.⁷⁴

As J. T. McDill noted, “We have had a remarkable lesson in Tennessee law.”⁷⁵ In addition to the printing press, the colonists were able to buy their laundry, lathe, coffeehouse, shoeshop, and suspender tools, and the tinshop. In the same issue of *The Coming Nation*, McDill’s “Colony Notes” sounds a clarion call, one soon to become sadly familiar in later Ruskinite ventures:

Our property has been taken from us with no return, except that we may get a share of the sale money in 18 months from now, about the beginning of the next century. But we felt that, for all we have lost, we have saved the best. RUSKIN COLONY STILL LIVES IN THE RUSKIN COMMONWEALTH!! We have been forced to leave our homes; but we are THE COLONY, and we will go wherever we must as a colony.⁷⁶

A new site in Virginia was tempting, but the decision had been made for Georgia, based in part on the favorable reports of colonists Sherwin and Walsh.⁷⁷

While the colony was packing for the journey south, Dr. McDill added up the ideological victories of the anti-injunctionists of Ruskin, Tennessee:

Now that the battle is over, every body can see what we have lost. Our lands and homes are gone: five years of labor wasted; \$75,000 forced from our hands and we driven to seek a new location. These are our losses. Have we made any gains? Yea, verily: Anarchy and free love have been utterly stamped out. Woman suffrage is a fixed point. Private ownership in stock has been destroyed. Our children are entitled to full membership, upon becoming of age, BY RIGHT OF BIRTH and without vote to admit them to the commonwealth. All these principles have been grafted upon our constitution, never to be removed. While our losses have been great our gains have been greater.⁷⁸

In the July and August heat, men from Ruskin worked splitting cord-wood for the charcoal iron smelter at Cumberland Furnace, Tennessee. Young J. T. McDill remembered the work as a heroic effort to help support the commonwealth,⁷⁹ but old Isaac Broome found that descending to menial labor, for wages, was a disgrace: “The great, proud co-operators of Ruskin rushing for a miserable chance to slave.”⁸⁰ Broome’s own contributions to the last days of the Tennessee colony was kindly described in “Colony Notes”: “a beautiful life-size portrait in oil of John Ruskin, from his latest photograph. It is a magnificent picture of a noble man.”⁸¹

The colonists found other forms of popular art to raise their spirits, but it was no good omen that their song for September was to the tune of “Marching Through Georgia”:

Come on, come on, we'll sound the bugle call,
 We'll stand together, or together fall,
 We'll leave the caves of Tennessee, and forward one and all,
 For we are going to Georgia.

Long we've worked together to perfect a noble cause,
 We have had the justice, but the other man the laws,
 We have lost our land and homes and will no longer pause,
 So we are going to Georgia.⁸²

In September, 1899, some 250 Ruskinites boarded five cars of the N. C. and St. L. Railroad at Tennessee City, where the colony had first settled only five years and two months earlier. A thirty foot bolt of broadly painted muslin ran in the wind on each side of the cars “to tell what we were, where we were going, and to tell about our paper, *The Coming Nation*.”⁸³ So great was the voyagers' sense of urgency, that when little Lillian Smith fell three stories down the dumbwaiter shaft one day before departure, she was bundled onto the train anyway. The Ruskin Brass Band played bravely in the Union Depot at Nashville, but the colonists bought a coffin in Atlanta. Rolling south of Atlanta, the Ruskin Band was silent until Waycross. As Earl Miller explained, “Little Lillian had been a favorite with us, and her father was leader of the band.”⁸⁴

Notes for Chapter One

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5. P. 25.
6. P. 88.
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14. Bryson, p. 180.
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16. Stone, p. 313. Her source is *The Coming Nation*, #263, (Special Bellamy Edition), June 4, 1896.
17. "Recollections," p. 49.

18.
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Isaac Broome, *The Last Days of the Ruskin Co-Operative Association* (Chicago: N. P., 1902). (Hereafter cited as Broome.)
23.
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24.
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25.
"Recollections," p. 61 and Colony Notes (November 19 and November 26, 1898).
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27.
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28.
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29.
Interview with W. D. Miller by A. McA. Miller, N. D.
30.
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34.
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35.
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- 39
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41.
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42.
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43.
Broome, p. 79.
44.
III (June, 1899), p. 275.
45.
A well-documented and thoroughly researched running commentary on Broome's book is found in the unpublished annotated version of Broome's text included in the New College of USF (Sarasota, Florida) Senior Project by Bruce Thiel.
46.
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47.
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48.
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49.
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50.
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54.
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58.
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59.
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63.
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67.
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68.
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69.
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70.
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71.
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72.
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73.
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74.
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75.
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76.
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77.
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78.
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79.
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80.
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82.
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83.
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CHAPTER TWO, RUSKIN, GEORGIA

When Brother W. E. Benton, the colony's official photographer, snapped "Our arrival at Ruskin" on September 16, 1899, he memorialized a group of plainly dressed and very serious people. Numbering 249 "souls," not counting the child in her coffin.¹ they were to merge with the remaining 35 members of the American Settlers' Co-Operative Association (ASCA) who had been at Duke (soon to be renamed Ruskin), Georgia, for nearly a year.²

"As we pulled into Duke," wrote the ever cheerful H. C. McDill, "the first thing that struck us as the word 'Welcome,' over the veranda of the hotel, done up in cornstalks in an artistic manner. We took their word and spread ourselves all over the place."³ The buildings of Duke, Georgia, which had seemed so attractive from Tennessee, were scattered as if at random on both sides of the railroad south of Waycross. Real estate occupied by the earlier colony, the ASCA, included much timbered-over land, some farmland, and the building sites—786 acres in all.

Among these earlier Georgia colonists of the ASCA was John G. Steffe, who, in less than three years, would become private owner of all the Ruskin Commonwealth lands. Old Man Steffe, well remembered as late as 1976, was a "sharp dealer" and a "mean old boy," according to E. W. Crawford.⁴

Among the new colonists' first plans was to cluster the buildings which, compared with the tight focus of their Tennessee Valley, seemed scattered. This early decision to centralize the buildings would prove fatal to the colony, but in 1899 it seemed only logical:

To lessen the danger from fire the builders of the town scattered the houses over considerable territory but this fault we will correct as rapidly as possible so that good streets and sidewalks can be made with the least possible expense of time and money.⁵

Fire would first plague the community, and finally destroy it; but the need for roads and sidewalks—even in Georgia’s dry season—seemed more pressing. Waycross, Georgia, is on the northern reaches of the Okefenokee Swamp. Ruskin, just south of Waycross, had severe drainage problems at the turn of the century. The built-up railroad bed, where as many as 25 trains a day would pass, was high and usually dry; but just off the railroad right-of-way, water backed into the lowlands as if the railroad were a low dike, miles long.

True to their Ruskinite principles, the colonists shared manual labor in this strange new land. The colony doctor, not exempt from grubbing out palmettoes, tried to give readers of his “Colony Notes” in *The Coming Nation*. a whimsical sense of this obdurate southern plant:

Now a palmetto root ain’t like anything else under the sun. When it wants to go in any particular direction, it don’t go spreading around like other roots, but takes the shortest cut, and when it gets there stops short off. The roots are rather flat, from 2 to 6 feet long, and hold their size pretty well to the end. From the underside little rootlets, world with end, run down from each side into the earth a distance, they say, of 10 to 18 feet. Our private opinion is that they go clear through [the earth] and are clinched on the other side.⁶

A belief in the inherent value of work, whether performing surgery or grubbing palmettoes, was a strong carry-over from the Ruskinites’ early commitments. Although their charter had changed, and would change again, the colonists maintained a set of beliefs—only slightly modified by experience—that included communal effort, a labor-based currency counting hours instead of dollars, and a strong emphasis on community culture and education.

Concerning the value of work, *The Coming Nation* localizes the fervor John Ruskin had generalized in *Fors Clavigera*. In Georgia, the “Colony Notes” contend:

We don’t believe there is a place in America where the dignity of labor is more recognized where there is so little caste prejudice as right here in Ruskin. Here all work is considered honorable, and he is considered dishonorable who shirks it. There is no rank or caste here. Ladies who work in the laundry or kitchen are often at the head of our literary society, able and willing to hold their own in

either place. With men it is the same. Our president and other officers more frequently come from those who do the heavy drudgery work than from the office. . . . Verily, all work is honored here.⁷

Currency, at the new Ruskin, as in Tennessee, was counted in hours and even in fraction of hours. Although the Tennessee system would show signs of strain in Georgia, it remained in full force until the end.

Although advocates of anarchy and free love had been purged with the “Injunctionists” in Tennessee, the freedom of thought and association stipulated in the Tennessee By-laws did persist in Georgia. The Georgia colony numbered Quakers along with Baptists, and its rhetoric was strictly non-sectarian:

Bear in mind that in the Ruskin Commonwealth no creed obtains. Here there is absolute and unqualified religious freedom. If we find nobility of character in Buddha we indorse it; if we find truth and loveliness in Jesus Christ we cherish them; if we find splendid moral teaching in Confucius we proclaim it anew. Truth, virtue, honor, integrity, charity; these are our safeguards.⁸

Writing in 1903 for *The American Journal of Sociology*, J. W. Bamm of Chicago, who had spent six months in Ruskin, Tennessee, strongly implies that the Ruskinites’ lack of commitment to a mainstream religious system speeded the dissolution of their communities in Tennessee and Georgia. Comparing them with religious communalists in New York, Bamm writes,

The Oneida Community also had to face a crisis, some time after they had begun to co-operate, when they found that they had lost some \$40,000. However, there was such religious discipline there, and the leaders had such good sense, that they were enabled to institute a system of rigid economy in the colony which put them on their feet once more. There was no religious discipline at Ruskin, but an economic control would, I think, have answered the purpose.⁹

For “economic control,” the Ruskinite Colony substituted a bewildering succession of elected officers. And for “religious discipline,” the colony tried to substitute a non-sectarianism, a range

of cultural events, and a new emphasis on education as a means of achieving a sense of community. The “College of the New Economy” had failed in Tennessee, but—if the last week of August, 1900, was typical of the Georgia colony—the Ruskinites’ new home was, however briefly, a beehive of culture. Monday evening, elocution class and “regular voting”; Tuesday, band practice and vocal music; Wednesday night, Directors’ meeting; Thursday night, ladies’ reading circle; Friday night, band-practice and meeting of harmony circle; Saturday night, dance; Sunday afternoon, ethical society. And all this, mind you, even before the county school opened in September.

Ruskinites were interested in music as art—beyond its value as entertainment. Back in Tennessee, Ray G. Edwards, son of the injunctionist A. S. Edwards, had conducted violin classes and had drafted a textbook on harmony before leaving for Chicago. One of his most devout pupils was Ethel Calkins, whose bout with the “music machine” was reported in *The Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* and duly reprinted in *The Coming Nation*:

ST LOUIS, MO. Feb 9—Ethel Calkins, aged 12, travelling alone from Alliance, Neb., to her home in Ruskin, Ga., created a sensation at the Union Station. . . . The little mite was awaiting her train in the matron’s room when a traveler dropped a nickel in the slot of a music machine in the main waiting room and started it to playing. The air was the intermezzo from “Cavalaria Rusticana.” Ethel, attracted by the music, stood silently until the machine had stopped; then, quietly remarking, “I can beat that,” . . . began to play. . . . To all entreaties that she treat those present to another exhibition of her wonderful gift, Ethel replied in the negative, saying that she only played the intermezzo for the purpose of demonstrating that machine-made music lacked life—was without a soul.¹⁰

Although Ray G. Edwards’ father had been an injunctionist, the Georgia colony

Ruskinite emphasis on communal cultural events, the dignity of labor, a work-based currency, and common ownership of property—all these features of Tennessee life had carried quite successfully to Georgia. Other aspects of the community had been deliberately changed when the majority adopted the Ruskin Commongood document of intention, having signed over their stock in the Tennessee RCA to the new Ruskin Commonwealth. As noted above, the new charter styled itself “co-operative, not capitalist”; the new organization gave all adult women the vote, and it provided full membership for the members’ children upon reaching eighteen. These changes were deliberate. Other shifts in community organization were less carefully planned. Several of these shifts showed an erosion of the members’ bonds outside their family groups. The long communal dining tables in Tennessee, for example, had seated 12 to 14 people; “and each person was at liberty to sit where he pleased, but this was found to scatter the families too much.”¹³ The long tables from Tennessee were cut in two in Georgia. The shorter tables served only six, which was said to give “a more family appearance to . . . the dining room.”¹⁴

Early signs that communal bonds were eroding in Georgia came in their first December, as each member was given a house and a lot “which shall belong to them absolutely so long as they occupy them.”¹⁵ Legal ownership, of course, stayed with the Ruskin Commonwealth; but the new arrangement to include fencing by each family, was a small indication of divisiveness. In Tennessee, almost all the Ruskinites had dined communally on the vast third floor of the

Printery. By January of 1901 in Georgia fully half of the community dined at home. Even in the usually hortatory columns of *The Coming Nation*, no premium was placed on communal dining. “The half of the community who still eat at home, presumably prefer it; those who eat at the common dining hall, seem to prefer that.”¹⁶

In Georgia, the announced ideals of Ruskin remained unchanged, yet some differences in the detail of community life pointed to internal dissension. Some of the similarities between the Tennessee and Georgia colonies were ominous. These included a communal debt, a new but all too familiar division of the utopians into separate groups, and the ultimately unsuccessful struggle to build an agricultural base in an unfamiliar state.

The Ruskinites remained in debt. H. C. McDill’s prediction in Tennessee, that they might be paid from the receiver’s sale “sometime around the beginning of the next century,” proved not too pessimistic. The three tracts of land the RCA had agreed to purchase from Thomas Rogers a few years earlier for \$10,500 were “bid-up” by a cousin of Leech the receiver, who then reported a default on the bidding. Late in 1899 the property was, by default, sold back to the same Thomas Rogers for \$1,505.¹⁷ A few dimes on the dollar had come from the receiver’s sale of moveable property, but the total share of the Georgia colonists was only \$2,370 from the sale of their entire community in Tennessee. The colony itself had paid the railroad a “pretty stiff” fee of \$3,476 for transportation to Georgia.¹⁸ To acquire the ASCA property at Duke, Georgia, the Ruskin Commonwealth had to pay and pledge some \$3,000 more.

Putting a brave face on the facts in March, 1900, the editor of *The Coming Nation* defended Ruskin, Georgia:

Our land and homes are entirely free from debt; but we owe \$5,065, almost entirely to friends and members, and we now have over \$2,600 CASH in the treasury, leaving our real indebtedness about \$2,400. A conservative inventory of the real and personal property of the Commonwealth reaches the sum of \$23,000.¹⁹

In actuality, much of the assets of the RC was a simple paper—stock signed over from the earlier RCA in Tennessee. The real estate holdings of the RC had been purchased for \$3000—a far cry from the “conservative inventory” of an additional \$20,000. Much of the real debt of the Ruskin Commonwealth in Georgia was owed to members including A. H. Steffe, an earlier member of the ASCA in Duke, now renamed Ruskin. So much for communal debt; it did continue.

A second persistent problem of the Ruskinites was internal dissension. In Tennessee, the split between charter members and newcomers had become that between Injunctionists and members of the Ruskin Commonwealth; in Georgia, the new colonists found it difficult to absorb the ASCA members, especially A. H. Steffe. In listing the 11 adult males of the ASCA in “Colony Notes” for Sept. 30, 1899, the ever optimistic H. C. McDill affirmed, “This is the last time we will ever mention these new members separate and apart from all other Ruskinites, as the two branches have become so thoroughly amalgamated.” In actuality, nine of the eleven were seldom cited by name even in the chattiest columns of *The Coming Nation*. Only one ASCA member, W. K. Stokes, became a colony officer in the latter days of Ruskin. A. H. Steffe, a bachelor, was somewhat abrasively chided by Dr. McDill for refusing to marry. Steffe ran the colony store, where McDill pictured him “shivering round behind the counter with overcoat, gloves, ear muffs and leggins on.”²⁰

When a community is in debt, even to its own members, hunger can put an edge on divisiveness; and here again in Georgia the community was unable to build an agricultural base adequate to sustain itself. In analyzing the failure of the Tennessee community, J. W. Braam had noted that the typical farmer was a northerner, and “the southern soil has certain peculiarities which the northern and western soil has not, and a northern farmer cannot work a southern farm profitably until he understands these peculiarities. . . .”²¹

Ruskinites soon found that, to newcomers from the Tennessee hills, the south Georgia flatland was far from hospitable.

The first American Ruskinite colony had relocated from the railhead of Tennessee City to the farmland of Cave Mills; the new Ruskinites in Georgia, this time, stayed close to the railroad and leased a farm about two and one-half miles from town. Most official photos in Ruskin were sold to help promote the colony, but the informal print titled “In the ‘Bay’ on the Way to the Farm” was not advertised in *The Coming Nation*. That “bay” was the road “covered with from one to three feet of water for over a quarter of a mile.”²² Even in spite of the “bay,” it seemed at first that “all the world this land needs to make it productive is careful farming and plenty of fertilizers.”²³ But by the following July, even the eternally cheerful Dr. McDill had concluded, “It is our private opinion that we got badly taken in on that leased farm. It looks all right and lays nice, but experience has taught us that the land is too poor to even raise a fuss on without a quart bottle in each pocket.”²⁴

In actuality, the Ruskinites’ problem may have been less with poor land than with poor farming. Crops have to be “bedded” in south Georgia. E. W. Crawford, then in Waycross, remembers hearing the crackers express contempt for the utopians’ vegetable farming. Their land was so low, he remembered, that “come a toad-frog strangler” rain, “it’d steam ‘em right in the ground.”²⁵ J. W. Braam quotes a late editorial in *The Coming Nation* which notes that farmers in the Georgia colony insisted on “planting flat” instead of in raised beds or ridges. “One of the farmers of the colony said, ‘I will plant this way if I live to be a thousand years old.’”²⁶ By 1901, the colony had less than a year to live.

Continued debt, the resurgence of factionalism, and continual failure of their crops combined to destabilize the community. Trying to save Ruskin, the colonists began to tinker with the Ruskin Commonwealth Charter. Drafted and presumably legalized in Tennessee, the

RC documents had to be resubmitted in Georgia, “the state of Georgia not recognizing our Tennessee organization as a trust.”²⁷ The newly revised charter appeared in *The Coming Nation* on November 11, 1899, but was “undergoing complete revision” two weeks later.²⁸ During the exceptionally mild early winter of '99 (82 degrees two days before Christmas), the colonists were plagued by high water and drainage problems; by early February, an informal search for a new site had begun.²⁹ But the Ruskinites had bought the only land they could afford, and they could not afford to move by rail again. Even in the first mild winter there was much illness and some hunger.

New members were urgently needed. Subscriptions to *The Coming Nation* had fallen drastically; so the Georgia Ruskinites adopted a variation of J. A. Wayland’s original plan for building his Tennessee City utopia. In 1894 Wayland had offered a share of utopia to any couple who added two hundred new subscribers to *The Coming Nation*. Six years later, the Ruskinites in Georgia pledged that

... if the friends of the co-operative movement throughout the country will increase the circulation of *The Coming Nation* to 50,000 a year, at 50 cents a year each subscription, the Commonwealth will admit to the colony free of membership twenty-one new members.³⁰

Although it gained some national attention, this appeal was not effective.

One member of the Commonwealth, John G. Steffe, turned to speculation in private land-sales. Groping for a new public, *The Coming Nation* carried free notice of Steffe’s capitalistic venture. This, in a community which had just voted “no” by a large majority to a proposal initiated by a referendum of members’ “Shall private ownership of animals be allowed.”³¹ In the same issue of *The Coming Nation*, its editors felt obliged to explain,

We wouldn’t touch a big land-speculation with a ten-foot pole. What we hope to do is make it possible for some poor man to secure a home at a reasonable price. Land can be had here cheap, and if we can aid them it will be done at a reasonable

cost. But what we especially want to do is to encourage the spirit of co-operation among our applicants and special preference will be given to those who wish to buy land co-operatively.³²

Into the communal Eden, the snake of private land sales had intruded.

With divided goals and with one member of the community making private profit from real estate, it was difficult to keep one's rhetoric pure. Even though later Ruskinite ventures were sustained or even initiated by land sales, the experiment in Georgia was not designed to allow them.

It was lucky for the Ruskinites that H. N. Casson, a former editor of *The Coming Nation* and early member of the Tennessee Colony, had not yet heard of the latest plans in Ruskin, Georgia. His indictment of intentional colonies was already stinging enough. J. A. Wayland, the first editor of *The Coming Nation* and disgruntled founder of Ruskin, Tennessee, was willing enough to unleash Casson's rhetoric in the newspaper *The Appeal to Reason*. Casson spoke of all Socialist' colonies," but his prime target was the defunct Ruskin, Tennessee:

There is not today, and there never has been, a successful Socialistic colony in America.

I held a different opinion two years ago, and it cost me \$1000 and almost fatal attack of thyroid fever to discover the truth. Those who read the *Appeal* may get the facts without paying so much. A business enterprise is not a success when its promoters are forced to live on dry bread, beans and cowpeas. It is not a success when it brings a salary of 50 cents a week, with which all necessities, except food and lodging, must be bought. It is not a success when it isolates its members from nearly all the advantages which the nineteenth century has developed, and condemns them to the hardships of a wilderness pioneer. It is not a success when it requires a ten-horse power heroism from every member to enable him to remain loyal to the experiment. It is not a success when at least one-third of the women are heartsick and dejected at the conditions under which they and their children are living. It is not a success when half of the members remain in it simply because they lack the means to get out of it. It is not a success when it fosters the spirit of wrangling, hatred and intolerance, leads as inevitably to splits as rivers lead to the sea.³³

The contentious editor of *The Coming Nation* would not let this challenge pass. Editor Calkins tried to refute the charges point by point. He encouraged the women of Ruskin, Georgia, to attest in writing that they, indeed, were not “heartbroken or dejected.” Accurately, Calkins disputed the amount of Casson’s loss in Ruskin, Tennessee (not \$1000 but \$500, at most), and he even printed a letter from Casson’s doctor saying that typhoid fever had not made Casson so sick as all that. With great editorial inconsistency, *The Coming Nation* touted even its second editor and “injunctionist,” A. S. Edwards—holding him up as a triumph of a utopian’s influence in national politics. The Ruskin newspaper itself, Calkins contended, has been a national leader: “That other Socialist papers now have thousands of readers is due to the fact that the Ruskin colony made *The Coming Nation*, and it, in turn, made Socialists.”³⁴

Rhetoric aside, the fortunes of Ruskin were ebbing. Membership was lagging, and many colonists were ill. H. C. McDill returned from Tennessee in March, 1900, with “a very small portion of wealth we created there.”³⁵ Editor Calkins, having made his editorial stand, stepped down and prepared to visit New Zealand as an “accredited agent of Ruskin Colony.”³⁶ As summer came on, the “Ruskin Coffee and Suspender Factory” burned to the ground. The colonists who had advocated centralizing their public buildings now had hard second thoughts. Always the optimist, Dr. McDill gave thanks for the limited damage:

Once again we have been face to face with ruin, and the providence that seems to watch over Ruskin, once more brought us through in safety. Had the machine shop got started nothing we could do would have stopped it. From there it would have spread to the boiler-house, printery, dining-room and kitchen, thus wiping out all our industries. Whether the colony could life through such a loss is a question that we fortunately do not have to settle at this time.³⁷

Any arsonist reading *The Coming Nation*—and there was at least one in the colony—could have taken his cues from Dr. McDill’s test. By mid-September, the Doctor was musing, “Next Friday, Sept. 14, will be just one year since we left our Tennessee home arriving here on Sept. 16. What

a vast amount of work, hope, disappointment, joy and sorrow we have crowded into that twelve months. Many old comrades have left us since coming here, worn out by the long struggle.”³⁸

The winter of 1900-01 was hard in Georgia. As E. W. Crawford put it, “The first winter was easy, but the second kilt ‘em.”³⁹ Continual illness and deprivation were to overcome the old sense of communalism. When H. C. McDill traveled back from Ruskin, Georgia, to revisit the remnants of Ruskin, Tennessee, the new president of the Commonwealth, Daniel Shepherd, had Tennessee attorney W. B. Leech seek an injunction forbidding McDill to present himself as an agent of “Ruskin Commonwealth,” as if fearing the Doctor would skim off the few remaining assets not leached by the court.

Here, the last periodic sentence in Herbert Casson’s condemnation of utopias applies: “It is not a success when it fosters a spirit of wrangling, hatred and intolerance, and leads to splits as inevitably as rivers lead to the sea.”⁴⁰ On July 1, 1901, the new officers of Ruskin in Tennessee again revised the Commonwealth charter, revoking all leaves of absence,⁴¹ a move designed to excommunicate those members of the Tennessee Colony now living in Georgia. Two weeks later a splinter group with Dr. McDill as spokesman formally protested this revocation to the President and Board of Directors of the Ruskin Commonwealth in Georgia. McDill and 14 other charter members of the Commonwealth, along with an additional ten members for whom he was agent, charged: “We know for a certainty that the very last thing you desire is our return. That this is but a part of a plot to disfranchise and disinherit certain numbers of members who are absent—with a view to securing the real and personal property of the Colony for your own use and profit.”⁴²

Although there is no evidence that Isaac Broome ever visited the Ruskinites in Georgia, he does spend two pages of his vitriolic book-length expose of the Tennessee colony. *The Last Days of the Ruskin Co-Operative Association*, on the Georgia colony. Broome’s thesis is that

experiments in colonization will hinder the coming of the Socialist state. Given his skewed wisdom of hindsight, Broome's conclusion is not surprising:

One of the most important lessons, after showing the incapacity of the uneducated proletariat to organize or sustain a condition of society giving any security or advancement: Do the misfortunes that happen to this class of people result in any beneficial lesson by which they may profit? This point has been watched closely in the sociological study of Ruskin, and the conclusion is positively, no! They do not. There is not sufficient intelligence to realize the seriousness of the disaster. The pinch is felt, like a starved animal; but the least variation in it in the way of relief, brings forward the same traits of impudence, tyranny and cruelty as before, as shown in the new organization that went to Georgia. Two years wiped them out.⁴³

True enough, two years in Georgia was hard for the Ruskinites. But arson, not time, wiped out the community.

In its last phase, Ruskin, Georgia, was governed by a Board of Directors including the pre-Ruskinite ASCA colonist A. H. Steffe. In 1976 E. W. Crawford still remembered the "shrewd fellow" well: "He burnt 'em out, then bought 'em out"⁴⁴ In the later years, "he was a full-blooded ole Yankee with a little white goatee beard. . . . Every day he'd dress up with a white collar and a black tie."⁴⁵

In its last weeks, the colony's members lost all faith in their management. Challenged at a town meeting, the manager refused to show his books.⁴⁶ Two days before a professional accountant was to arrive, the dreaded mid-town fire broke out. When the Ruskinites first arrived, Dr. McDill had agonized over such a fire; it was worse than his imaginary portrait. All the central buildings of Ruskin burned to the dirt: the Cereal-Coffee building and two-story-suspender factory, the broom factory, the coffee house, the community kitchen, the manager's accountroom, and the printing room and the press of *The Coming Nation*. Everything went in one central fire.

As R. L. Hurst's printed history summarizes, one member of the Board of Directors died suddenly. Rumors tagged his demise as 'poisoned.' Another member of the Ruskin Board hurried off to California. A. H. Steffe, a remaining director, offered a way out of the predicament. . . . each colonist was offered ten dollars for his house."⁴⁷

Local historian Lillian Corbett, whose diligent and restrained master's thesis portrays the Georgia Ruskinites, offered more detail when interviewed in person:

An old nigra man who worked in the colony told me this; and I've never told but one of two people this. The night before that [the Ruskin colony] burned, all night long he and another man hauled furniture and all important things out in the woods. And then, when these poor things [the colonists] were destitute . . . he bought them out. They were glad to get away from there. No food, no money, no anything. . . . Mr. Steffe over-ruled every other one, and got out with all the things of all the people.⁴⁸

Back when the Ruskinites of Tennessee had lost their land, they cut cord-wood to support their families. Isaac Broome had disdained their menial labor. Mrs. Corbett confirms that, after the Georgia colonists were burned out, they worked for local farmers. Broome, again, cannot resist drawing a loaded conclusion:

Who is to blame for the stupidity of the masses? if they were not stupid no one could exploit them, or would they wreck a first-class chance such as they had in Ruskin, or fight like fiends in the new organization that went to Duke, Ga., until the last vestige was destroyed and then go to work making berry crates for an employer of convict labor alongside of convicts—a fate worse than the Cumberland furnace slavery, after the smashup in Tennessee. . . .

Although a small group attempted to carry on a new colony near Valdosta, the Ruskinite venture in Georgia was ended.

Characteristically, Broome held "stupidity" as the culprit and education as the answer. And it is significant that each of the three later Ruskinite colonies was centered on a college. The series of Ruskinite communities did continue after Tennessee and Georgia, but Broome's

impassioned account would inflate the history of the first two Ruskins to apocalyptic dimensions:

The wreck of individual lives and whole families that followed the tragedy of Ruskin cannot be given here. A Zola could not picture its horrors. Dispersement, moral debasement, death and insanity resulted. Many of the survivors maintained a precarious existence worse than death. Disease in the swamps of South Georgia swept them away, or to the grave, like flies.⁵⁰

True enough, the mortality rate was high. But many surviving colonists soon found welcome in the single-tax colony of Fairhope, Alabama.⁵¹ A “Ruskin Reunion” picture in Fairhope shows 24 colonists, children included. Now that the printing press of *The Coming Nation* was lying in the ashes, Dr. H. C. McDill turned to a hand-cranked “ditto” duplicator to mail out the successor to the “Colony Notes,” now named the *Ruskin Bugle*. McDill’s publication was a valiant attempt to keep touch with the former members of Ruskin. For eight single-spaced pages the indefatigable doctor shared news, names, and addresses among Ruskinites scattered to Texas, Illinois, California, Wisconsin, Arkansas, and Colorado. A few veterans of the earlier experiments would read of the new ventures in *The Arena*; some veterans would join the new campaigns for utopia.

Notes for Chapter Two:

1. "Colony Notes" (December 30, 1899).
2. "Colony Notes" (September 30, 1899).
3. *Ibid.*
4. Interview with A. McA. Miller, of 26 August 1976. The interviewee was born Nov. 9, 1898, and remembers Steffe well.
5. "Colony Notes" (September 30, 1899).
6. "Colony Notes" (December 2, 1899).
7. "Colony Notes" (January 20, 1900).
8. "Colony Notes" (December 2, 1899).
9. VIII (1903), pp. 679-680. Hereafter cited as Braam.
10. "Colony Notes" (February 17, 1900) and *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (February 10, 1900).
11. *The Illinoian*, XLII, #49 (December 4, 1903).
12. Interview with Cuyler Cox (b. May 25, 1885) by his grandson Luther Thrift in Waycross, GA, December 15, 1973.
13. "Colony Notes" (February 24, 1900),
14. *Ibid.*
15. "Colony Notes" (December 30, 1899).
16. "Colony Notes" (January 19, 1901).
17. This astonishing disparity is no typographical error. "W. H. Lawson et al vs Ruskin Co-Operative Ass'n et al" was heard in chancery court August 22, 1899, on November 6, 1899, the court released R. L. Leech from his bid; Thomas Rogers then made his offer, which Hardin Leech and R. L. Leech pled to the court as "wholly inadequate, that property is worth vastly more than this bid offered thereon." But Thomas Rogers offered \$1,505 cash, and the chancery upheld his right to purchase. Because the colonists in Georgia still considered Thomas Rogers their friend, it would appear that Rogers had to pay little more than the amount the colonists—in monthly payments—had actually paid him in cash or kind before the colonists displaced to Georgia. In summary, Rogers got his property back; the Leeches got their legal fees and the colonists—whether of the Commonwealth or the

Injunctionist factions—were totally the losers. See MS-23 in Tennessee State Library and Archives, source cited as “Leech” above, and “Colony Notes” (October 14, 1899, ff.).

18. “Colony Notes” (September 30, 1899).
19. *The Coming Nation*, March, 1900.
20. “Colony Notes” (January 27, 1900).
21. Braam, p. 669.
22. “Colony Notes” (May 19, 1900).
23. *Ibid.*
24. “Colony Notes” (July 28, 1900).
25. Interview by A.M.M., August 22, 1976.
26. Braam, p. 671.
27. “Colony Notes” (October 21, 1899).
28. “Colony Notes” (November 25, 1899).
29. “Colony Notes” (February 10, 1900).
30. Quoted with approval in *The Daily Battle Creek [Michigan] Moon* from *The Coming Nation* (February 17, 1900).
31. *The Coming Nation* (February 17, 1900).
32. *Ibid.*
33. H. N. Casson in *The Appeal to Reason*.
34. *The Coming Nation* (March 17, 1900).
35. “Colony Notes” (March 17, 1900).
36. “Colony Notes” (May 26, 1900).
37. “Colony Notes” (June 2, 1900).
38. “Colony Notes” (September 15, 1900).
39. Interview with E. W. Crawford, *loc. cit.*

40.
The Appeal to Reason. loc cit.
41.
Copy is MS-23, Tennessee State Library and Archives.
42.
Ibid.
43.
(Chicago: 1902), p. 181.
44.
Interview by A.M.M., August 22, 1976.
45.
Ibid.
46.
Robert Latimer Hurst, "Ruskin: Ware County's Lost Utopia," *This Magic Wilderness; Historical Features from the Wiregrass.* p. 70.
47.
Ibid., p. 70.
48.
Interview by A.M.M., Aug. 22, 1976.
49.
Broome
50.
Broome
51.
Handwritten note by Dr. McDill's son, J. T. McDill, on spirit duplicator copy in MS-23,
loc. cit.

CHAPTER THREE: RUSKIN, MISSOURI

In the spring of 1900, while Ruskin, Georgia, was still persuading itself into optimism, the next Ruskinite venture began in Trenton, Missouri. Avalon College, soon to be renamed Ruskin College, opened on September 3, 1900. Claiming to be affiliated with Ruskin Hall in Oxford, England, the college linked itself with a maze of co-operative associations allegedly nationwide. The complex of Ruskinite interests then shifted southward to Glen Ellyn, Illinois, in July of 1903. Avalon College had been reopened in 1900 by G. M. Miller, one of two “People’s University people” from Chicago who had offered to affiliate with the directors of the Ruskin Commongood Society in Tennessee. That offer had been rejected, and G. M. Miller had stayed on briefly, to help the Tennessee anti-injunctionists draft an early version of the Ruskin Commonwealth charter, the first framework for Ruskin, Georgia. G. M. Miller’s diversified work in law, classical languages, and education helped him to focus Ruskinite social experimentation for the next two decades in Missouri, Illinois, and Florida.

The colonies in Tennessee and Georgia formed the first phase of Ruskinite utopianism in America. The second phase, beginning with Ruskin College in Missouri, had three new aspects. First, college was defined as central to the communal venture. In Tennessee, a cornerstone was laid for the “College of the New Economy,” but the building funds were quickly diverted, and in Georgia, formal education was limited to the grade-school level.

Another new aspect of this second phase of the Ruskinite communities was their allowing and even encouraging individual ownership of property within a framework of collective ownership of community assets. In Georgia, late in the community’s life, a new member had to give the Commonwealth his first \$500 worth of personal property, if any, in addition to paying \$500 for membership.

The third new feature of the second phase would become more evident as the Ruskinites shifted south from Missouri, through Illinois, to Florida. Selling land came to be defined as a legitimate source of communal income. In Tennessee, the community sold its mortgaged land only when a court receiver was appointed. In Georgia, A. H. Steffe's speculation in land sales had run firmly against the grain of the Ruskin Commonwealth.

Most of the new aspects of Ruskinite social experimentation seem directly related to the educational policy of Ruskin College in Missouri. G. M. Miller, always the idealist and promoter, had both personal and philosophical reasons to keep the old Avalon College alive. In 1881, he had assumed the chair of Ancient Languages at Avalon; in the same year he had married Adaline Dickman, a fellow member of the faculty. By 1900, he had held interim positions in law and education, and had a family of seven children. The range of his allegiances is indicated by the names of his two youngest sons. Olnton, the elder boy's name, was coined from the final syllables of Lincoln and Washington. The first two names of the youngest child, Willard Bellamy, were chosen in honor of Frances Willard and Edward Bellamy, author of *Looking Backward* and *Equality*. As the story goes, things could have been worse. As his youngest son came due, G. M. Miller was celebrating a successful injunction to block the use of alcohol in a nearby community called Crossroads; his youngest child barely escaped being named "Crossroads Injunction Miller."

The naming of the new Ruskin College was more direct. According to T. E. Will, a former president of Kansas State College,

. . . . Mr. Walter Vrooman, founder of Ruskin Hall, Oxford, England, and recently returned to America to establish here the Oxford or Ruskin Hall movement, heard of Avalon College, visited it, and effected a combination with President Miller whereby the institution, to be known thereafter as 'Ruskin College' became the center of the Oxford Movement in America.¹

Walter Vrooman, one among several reformers of that family, offered a highly generalized statement of purpose to the school:

Ruskin College stands for an ideal. It realizes that the world loves. It recognizes that mechanical progress has made want unnecessary, but that poverty, like a dark shadow, follows in the wake of progress, breeding conditions that menace civilization. This condition it traces to the survival of outgrown institutions, notably the private ownership and control of the heritage of the race—the earth and the tools with which its wealth may be made available to man. As political autocracy was superseded by political democracy, so industrial autocracy must be superseded by industrial democracy. But the organs of enlightenment, including colleges and universities, are largely under the control of forces opposed to the change. Ruskin College stands for peaceful progress and the cooperative commonwealth.²

Vrooman's charge to the college, although well within the mainstream of American anti-monopolistic rhetoric, is not specifically drawn from John Ruskin. Ruskin, after all, distrusted democracy as much as he disliked machinery. Even though his utopian proposals changed markedly throughout his later years, John Ruskin can hardly be cited as an advocate of "political democracy." And Ruskin's acknowledged master, Carlyle, would have raged at Vrooman's slap at "autocracy." Ruskin's Guild of St. George was not democratic, even though Ruskin made concessions for government by council. Vrooman's ideological contributions, while not Ruskinite in politics, are nonetheless compatible with John Ruskin's general goals for education.

As T. E. Will interpreted Ruskin's charge, the college should feature a curriculum to represent "not the dead past, but the living present; the widest freedom of choice among studies should be accorded students. . . . stress should be laid upon education for citizenship; hand training should accompany mental training."³ Will's allusion to the "dead past" must have grated on G. M. Miller's training as a classicist; but, as President of Ruskin College, Miller was a proponent of "hand training." This evocative phrase was meant to recall John Ruskin's

education triad of “Hand, Head, and Heart.”⁴ Meanwhile, the President’s rhetoric stressed that ideals and ethics are central. Individual values and national ideals must answer each other:

The greatest offense one can commit against himself and his fellow-man is the abandonment of an ideal better than himself—the denial of life’s faith, in which alone progress is possible. The refusal to advance or the determination to deteriorate, which two are one, is the only unpardonable sin. These principles apply as strictly to nations as to individuals.⁵

An intense idealism, then, was to join with “hand training” to shape the curriculum of Ruskin College. The college itself, according to its President, “should be a prophecy of the new order, as each ascending form of life in evolution prophesied a higher.”⁶ Such rhetoric made strange bedfellows. Although G. M. Miller winced at Frank Parsons’ castigation of the classics, he welcomed Parsons as a faculty member in the Ruskin College of Social Science.⁷ Evolutionary concepts were basic to Parsons’ social philosophy of “Mutualism,” which he ingeniously had rescued from the anti-humanitarian conclusions of Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism.⁸

The President contended that the college goal, to further the evolution of society towards “the new Time . . . the new order,”⁹ gains strength from the “chief hope . . . found in the fact that industry is asserting its supremacy—that doing is taking precedence of both praying and ruling.”¹⁰ By industry here is meant work, agricultural in particular, but not necessarily non-mechanical. According to the President, the value of industry (thus defined) is to re-inform the relationships of the determinate of modern society; market, government, church, factory, and school.¹¹ The school had been an instrument of social repression because “each generation must be taught to protect the market and its adjuncts” (i.e. the government, church, and factory), or else the market “cannot stand.” By this argument, to change the school is to reform society at large. When work as a value informs the school, then society must change. To usher in “the new order,” accordingly, society must have a school which unites the “farm and the factory”

with “the market,” implicitly under the government of a college. Touting in 1902 a college founded in 1900, President Miller voiced a basic tenet of the American Progressivism of his time. As Lawrence A. Cremin puts it more coolly in *The Transformation of the School*:

To look back on the nineties is to sense an awakening of social conscience, a growing belief that this incredible suffering [of the poor] was neither the fault nor the inevitable lot of the sufferers, that it could certainly be alleviated, and that the road to alleviation was neither charity nor revolution, but in the last analysis, education.¹²

The role of religion at Ruskin, Missouri, is withheld for the last page of G. M. Miller’s article “The School in the Promotion of Progress.” Strict non-sectarianism is the policy:

As to religion, the college preaches and practices religion as but the correction of the errors into which the government is likely to fall in dealing so largely with material things in its direction of industry, by calling attention to the larger relationships among men and the larger destiny of the race. It lets medieval theology rest in the grave it has digged [sic] for itself. Among the five hundred or more students from fourteen States, three Territories, and five foreign countries that have been enrolled in the last two years are all shades of faith. From the agnostic to the Christian Scientist, including the Jew, the Catholic and the Theosophist; yet religious controversy is almost unknown.¹³

At Ruskin College in Missouri, the pluralism of religion was simple in comparison with the maze of its corporate structure. When Avalon College was renamed Ruskin, its relationship to the British Ruskin Hall Educational System remained obscure, but it was said to be the “Central College for America” of that system.¹⁴ Frank Parsons and G. M. Miller judged this affiliation to be important; when Parsons went abroad in 1901, he had the President’s letter of introduction identifying him as “dean of the lecture extension division” of “the Oxford Movement of America.”¹⁵ Later, after the Vroomans’ money was withdrawn from support of Ruskin College in Illinois,¹⁶ no affiliation with Oxford or with Ruskin Hall would be claimed.

Late in 1902, G. M. Miller noted the college's affiliation in Trenton, Missouri, with the "Western Cooperative Association." As affiliations coalesced, the college in Missouri ballooned into a "University." In Missouri, the corporate structure, as described by R. R. Denslow, was as fragile as most structures made largely of paper:

The most notable event in the history of the college was the establishment of "The Multitude Incorporated." This was a corporation organized under the laws of Missouri, its directorate controlled by persons identified with Ruskin College, its functions being to act as trustee for and manager of certain cooperative movements, to receive from these revenues for Ruskin University and to control the entire educational movement comprehended by the name "Ruskin University."

The chief cooperative movements were four in number, including the western Cooperative Association, organized under the laws of New Jersey. It owned in Trenton, a drug store, chemical manufacturing works, a hardware store, two grocery stores, including the stocks of three other stores which it absorbed, a large farm, a canning factory, a woodwork manufacturing company, and a dry goods store. Its authorized capital was \$500,000. Other movements were the Central Western Cooperative Association, organized under the laws of West Virginia with headquarters in Kansas City, with an authorized capital of \$350,000; the Kansas Western Cooperative, organized under the laws of West Virginia with an authorized capital of \$25,000; and the Southern Cooperative, under the laws of Florida, with an authorized capital of \$25,000.¹⁷

Whether legal fiction or fact, this web of corporations touched the lives of Ruskin College students through the Trenton-Ruskin Manufacturing Company, which did for a time provide work-study opportunities for the undergraduates of Ruskin.

Room, board, and tuition at Ruskin College in Missouri was \$120 for 40 weeks.¹⁸ If a student had no money at all, he could in theory be advanced \$125 from the student loan fund; this amount paid to the college would guarantee him a place on the "industrial plan" by which he had first chance to work for five hours a day, six days a week, at ten cents an hour.¹⁹ This would pay for tuition, room, and board. Details of the plan varied as the Ruskin College experimented with it, but the idea of "industrial plan" students supporting themselves and the institution remained constant, whether the college was in Missouri, Illinois, or Florida. In Missouri, the

affiliates of Trenton-Ruskin Manufacturing Company were ready for student workers. Students on the “industrial plan” could work up to the number of hours guaranteed by their prior payment or loan; other students’ work hours were limited to 12 and ½ hours a week unless all “guaranteed students were fully employed.”²⁰ The company offered a range of jobs, involving “woodwork, including stairwork, doubletress, singletress, neck-yokes, ax, hatchet, and hammer handles. . . . A carpenter shop, dressmaking establishment and a small laundry were all operated by the students.”²¹ Garden and farm work was also available, as in the earlier Ruskinite communities. In Missouri, however, work was computed in the equivalent of currency—not hours. Skilled and responsible jobs brought higher wages than the more menial;²² and in Missouri the labor went to support college instruction, in addition to the room and board for which—in effect—Ruskinites had worked in Tennessee and Georgia.

Student life at Ruskin College was busy enough. Not only were there six days of labor for those on the “industrial plan,” but all students were members of a “student republic.” According to the President, as the school changes, so will the State. Therefore, a republic is essential: “As long as the school is monarchic or oligarchic, so will be the State, no matter what theories of government there may be or what tag the State wears.”²³

Insistence on high ideals pervaded even the athletic teams at Ruskin College. A portrait of the Ruskin College football team in 1902 shows thirteen lightly padded young men, including the President’s oldest son, staring firmly at the camera. A very young man indeed holds the football with the date painted in careful white letters. The President’s youngest son, then only four years old, retained “a vivid recollection of standing on the platform and calling off the college yells.”²⁴ Two “college yells” still survive. The first, “Everyday and Everywhere Yell,” attests to the students’ sense of affiliation with John Ruskin’s legacy in England:

The earth, all the earth is
Ours, ours, ours,
Oxford, Ruskin,
Boom, Row,
Fire!²⁵

The second yell, probably composed after fire destroyed the hotel that had housed Ruskin College in Illinois, cut the final word “fire” (and who should call “fire” in a crowded room?), and inserted the word “Ruskin.” This is the “Ruskin College Students Official Yell,” a turn-of-the-century paean to faith in evolution, perseverance, and the cooperative movement:

Mineral, Vegetable,
Animal, Man!
Stop?—No!
Kingdom corporate, on we go:
Ruskin!!²⁶

The core of the academic and agricultural faculty of Ruskin College in Missouri, aside from the President and his wife, was formed of refugees from the Republican purge of Kansas State College in 1899. Thomas E. Will,²⁷ Ruskin College professor in social science, had been President of Kansas State for two years, and had brought part-time Boston State University professor Frank Parsons to Kansas. Former President Will had tried to make Kansas State “a center for liberal aspirations.” He had turned “the *Industrialist*, the college agricultural journal, into a reform organ.”²⁸ Joining the Ruskin College faculty in 1900, Will and Parsons brought former Kansas State Professor of Agriculture H. M. Cottrel with them. The Vroomans also held faculty positions. Walter Vrooman—the direct link with Ruskin Hall, Oxford, who had “contributed directly to the college treasury”²⁹—lectured at Ruskin College “on organization of Trusts, combines, and monopolies.”³⁰ Reverend Harry C. Vrooman spoke on the ethics of business;³¹ H. P. Vrooman was general superintendent of industry;³² and Mrs. Ella Cady-Vrooman joined the part-time faculty.³³ Frank Vrooman, although not listed on the Ruskin

College faculty, was an enthusiastic agrarian who joined the Ruskinites in writing for *The Arena*.³⁴

Clearly enough, the Vroomans were a force to be reckoned with in the Ruskinite experiment in Missouri; when their support was withdrawn after the move to Illinois, Ruskin University shrank back to being a college.

Even as early as 1902, the Ruskinite experiments had staked out a wide claim to causes of disaster. The colony at Ruskin, Tennessee, had been thwarted by legal injunction; the colony at Ruskin, Georgia, had been destroyed by financial mismanagement and arson. Ruskin College and University, together with the Trenton Ruskin Manufacturing Company of “The Multitude Incorporated,” appears to have been defeated by economic warfare. The Ruskin College President put a good face on the situation when, introducing the new Ruskin College in Illinois to readers of *The Arena*, he summarized the situation in Trenton, Missouri:

... the attendance was fast outgrowing the capability of the industrial department. More buildings for dormitories and minor industries became necessary, and plans were made for merging the lease into title and fee and putting up two new buildings. To carry out these plans it was necessary that \$50,000 be secured in donations. The writer started eastward in November [1902] expecting to join Dr. and Mrs. Vrooman in New York City, in an effort to enlist the cooperation of such people as are coming to look with favor upon the New Education as it is represented by Ruskin College. He got no farther than Chicago. He found there such an intense sentiment for the New Education in all of its phases that it was unnecessary to go farther.³⁵

Granted, Chicago was far more involved with educational and social reform than was Trenton, Missouri. By 1902, the settlement movement had been active for over ten years in Chicago, which had Jane Addams’ Hill House, “the most famous of American settlements.”³⁶ While John Dewey was at the University of Chicago, he had been closely associated with Addams.³⁷ The focus of her efforts in Chicago was her attempt “to socialize Ruskin’s dictum that labor without

art brutalizes; ‘industrial civilization,’ she maintained, ‘needs the solace of collective art inherent in collective labor.’”³⁸

It may be polite to describe the problem in Trenton, Missouri, as a shortage of jobs for a growing student body; it would be more accurate to describe it as students deprived of their cooperative jobs, as more conservative merchants systematically undersold the Trenton-Ruskin Manufacturing Company. The group photo taken in Trenton, Missouri, on March 10, 1903, shows 103 people gathered at the door of Ruskin College—students and faculty together. At least four of the young people are the President’s children who by then were old enough to be students. Some of the young men’s hats were set at a jaunty angle. The President’s son Wendell, at age eleven already a student of accounting and shorthand, lounged on the college sidewalk, ready, it seems, for anything. March, 1903, was one month before the college moved again. Denslow’s *Centennial History* gives the best account of how the cooperative movement had overextended itself in Trenton:

They had almost every field of business and for a while it looked as if the business men out of the town would be ruined. How were they driven out? In the first place, they fell by their own weight, but the fall was accelerated by the activities of the business men of the town. It was decided that each merchant with the cooperation of his wholesale dealers, should undersell the cooperatives which were competing in his own field. This was done with great losses to the legitimate merchants, and also to their wholesale houses. In the dry goods line, one well-known Chicago firm is reliably reported to have lost \$10,000 by supplying goods to a local merchant at below-cost prices.³⁹

Late in April, 1903, the remaining Ruskin students and faculty boarded the Rock Island Line, headed for Glen Ellyn, Illinois. The school year was not over yet, so classes were held as the train rolled on. When the overloaded train slowed down, the students got out and walked beside the cars.⁴⁰ Unlike the earlier Ruskinites’ train to Georgia, this one flew no banners. The work of education continued. On April 23, 1903, the train pulled into Glen Ellyn. A new Ruskin was about to begin.

Notes for Chapter Three:

1. "A College For The People," *The Arena*, XXVI (July, 1901), p. 16. (Hereafter cited as Will).
2. William Ray Denslow, *Centennial History of Grundy County, Missouri: 1839-1939*, p. 242. (Hereafter cited as Denslow.)
3. Will, pp. 15-16.
4. G. M. Miller, "An Academic Center for the New Education," *The Arena* XXIX (July, 1903), p. 602. Hereafter cited as "New Education." His source is John Ruskin, "Essays on Political Economy: Nature of Wealth and Labor," p. 226 in Bryson.
5. G. M. Miller, "Why I am Opposed to Imperialism," *The Arena*, XXVIII (July, 1902), p. 2.
6. G. M. Miller, "The School in the Promotion of Progress," *The Arena*, XXVII (Sept., 1902), p. 233. Hereafter cited as "The School."
7. Arthur Mann, "Frank Parson: the Professor as Crusader," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVII, #3 (Dec., 1950), p. 476.
8. Mann, p. 477.
9. "The School," pp. 232-233
10. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
12. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957*. p. 59. (Hereafter cited as Cremin.)
13. "The School," p. 237.
14. Denslow, p. 242.
15. Mann, p. 476. This letter is in the holdings of the Parsons collection at Yale.
16. Neither the Ruskin College in Missouri nor that later in Illinois was "founded in Ruskin, Tennessee" as a WPA history alleges; no available literature for either college claims such a lineage, and the "College" in Tennessee never grew beyond its cornerstone. This notion seems to have originated in Ada Douglas Harmon's *The Story of an Old Town—Glen Ellyn*. (c. 1928). It is repeated in the WPA's *DuPage County: A Descriptive and Historical Guide, 1831-1939*, p. 86. Later local histories repeat the errors of this text.
17. Denslow, pp. 243-244.

18.
 "The School," p. 236.
19.
 Will, p. 17.
20.
 "The School," p. 236.
21.
 Denslow, p. 244.
22.
 "The School," p. 236.
23.
 Ibid.
24.
 Interview with W.D.M. by A.M.M., November 4, 1973.
25.
 Denslow, p. 245.
26.
 Denslow, p. 245, gives a slightly different version. This one is verbatim, and better.
27.
 Mann, p. 475. Will's middle initial is "E," not "A." His biography and signed articles in *The Arena* identify him correctly. See "The Arena for the Coming Year," XXVIII (September, 1902), pp. 230 ff.
28.
 Mann, p. 475.
29.
 Will, p. 16.
30.
 Denslow, p. 246.
31.
 Ibid.
32.
 Denslow, p. 245.
33.
 Denslow, p. 246.
34.
 See, for example, "Uncle Sam's Romance with Science and the Soil," *The Arena*, XXXIV (Dec., 1905), pp. 561-68.
35.
 "New Education," p. 605
36.
 Cremin, p. 60.
37.
 Cremin, p. 63.
38.
 Cremin, p. 63. Internal quote from Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, p. 219.
39.
 Denslow, p. 60

40.

Interview with O. D. Miller by A.M.M., Summer 1971.

CHAPTER FOUR: RUSKIN, ILLINOIS

Ruskin College and University in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, lasted less than two academic years; it left records of only one graduating class, 1904, but the lesson its founders learned near Chicago—how not to found a college—would serve them in good stead later in Florida. Ruskinites in Illinois would find their ventures subverted by their immense physical plant, their sprawling corporate entanglements, and the constant friction between their idealistic goals and the social setting.

Back in Missouri, the old Avalon College building had been a known quantity; in Illinois, the bulk of the Glen Ellyn Hotel, built in 1891, was a maze of unpleasant surprises. Soon renamed the Central Building of Ruskin, beside Lake Ruskin, two blocks north of the Ruskin station of the Chicago and Aurora Electric Railroad, the building was lovely in summer but vast and unworkable in winter. *Ruskin Rays*, a lavish 68-page catalog printed for August, 1904, describes the building as “six stories high in front, four stories in the wings, and eight stories in the tower. It covers nearly an acre of ground and was erected and furnished at a cost of \$120,000”¹ Three weeks after the Ruskinites arrived, the Central Building’s power house burned.² By early November, the midwestern fall was nippy, and the Ruskinites were inquiring whether the hotel could be warmed by electricity drawn from the third rail of the railroad.³ One week later this scheme was abandoned, and other hopes were held out:

The plan for heating the College building by electricity to be taken from the electric railroad was found to be impracticable at present. A combined system, including a large hot air furnace, is already in, also a part of the radiators, and a large steam boiler goes in this week or the first of next.⁴

One more week without heat, and the Ruskinites were ready to forget about John Ruskin’s distrust of modern technology. In the Ruskin College debate on whether or not “improved machinery was of advantage in human progress,” the affirmative carried the

audience.⁵ Heat came in late December. In honor of the plumber, Ruskin students and faculty “sang the doxology as they sat down to a sumptuous Christmas dinner. This was followed by the Ruskin yell and three cheers . . . for his skill and ability as a plumber.”⁶ With piping for mineral springs, steambaths, mud-baths, and heating, the building was a continual challenge.

The corporate structure of the Illinois Ruskinites was just as rambling and balky as their Central building. Moving from under the umbrella of the “Multitude Incorporated” in Missouri, in January of 1903, college President G. M. Miller had linked Ruskin with the organization of Midland University⁷; but by June of 1903, theoretician and philanthropist Walter Vrooman had resigned from the Board of Administration of the new corporation called Ruskin University (Midland).⁸ Fourteen months later, the official College publication would refer to Vrooman’s resignation as a “crisis” which came “by way of the withdrawal of the financial support of a half-million fortune which had been liberally drawn upon in the beginning of its work and which was supposed to be back of it permanently to furnish funds as needed. . . .”⁹

Deprived of Walter Vrooman’s funds, the former corporate head of Midland University, one J. J. Tobias, was coming to doubt the wisdom of progressive social thought. Publicly announcing the Board’s position, Tobias noted that a “large majority” of the Board “have been republicans for twenty-five years,” and “The Board emphatically declared against the propaganda of political socialism. . . . though one of the departments of the [Ruskin] University recently organized is sociology, with courses in economics and industrial history, and economics from the union labor standpoint.”¹⁰ To smooth the matter over, Tobias was willing to distinguish between political socialism, which was deplorable, and economic socialism, which would be carefully taught to advanced students only.¹¹ The signs were not good for Ruskin College whose core faculty in Missouri had been drawn from academicians purged from Kansas State University when conservatives regained power.

By August of 1903, Ruskin had reorganized again. Whereas immediately after the move to Glen Ellyn, it had been merely the “literary department of Ruskin University,” now it would be full-fledged Ruskin College “in full possession of the Glen Ellyn property formerly controlled by the University.”¹² Ruskin College was to be the “academic center” of the University, which would develop even more numerous programs of industrial and therapeutic education. G. M. Miller remained as President of the College and Dean of the University. With its academic and political freedoms hedged by separate incorporation, Ruskin College was free to expand and again change its name. Having freed itself of the Illinois charter of 1903, and having claimed control of Glen Ellyn property, Ruskin College one year later (July 8, 1904) announced its incorporation under “a federal law passed for the District of Columbia”—while remaining still at Glen Ellyn. The new name of Ruskin College was to be Ruskin University without links to J. J. Tobias and the Republicans associated with the same “Midland.” In cycling from University, to College, and back to University, the institution had been able to affiliate with “medical and other departments . . . in Chicago.”¹³

As long as the affiliates stayed in Chicago, they were no problem. It was the on-campus Glen Ellyn medical facility, the Ruskin Sanitarium, which was to disrupt the town-gown relations. Few documents of this venture survive, but the illustrated pamphlet titled *Ruskin Sanitarium* gives one a feel for how precarious and pretentious a venture this was. The pamphlet was published by the “‘Life and Health’ Department of Ruskin University” from an address in Chicago, but the sanitarium itself was housed in the central building of Ruskin University in Glen Ellyn. It offered regular, uncooked, or vegetarian diets, together with clean high country living “nearly three hundred feet up in the air—that’s most as high as the Masonic Temple” and

. . . the most important features of all are the MEDICATED MUD BATHS AND MINERAL SPRINGS. For ages five natural mineral springs have been pouring their medicated waters over the soil, until now it is impregnated for the healing of

Rheumatism, Gout, Eczema, diseases of the Kidneys and Liver, and all the disorders dependent upon a vitiated condition of the blood.¹⁴

Although the photographs of this brochure themselves were “doctored” to show crowds of people thronging the lake and the springs, unaltered photos do show an ostentatious and elegant architectural conceit of the Gilded Age: five mineral springs piped into reservoirs for drinking beneath one flat-topped pergola. Such beauty must be good for one, as medical science could prove:

Prof. Walter S. Haines, of Rush [sic] Medical College has analyzed them and pronounced them each of different chemical analysis, and they each have, therefore, different medicinal value. . . . The water of one spring is already well known as “Apollo Water,” the prince of table waters, pure, sparkling and delicious. One spring produces a laxative water, another a diuretic [sic], and yet another is tonic.¹⁵

This rhetoric would have been harmless enough, had not the Sanitarium advertised cures for “drug and liquor addictions . . . morphine, opium, etc.”¹⁶ By February, 1905, the *Wheaton Illinoian* was charging the patients with “making the nights hideous with their screams and foul language.”¹⁷ Although President G. M. Miller had assured the community that the building for drug addicts was fire-proof and separate from the college,¹⁸ the situation was clearly getting out of control.

Educationally as well as corporately, Ruskin University was over-extended. By claiming to fulfill all goals, the University ended by touching none for more than a moment. As listed in its bulletin for August, 1904, the Ruskin University Alliance comprised: Ruskin University, Ruskin Sanitarium, Ruskin Industrial Bank, Ruskin Botanic Gardens, Ruskin University Press, Ruskin Industrial Guild, and Ruskin Co-Operative Association. The faculty of what had been called the academic department of Ruskin College, newly transformed into the College of Liberal Arts, often doubled in brass as administrators for the above institutions. Claiming a

faculty of only eighteen (including the president and vice-president), together with eight adjunct faculty and seven assistants, *Ruskin Rays* for the 1904 listed the University as composed of:

- College of Liberal Arts
 - College of Applied Science
 - College of Engineering
- College of Law
 - College of Medicine, Dentistry, and Pharmacy
- Training School for Nurses
 - Ruskin Business College
- School of Oratory
 - Department of Music
 - Department of Art
- Ruskin Academy
 - Ruskin Home School
- Correspondence School of Correct English
- Ruskin Hall, Oxford, England (Affiliated.)

There was an announced “Lecture Staff” of fourteen persons including Edwin Markham (author of “The Man with the Hoe”), who was to offer a course in Modern Literature, and John Coleman Kenworthy, the British reformer who did indeed lecture on “Carlyle, Morris, Ruskin, and Tolstoy.”¹⁹ Of the schools and colleges listed above, it is clear that the College of Medicine was located in Chicago and was otherwise known as Jenner Medical College;²⁰ the other colleges centered in Glen Ellyn. Whether one reads *Ruskin Rays* as the height of idealism or the nadir of academic puffery, it is clear that the faculty believed in hard work—both in theory and in practice. John Ruskin’s dictum, “Wholesome human employment is the first and best method in all education, mental as well as bodily,” was set in bold face print to head the section titled “The New Education.”²¹ The President and his wife (who served as Vice-President) taught full-time as well. Their oldest son was a professor, and their oldest daughter was among the eight adjunct faculty. The next youngest daughter was among the seven assistant faculty members. These two young women themselves had graduated from the college only the previous June (1904). Their younger sister was a student, and their 11-year-old brother Wendell was a recent graduate from the program in business and shorthand. He served as corresponding secretary for his father, the

President. John Ruskin had upheld the well-run family as a model for educational and social organization; the family central to Ruskin College was an extreme example, if not of Ruskinian paternalism, then of an often desperate devotion to a cause.

Members of the other Ruskin colonies formed something like an extended family. Young Ethel Calkins, from Ruskin, Georgia, by way of Nebraska, appeared as a student during that heatless early winter of 1903.²²

When the principal of the Ruskin School or Oratory, Forrest W. Beers, and his wife had a daughter in the fall of 1904, she was named “Ruskina.”²³ And the redoubtable Harriet E. Orcutt, teacher of French and German in Missouri and Glen Ellyn, would follow the family and the college to Florida.

If the colleges and affiliated programs of Ruskin University were over-extended, and they were, perhaps it was because their goals were so all embracing. Education was to be reformed by applying three criteria: Elimination, Symmetrization, and Unification.²⁴ The first criterion meant cutting “obsolete elements”²⁵ from the curriculum and opening it to an elective system of courses; these courses would be “symmetrical” because they would treat John Ruskin’s three “H’s” as being “of equal importance.”²⁶ In *Unto This Last*, John Ruskin had taken Head, Heart and Hand to be facts as well as emblems of the greatest capital, which is Life.²⁷ Although the three “H’s” are theoretically of equal importance, Miller contended that the new Illinois college must stress the Hand most strongly, simply because it had been the most neglected in education.

Ruskin declares that moral character is impossible without manual labor, and Ruskin University believes it, not because Ruskin said it, but because experience proves it. Ruskin says, ‘Wholesome human employment is the first and best method in all education, mental as well as bodily,’ and Ruskin University believes it; not because Ruskin said it, not even that because a greater than Ruskin said, in substance. ‘Do that you may know;’ but because experience proves it.²⁸

Education is to be governed by the third criterion, Unification, as it eliminates the “fences” between the “material and spiritual . . . sacred and secular . . . body, soul, and spirit.”²⁹ Just as the principle of Symmetrization is slanted slightly by the new Ruskin’s emphasis on work, so Unification will be brought into balance over time by an immediate emphasis on “sociology.” Symbolically, balance is represented by the University’s logo: three “H’s” spread to the three inner angles of an equilateral triangle, each angle projecting equally over the circumference of a circle in which is inscribed the word Ruskin.

Progressive “sociology” at Ruskin merged into the study of history and religion, and the President increasingly turned to the Bible for models of equitable and just social organization. In “The Bible vs. Plutocracy,” printed in *The Arena* in September, 1903, he sketched the three principles of “administrative policy” which he found in Mosaic law:

1. Direct administration of political affairs by the people.
2. Economic equality in the tenure of the land.
3. Economic equality in industry and commerce.³⁰

In three later installments on “Economics of Moses,”³¹ he would reiterate and clarify these principles. As an administrator and theoretician, Miller applied his Mosaic principles to managing a student work-study program. “Direct administration” implies a student republic like the earlier one at Ruskin College in Missouri. In a wider context, “economic equality in the tenure of the land” allows private ownership, but not landlordship; and “economic equality in industry” means that the tools of production should be jointly owned. The first principle worked well during the new college’s first flush of enthusiasm; the second opened the way for equitable dealing in real estate, but the third principle—when the community as well as the college claims

an interest—can be disruptive. In the darkest days of the college, in 1905, these principles would return with a vengeance.

As early as November, 1903, there were indications—all immediately denied—that there was not enough productive work for the students to live on the “work-study” method introduced in Missouri.³² Certainly there was enough simple manual work available; the modern languages teacher Mrs. Orcutt led a singing clean-up crew across the campus, singing to the tune of “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow”: “It’s the way we have at Ruskin/To clear the trash away.”³³

By April 23, 1904, the college had survived one full year in Illinois. In May, 1904, the Industrial Guild was boosted by the arrival of a new female superintendent from Fairhope, Alabama,³⁴ where the refugees from Ruskin, Georgia, had gathered the previous year. As graduation approached, the students were cheered by a more positive indication of bonds among Ruskinites; John Coleman Kenworthy, Ph. D., described as “the personal friend of Tolstoy . . . and of Ruskin’s in his last years,”³⁵ was to speak on “Ruskin as He Was” and receive an honorary degree at the commencement of June, 1904.

There were only thirteen graduates at Glen Ellyn—three women and ten young men. One was a very young man indeed—the President’s son, eleven-year-old Wendell, who graduated in shorthand from the pre-university business program. The youngest graduate of Ruskin also became its first fatality. Before school opened the next September, the Grosse Clothiers of Chicago were playing the Glen Ellyn team. With some 200 spectators crowding into the baseball field, R. L. Newton of the home team hit a foul that struck Wendell two inches above his left ear. He died one hour later.³⁶

Early in October, the Ruskin University Alliance was beset by problems beyond the personal. The University had purchased 26 acres of land for development and private sale on land “which for varied attractiveness is unsurpassed within many miles of Chicago.”³⁷ but the

property was not moving. In a complex transaction, swapping areas of indebtedness, the Alliance had tried to reduce the debt to some \$30,000,³⁸ but Ruskin's situation was not improving. By October, 1904, the attendance was "considerably beyond the hundred mark and new students still arriving,"³⁹ but enrollment was still far below the 350 students Ruskin College had claimed in Missouri.

On November 17, 1904, appeared—phrased as if good news—one of the strongest danger signals a college can receive, a vote of confidence from the student body:

Resolved. That we declare our loyalty to Ruskin University and brand the derogatory reports recently circulated concerning the institution as having no sufficient grounds and as being inspired by ignorance or malice, or both, and that we hereby express our confidence and faith in the permanency and success of the University.⁴⁰

Ruskin land was not selling. Sales of Ruskin cereal foods were swamped by advertisements for Battle Creek, Michigan, products from a retailer named "Chicago" Orlando Edgar Miller, manager of the Ruskin Sanitarium⁴¹ (but no relation to the president of the University), who had been maligned for "losing a fortune of half a million in the panic of 1893" and having been suspected of arson in the St. Luke Society disaster of 1902.⁴² President Miller's public defense of him was ill-timed to encourage public confidence. Matters worsened as the city of Glen Ellyn brought suit against the Ruskin Sanitarium. When the manager claimed he was on the faculty of the University, the President denied it and the manager then claimed that the President was solely responsible for answering the suit.⁴³ Stripped from the University Alliance, the Sanitarium was placed under the private management and the University lost its share of the profits. Faced with heating the vast building in February, the Ruskinites rallied to help make up the loss of income:

To overcome the dificit [sic] of \$100 per week caused chiefly by the loss of the Sanitarium, the students and faculty have organized the Ruskin Co-

Operative Guild which takes care of heating and boarding problems without any difficulty by each contributing a proportionate share of cash and work. . . .⁴⁴

Without land sales, without the sanitarium, frozen out by competition from Chicago merchants, and low in enrollment, the Ruskin University Alliance was hard pressed in the winter of 1905-06.

Two columns of scathing attack in the *Wheaton Illinoian* for February 24, 1905, are the paper's final comment on Ruskin College. The complex, by then abandoned, made news again when it was struck by lightning May 1, 1906. In spite of rain, fire spread down from the northeast tower, and the vast building burned to the basement. The former president of Ruskin University was already on the road towards Ruskin, Florida.

Years later, when a homebuilder attempted to level part of the site of the Glen Ellyn Hotel, he struck such a tangle of waterpipes that the contractor backed off. Instead of leveling the lot, he moved the house.⁴⁵

Notes for Chapter Four:

1.
Ruskin Rays, p. 66.
2.
Wheaton Illinoian for May 15, 1903. (Hereafter cited as WI.)
3.
WI, November 6, 1903.
4.
WI, November 12, 1903.
5.
WI, November 27, 1903.
6.
WI, January 1, 1904.
7.
G. M. Miller in *The Arena*
8.
WI, June 5, 1903.
9.
Ruskin Rays, p. 22.
10.
WI, June 5, 1903.
11.
Ibid.
12.
WI, August 21, 1903.
13.
Ibid.
14.
Ruskin Sanitarium, p. 7.
15.
Ibid., p. 9.
16.
Ibid., p. 11.
17.
WI, February, 1905.
18.
WI, July 22, 1904.
19.
Ruskin Rays, p. 10.
20.
Ibid., p. 45.
21.
Ibid. p. 13.
22.
WI, December 4, 1903.
23.
WI, October 14, 1904.

24.
G. M. Miller, "Academic Center for the New Education," *The Arena*, XXIX (July, 1903), pp. 607-608. (Hereafter cited as "New Education.")
25.
Ibid., p. 601.
26.
Ibid., p. 608.
27.
Lincoln, Nebraska, and London, England: University of Nebraska Press, 1967, p. 88.
28.
"New Education," p. 608-609.
29.
Ibid., p. 610.
30.
G. M. Miller, "The Bible vs. Plutocracy," *The Arena*, XXX (September, 1903).
31.
The Arena.
32.
WI, November 6, 1903.
33.
WI, June 3, 1904.
34.
WI, May 6, 1904.
35.
WI, Sept. 9, 1904.
36.
Ibid.
37.
Anonymous, *Something Worth Reading, About Homes in the Country*, E. W. Zander and Co., Chicago, E. W. Zander and Company, p. 9.
38.
WI, August 19, 1904.
39.
WI, October 14, 1904.
40.
WI.
41.
Ruskin Rays, p. 22.
42.
WI, July 22, 1904.
43.
WI, January 20, 1905.
44.
WI, February 17, 1905.
45.
Interview with Lee Hesterman, local historian, Glen Ellyn, Illinois by A.M.M.

CHAPTER FIVE: RUSKIN, FLORIDA

By the mid-summer of 1906, the Ruskinite ventures in America were about to enter their third and final phase. Geographically, the experimental communities had looped through the southeast and midwest—from Tennessee to Georgia, from Missouri back to Illinois. In 1906 the Ruskinites were soon to move farther south—halfway down the west coast of Florida.

Each phase of the Ruskinites' social experimentation had been marked by theories which, when put into practice, pointed to different and more viable ways of surviving. Because highly partisan "instant histories" of these communities often became news copy, and because the families of several individuals tended to overlap among the successive experiments (J. T. McDill, A. S. Edwards, G. M. Miller), there was at least a chance that successive failures would result in later and more successful social experiments. At least to some extent, the failure of one Ruskin did lead to corrections in the next.

The first phase of the Ruskinite colonies, for example, changed significantly even from Tennessee to Georgia. Compared with the Tennessee colony, in Georgia the bonds of communal property and enforced group dining, were loosened, and a new cooperative charter replaced the capitalistic Tennessee charter. The main lesson of phase one was that a community's legal structure must fit its social goals. A good charter is necessary but unfortunately it is not sufficient to assure success. Even though the new charter fitted their aspirations far better, the Ruskinites in Georgia found that private land sales—even though disallowed by their charter—threatened the survival of their community. When the Ruskin south of Waycross burned, its holdings became entirely private—and subject to individual sale. The second phase of Ruskinite experiments, in Missouri and Illinois, allowed ownership of individual property, but kept a cooperative charter to govern communal and public property. Higher education, a thwarted ideal during phase one, became central to the Ruskinites of Missouri and Illinois. Their colleges,

however, were highly dependent on income from affiliated businesses—“Multitude Incorporated” in Missouri, and the Sanitarium, among others, in Illinois. Whether defined as colleges or universities (and their titles were as shaky as their financing), these educational enterprises were held captive by over-extended corporate structure. Dubious fiscal management and outright financial warfare combined to ruin the social and educational experiments of phase two. In Illinois the Ruskinites did try to save their venture by developing and selling real estate, but that remedy was too little and too late. The main lessons of phase two were: to simplify the corporate structure, allow for land sales early in the life of the community, and seek an area remote enough to hide a small community from urban economic warfare.

Phase three of the Ruskin ventures, in a largely undeveloped area of Florida, was far from the merchants of Chicago and the lawyers of Tennessee. Ruskin, Florida, built a college into the center of the community; it funded its Commongood Society directly with land sales; it allowed individual freeholds in a cooperative social context, and it created the most survivable of Ruskins, whose Commongood Society lasted—on paper at least—from its inception until 1967.

Modern Florida is a peninsula of airports, beaches, and interstate highways, but in the early 1900's the south central coast of Florida was frontier territory. The east coast of Florida had a railroad down to Miami, but H. B. Plant's rail line had stopped in Tampa, thirty-five miles north of Ruskin.¹ Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders had encamped beneath the Moorish minarets of Plant's Bay Hotel, but there was no continuous road south of the Alafia River. South of Tampa, there were small coastal communities like Bradenton and Sarasota, where Bill Whittaker had set up a cabin as early as 1842. But the main coastal transportation was by water. Farther south, the religious visionary Cyrus Teed had surveyed the coastline with wooden cross-trees, and had satisfied himself that the south coast of Florida—like the rest of the earth—was concave, not convex; on this faith he then established the “hollow-earth” society of Koreshan Unity in

Estero, Florida, in 1894, South of Tampa, with few exceptions, the coast was a maze of undeveloped barrier islands, shifting sand bars netted by mangroves, and heavy pine woods standing in thickets of palmettoes. There were stands of live oak, water oak, and marshgrass, but there were no roads.

At the mouth of the Little Manatee River, which opens into Tampa Bay, an entrepreneur named Ben Moody had set up an oyster canning plant on Bird Key, a small island within hailing distance of the large shell mound which gave Shell Point its name. For centuries the Indians had feasted on oysters, and the shucked-out shells had accumulated into a day shell mound covering about 5 acres and jutting well above the water. Ben Moody paid his oyster workers by the bushel, and the main oyster bar which had fed the Indians for generations was decimated in several years.

On top of the westernmost shell mound, Ben Moody built a fishing lodge or resort hotel. As the daughter of an original colonist remembered it, the hotel was “at least eighty feet square and surrounded on all sides by porches, both upstairs and down. From the second floor, a stairway led to a cupola atop the building. As one looked out over the bay, from this favored position, the view was indeed beautiful.”² For a short time, this lodge would be known as Ruskin Hall. G. M. Miller had first heard of the hotel about 1905, when he had met the wife of its owner, O. L. Williams, heading south on a train from Jacksonville, Florida.³ G. M. Miller’s youngest son was remembered leaving Chicago and arriving at the lodge on the Little Manatee River on his ninth birthday—January 3, 1906.⁴ A series of contemporary photos shows the long fishing and boat dock, the high-perched lodge with its cupola, and ornate wooden grill-work above the porches looking over the mouth of the river. Some fifty acres went with the lodge, and for a short while “Ruskin Hall” was touted as being in “our new city named Venoa”⁵; but the site proved too low and marshy for colonization.⁶ After about two unsuccessful years on the

shell mound, the President's family moved upriver to the Hoey house, unable to close a deal on new property without more financial backing,

The President's wife, Adaline Dickman Miller, was the eldest of her brothers and sisters; among the Dickman and Miller families, sister and brother had married brother and sister, and the family ties were close and complex. Three of Adaline's younger brothers—A. P., L. L., and N. E. Dickman—agreed to close out their farmland in Sedalia, Missouri, and form the Ruskin Homemakers of Ruskin, Florida. Their investment was in 12,000 acres of land east of Shell Point on the Little Manatee and its estuarine inlet, the east-west axis of Ruskin.

Some of the 12,000 acres had already been "turpentine," and the now deserted forest included a rough wooden compound which had housed prisoners hired from the state to box and chip the longleaf pines. Convicts could be rented from the state of Florida for about 75 cents a day,⁷ but the contractor had to supervise and guard them. Chipping the faces of the pines was hot and demanding work. By the old destructive method of rosin gathering, a box about 10 by 5 inches was cut into the tree; each week the convicts would chip higher upon the tree with a wood hack; so the sap would flow down into the box. After a day's work the hired prisoners were locked into the contractor's compound. The prisoners had been moved on from Ruskin, but their compound remained. It was to this area and its few houses for supervisors that the Dickman families moved in February, 1908.

Although it was a warm Florida winter, the living was not easy. Even the supervisors' houses had been floored with green lumber. When the boards dried they warped and shrank apart, and the fleas that nested in the sand came up through the floor. The older women wore corsets, not only for propriety, but also as armor. Mosquitoes swarmed throughout the warm winter; in the summer they swarmed more thickly. On the flat unditched land, rain water would sometimes stand for days among the palmettoes and pine trees. Through constant exposure,

some settlers of Ruskin developed an immunity to the blood dilutant injected by mosquitoes. Although a mosquito bite normally stings and itches, immunized settlers—even fifty years later—could work through a Florida summer without once slapping at a bite.

As quickly as possible, the Ruskin Homemakers moved to establish a second organization—expecting it to absorb part of their initial expense. The new organization also was to open a channel for income from real estate sales. The Ruskin Homemakers had consisted of the G. M. Miller and the three Dickman families; the Florida Club—whose first meeting was March 19, 1909—included those settlers who seemed willing to buy into the community.

At the first meeting of the Florida Club, G. M. Miller was elected President, and the redoubtable Harriet E. Orcutt—activist, novelist, and foreign language teacher from Ruskin University in Illinois—was elected secretary. The main business of the Florida Club was to organize itself for the sale of land, and then metamorphose into a new cooperative agency. Often enough, legalities are murky at the birth of a new community. The Florida Club, itself, was an indeterminate portion of the Cooperative Homestead Company.⁸ whose president sporadically appeared to chide the new organization for its lack of progress. At its third meeting, the Florida Club agreed to “incorporate as a Commongood Company,”⁹ but it was not until early November, 1909, that the group voted to call itself the “‘Commongood Society’ instead of Florida Club.”¹⁰ Well before November, the group had clarified its goals: to sell land, to enforce proper moral conduct by inserting reverter clauses in the deeds, and to finance a cooperative community by appropriating a percentage of each new sale of land.

Early in April, 1909, G. M. Miller had proposed a set of deed restrictions, several of which would remain technically in force for over forty years. In earlier Ruskin ventures, the founders had attempted to assure the community’s rectitude by voting on the suitability of each new member (as in Tennessee), or by having potential members fill in a questionnaire (as in

Tennessee and early on in Georgia), or by selective admissions to an educational community (Missouri and Illinois). None of these measures had been perfect. In Florida, accordingly, G. M. Miller wanted to lock the standards of temperance legally into the land sale deeds. Only a property owner could be a Commongood member, and freeholders had to comply with the restrictions written into their deeds. By the standards of the later 20th century, several of the proposed restrictions are petty if not offensive, both in tone and content. Ensconced in Florida, the progressive thinker who had heralded his oriental college students in Illinois now agreed that “property shall never be sold or leased to any but white people.”¹¹ The remaining restrictions were equally firm in enforcing standards of conduct:

No manufacturing, mercantile, or banking operation shall be conducted on said land—all such business to be transacted on land specifically reserved for such purpose by the community.

No intoxicating liquors or cigarettes shall ever be sold on said land, and it shall never be used in any manner that two-thirds of the resident members of the Commongood Company shall note to be a nuisance, or derogatory to their peace, comfort, health or morals. . . .

It is hereby specifically agreed that in case any of the above mentioned conditions are violated, The Commongood Company shall have the option to repurchase said land by paying to said grantee or his heirs or assigns the original purchase price without interest, provided, however, that the Commongood Co. may allow an equitable sum for improvements.¹²

These proposals did not sit easily with those more concerned with land sales than with rectitude. Arthur Benson Hawk, in particular, a feisty promoter from Toledo, Ohio, objected that such restrictions would “cause some trouble,”¹³ but G. M. Miller held firm on blocking alcohol and tobacco and assuring that all business would be cooperative (rather than private) commerce. As A. B. Hawk was soon to be elected as General Business Agent for the Commongood,¹⁴ this early disagreement was a bad sign for the future. Tension continued to build between A. B. Hawk and G. M. Miller (who was by now busy with the new Ruskin College), on the one hand, and between A. B. Hawk and the Dickman brothers, on the other. Mrs. Pauline Lawler, daughter

of founder A. P. Dickman, remembered later phases of the Hawk affair as examples of G. M. Miller's believing everything said to him,"¹⁵ but Miller did take a stand against Hawk's challenge to his restrictive deeds. As the minutes show, Hawk himself was implicated in a general charge of non-compliance with the deed restrictions:

Moved, by Dr. Miller that the Executive Committee be instructed to make a thorough investigation of the matter as to whether any violations of the restrictions in the deeds to allotments have been, or are being committed, and especially as to the restriction against carrying on mercantile business without the express permission of the Commongood Society, that they take legal counsel in the matter, and if they find sufficient grounds for such actions, they take steps to at once enforce the forfeiture penalty against those guilty of such violations. Amended by Mr. Hawk, that the charge made against himself be particularly looked into. Amendment and motion carried.¹⁶

This "mercantile" charge against Hawk was not substantiated,¹⁷ and other colonists soon ventured into unapproved enterprise. One man conducted a mail-order dating and marriage service for a dollar per letter,¹⁸ and small-scale retail sales were frequent if disapproved of.¹⁹ Even in an early day, the ban on cigarettes and liquor remained "very unpopular,"²⁰ Nonetheless, throughout the long life of the Commongood Society, there was no successful prosecution for infringement of the deed restrictions.²¹

A. B. Hawk's disagreement with founder A. P. Dickman was more serious; Pauline Dickman Lawler remembers a "tremendous fight" over Hawk's ploy which would "have taken away the land which belonged to the Dickmans,"²² and Ruskin archivist James H. Lawler agreed, "He would have got the whole 12,000 acres if the Dickman-Miller owners (Ruskin Homemakers) had not got rid of him."²³ After A. B. Hawk left Ruskin, he made a small fortune bottling Crystal Springs water. He lived to be a spry 100, and received a congratulatory card from President Nixon. "We must be very good friends for him to send me a card," said the shrewd Mr. Hawk.²⁴

In early Ruskin, real estate was booming. In March, 1909, the Florida Club had agreed to pay \$25,000 cash to the Ruskin Homemakers for 5,000 acres of boxed timber at \$8.50 per acre, and give back a mortgage on 3,500 acres for \$17,500 at seven percent.²⁵ Above the \$25,000 due to the Homemakers, \$5,000 was to go to the Commongood Society; by late January, 1910, the cash flow of the Commongood Society was listed as nearly \$3,600, with a balance of over \$1,700 on hand.²⁶ Ruskin Colony Farms were well established north of the town, and 160 acres in the center of town was set aside for Ruskin College.²⁷ To those who believe the *Ruskin News*, proclaiming “ALL ROADS LEAD TO RUSKIN,” the fact that those roads were few and sandy did not deter the sale of land. Some ten percent of the price of each sale went directly to the Commongood Society, which in turn could hire workers to grub palmettoes and clear new streets.

The long-standing Ruskinite emphasis on work, which had made “hours” the standard of community scrip in Ruskin, Tennessee, underwent yet another change in Florida. In Missouri and Illinois, the Ruskinite scrip had been in cash equivalents units of work; in Ruskin, Florida, the scrip was printed in denominations of cash, but these “Ruskin Commongood Credit Checks” were clearly marked “Redeemable in Land.” Samples are preserved in denominations of 15¢, 20¢, 25¢, and one dollar, and five dollars. The obverse of the bill was numbered by hand, and signed personally by the Secretary of the Commongood Executive Committee. Outside Ruskin, the credit checks were worthless. Within the community, at the Commongood Store, they were negotiable for merchandise; and, “at option of the Commongood Society,” they were defined as redeemable in cash from a fund “produced by setting aside one-fourth of the cash receipts from land sales.”²⁸ Requests for cash could be honored on the Tuesday after the first Saturday in each month.²⁹ Within the community, then, this was viable currency. Trouble arose when the manager of the Commongood Store needed to buy goods in Tampa. Hard times were coming to

Ruskin, even before World War II, even before the Great Depression; but in the teens of the century, individual ownership—even in an economy of scrip—was a heady experience. The Ruskinite social experiments had moved beyond their earlier goal of seamless communitarianism; in Florida there were new vistas for self-expression in collective and personal ownership. New vistas, in other words, for architecture.

Even the communal architecture, the temporary buildings of Ruskin College, had a certain flair. Although these were simple single-board buildings, they were framed with dense heart-pine, so packed with resin it would bend nails after fifty years of weathering. Outer pine slabs of the walls ran vertically, on the model of the southern smoke-house, rather than horizontally. At first glance they looked like a log stockade. The outer walls were made of the thick trimmings from long-leaf pine logs, with the natural bark facing outwards. To seal the building, battens were run vertically inside the outer walls. The two large college buildings—the Chatuauqua building and the Dormitory—were two stories high. The Dormitory was topped with a tower, which held the Dickman brothers' farm bell from Sedalia, Missouri. Single-story buildings housed the Commongood Store, the Bungalow Inn (a guest house), the college building for the laundry, the newspaper circulation department, and the print-shop. Ormsby, the printer, something of a reprobate in such a staid society, would squirt water on his visitors as they stooped to see the “type-lice” between his hand-set letters and sing off-color ditties—much to the delight of President Miller's pre-teen sons.³⁰

The style of A. P. Dickman's house, the first built of finished lumber in south Hillsborough county, is different from anything else for miles. An elegant two-story version of a mid-western farmhouse, it is banded by porches on each story. In the northeast corner, a large square tower rises to form a third story—fit to overlook the south forty. Its builder “Captain” A. P. Dickman piloted the “Kilcare” from Ruskin to Tampa three times a week. The one-way

journey took three hours or more, and the boat could reach the Ruskin Commongood Store (one block east of his house) only at high tide, if then.

Dredging the salt water inlet was an early dream of the Ruskinites. As early as 1910, when Captain Dickman's house was built, the College President's wife moved in Commongood Meeting to have a committee to consider "the advisability of dredging the Inlet so that boats may get up to the store."³¹ The motion passed. There is some irony in the fact that, fifty-seven years later, the successful dredging of the Inlet would signal the dissolution of the Commongood Society of Ruskin. In the early teens, however, dredging mostly meant using shovels and a power boat to deepen a path over mud and shoals. As W. D. Miller remembered it, "The only dredging . . . was backing the boat up and tying it and then reversing it. It would kick the dirt out with the propeller, and we'd stand behind there with a shovel and loosen up the dirt, you see, and then we'd kick it on back up so we could make a hole that way."³² On each obstructing mud-bar, this process continued until part of the bar was swept away and the channel was slightly deepened.

The third, and most idiosyncratic, style of Ruskin architecture in the home of the college President G. M. Miller, built to his wife's design in 1912. To understand the style of this building, one must know that Adaline was a special devotee of John Ruskin. She had raised her eldest daughter, Zoa, on a heady mix of Ruskin's aesthetic and moral principles. Zoa's commencement address at her own graduation from Ruskin College was based on one of the Victorian Master's volumes, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. Zoa's avocation was painting detailed yet idealized portraits and quasi-impressionist landscapes; and Adaline Miller herself had painted at least one Ruskinite emulation of Venice, Italy, in oils—complete with mild high clouds and aerial perspective. Given the chance to design her own home, Adaline Miller turned to Ruskin's early volume *The Poetry of Architecture*. In an entirely different landscape, Ruskin

had offered the Swiss Chalet as a model for elegant and harmonious living. So, half a world away from the Alps, Adaline Miller (now Associate President of Ruskin College) designed a Swiss chalet for south central Florida.³³ The result is, remarkably not at all embarrassing. The wide buttressed eaves, with supports more slender than those designed for a Swiss snow-laden roof, serve to screen the windows and balconies from slanting Florida rain and sun. A grey stucco covering, roughly emulating stone, answers to the grey spanish moss on surrounding oaks; and the heavy verticality of the building, originally intended to lift with masses of mountains, is a welcome break in the cluttered flat landscape of Florida.

The Ruskin College campus lay due south of the President's home. After the Chautauqua building burned, the President's house became a center for college activity. Its spacious finished third-floor attic became a college classroom and, after hours, a center for student social activity. The large first-floor living room, already a lecture hall for non-denominational services each Sunday, became the college auditorium. In 1976 the building, now known as the Ruskin Woman's Club was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Individual ownership of land and housing, thwarted in the earlier Ruskinite ventures, became in Florida an incentive for self-expression. Although L. L. Dickman built a large home emulating the chalet style of his sister's home, the earliest days of swift expansion and ambitious building were numbered. As a community, Ruskin was beginning to press against the limit of its transportation system, its financial base, and its ability to hold such a disparate group of settlers in balance.

High among these "commitment factors"³⁴ holding the early community together was its relative isolation. Unlike the Ruskins in Missouri and Illinois, the Florida community was free from the pressures exerted by larger cities. G. M. Miller had sought the freedom that isolation could bring. When the Dickmans and the Millers first moved in, there were only two families—

the Royals and the Saffolds—living on the 12,000 acres.³⁵ Because voting membership in the Commongood Society was limited to freeholders on the 12,000 acres, there was no significant division of votes among the new colonists and the earlier settlers.

South of the early community centered on Ruskin Inlet (then called “Commerce Inlet”) there were small encampments along the banks of the Little Manatee River. The most elusive of these inhabitants—so unsettled as not to be “settlers” at all—were called the “fly-up-the-cricks.” Said to be escaped prisoners from Georgia and North Florida, these trappers and woodsmen were wary of being seen. They lived along the small creeks that fed into the river and the inlets; at the first glimpse of a settler, they would “fly-up-the-crick” and disappear.³⁶

The more settled earlier residents, the Florida Crackers, were fishermen and trappers who farmed just enough for their own families. Their ways were not the ways of Ruskinites. As O. D. Miller remembered it, there were some hard feelings among the older settlers when the Ruskin Homemakers first arrived:

The Crackers who lived around there were descendants of the Oglethorpe settlers in Georgia who drifted down, . . . and many of them felt that we were northerners and not welcome . . . as some of our ideas were pretty high hat for their business—I mean for their ideas, and then we started objecting to their burning off the woods so that new crops of grass would develop for their piney woods cows, there was a great deal of bitterness. . . . The Crackers that knew us best didn’t object to seeing us come in there because they enjoyed it; they enjoyed some fresh blood and some new ideas being brought in, although they didn’t understand them all.³⁷

O. D.’s younger brother agreed, “The native population as a general rule resented the fact that someone was coming down and was going to change their way of life; as one old man put it, ‘The old spoon had been laid aside.’ And they objected to the fact that their way of life, which was a fairly easy way, was being phased out.”³⁸

Although the life-style of the “fly-up-the-cricks” was threatened by any new settlement, the lives of the earlier settlers and the new Ruskinites affected each other in many ways. Both groups had strong traditions of hospitality; both turned to music for family entertainment and community worship, and both needed to survive.

Survival, independence, and hospitality were closely related. Early settler David Spencer paints a good verbal picture of the Florida Homesteader:

All these old-timers here, they had homesteads. They ruled with a shotgun. They had cattle and hogs running wild, you see. Any settler who came and fenced their cattle and pigs off, well, they didn't like that. They were friendly and everything, but they didn't like you to infringe on their rights, you know. Because they'd been here all their lives. Well, they didn't buy anything. They raised everything themselves. They had their own syrup and sugar, they made it themselves. They raised sugarcane. They raised rice, sweet potatoes, and they had meat—wild pigs and cattle. Whenever they'd butcher one, they'd come around and ask us, the newcomers, “Well, we're going to butcher a hog. We thought maybe you people would like to have a piece of meat.” And they were nice and friendly and very hospitable. Oh, I'd drop into one of their houses, a meal's on. “Come on in, Dave, have some biscuits.” Big yellow biscuits made out of sour milk and sorghum, raised up real big. . . . and fish, oh, everybody had fish. I've had fish for breakfast and supper. And bacon about that thick and long. It wasn't half done, but thick!³⁹

Paul B. Dickman, who was almost eleven when his family moved into the deserted prisoner's compound at the turpentine camp, remembered his first social invitation warmly:

The first time I was invited out to dinner was by Wilbern Saffold, the youngest son of Henry and Sarah Saffold. . . . It impressed me as a youngster. There was Olnton and Willard Miller and Wilburn and I. We were his guests; so Wilburn showed us his primitive type of toys and things he played with. At that time they were almost self-sufficient. Nearly everything they had for dinner that day, they grew on their farm—even made their own sugar. When Uncle Henry sat down at the head of the table, Wilburn and I were sitting on one side and Olnton and Willard on the other side, on benches. Uncle Henry said grace and then said, ‘Well boys, serve yourself to what you can reach and what you can't reach, holler for’ and I've never forgotten that. That was the first social contact I had with the local people.⁴⁰

In an early day, the Dickmans were among the more outgoing families in the Ruskin Homemakers' contact with earlier settlers. Preoccupied with reopening Ruskin College, the Millers tended to cultivate out-of-state acquaintances, hoping to rebuild the faculty and the student body. Partly because it was built two years before the College President's house, the large towered home of "Captain" A. P. Dickman became an early center for social events.⁴¹ A.P. Dickman, though he didn't fish and couldn't swim, was "Captain" of the Kilcare, the transportation to Tampa and St. Petersburg. His wife, Rosetta Dickman, was an intensely outgoing and social lady. When other women had problems with their marriages or their children, she was the listener. In Sunday school, "for years and years she taught the babies."⁴² In part because she was the youngest of many children, and accordingly had nephews and nieces much older than she was, Rosetta Dickman was known to everybody as "Aunt Rose." Whenever there was a singing, there was Aunt Rose. This was a passion she shared with the Millers and even the earlier settlers of the area. Her son remembered,

My mother was great for singing, and singing will bring people together and make them forget their troubles. In the first days, we had Sunday school in the little building we had for school. Then we would have a picnic dinner under some of the shade trees along Ruskin Inlet. After dinner, sometimes they would go back to singing. It was my introduction to square notes. Uncle Henry Saffold, one of the pioneers living out east of Ruskin, brought a song book with the old square notes. . . . Where they didn't have an instrument, they would sing the notes 'do, re, mi.' I'm not very musical minded, but we would sing the song through on the notes and then we would sing the words. Uncle Henry Saffold had a deep base and Aunt Sarah had a high treble, and it was really something to hear.⁴³

While the Ruskin Homemaker's children learned the old "buckwheat notes," the Florida Crackers were learning more sophisticated—if not more communal—musical traditions. As Ruskin College was forming again, all of its founding family spread their musical knowledge. The President's second daughter, Aurora, was soon to marry into the family of A. S. Edwards,

the charter colonist who had helped keep Ruskin, Tennessee, in continual turbulence. The marriage of his son, Ray G. Edwards, with Aurora Miller would further link the histories of the various Ruskinite colonies. Ray G. Edwards had taught stringed instruments and harmony in the Tennessee colony; his pupil Ethel Calkins had performed in the Georgia colony before joining the staff of Ruskin University in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. After serving as Musical editor in Chicago for *The Violinist*,⁴⁴ until the suspension of that periodical in 1905, Ray G. Edwards would come to Ruskin, Florida, bringing his cantankerous father with him. When the younger Edwards, an accomplished violinist and former member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, arrived in Florida, he found an eager audience cultivated—among others—by the President’s youngest daughter Georgadda. An instructor of voice and piano, the youngest daughter had astounded her rural audience by “being able to play all the notes at the same time.”⁴⁵ After hearing her recital, one Cracker was heard to say, “Why, I’d give ten dollars to be able to play like that!”⁴⁶

But an enthusiastic audience was no substitute for Chicago. By 1908, the President’s two younger daughters were old enough to know their family had abandoned the amenities to come to the southern frontier. The transition was difficult, especially since the President’s daughters had to be “like preachers’ kids—they had to set an example.”⁴⁷ These elegant young ladies from the midwest suddenly found themselves living like pioneers. The elder and the younger, characteristically, were poles apart. Aurora was gregarious; for several years she would teach in Ruskin’s one-room grade-school. Georgadda was reserved. As their cousin remembered it, “Aurora was like mother (Rosetta Dickman); they could be friendly with anybody, everybody. But Georgadda and Aunt Ruby were alike; ‘Hummm, I’m not going to waste my time with them,’ you know? And poor Georgadda was left out a lot. She hated it. Oh, how she hated it here!”⁴⁸ The pre-teen children of the Ruskin Homemakers, on the other hand, never missed the amenities of city life. By 1911, when young David Spencer came to Ruskin from Mexico, the

younger settlers were almost immune to mosquitoes. Later in life, Dave would marvel that those same children had grown so dainty with age. He reminisced in 1974:

We'd go hunting early in the morning. Or at night. The kids, we'd get together. We'd go steal some chickens, and the girls would meet us some place with a big fire and they'd cook 'em. and Paul's wife, I met her at the Coffee Cup one day, and she was telling Willie—you know, he's the butcher—'Just take a little old steak and trim it this way.' And I said, 'My God, Esther, how fussy can you get? I remember when you used to eat chickens with the feathers on 'em!'

Then we'd go out and steal watermelons, and bust 'em open and eat 'em. Fishing was no problem at all. You could get all the fish you wanted in half an hour. They were so plentiful that you'd go out in the boat at night, and you had a torch on the bow of the boat and lift it like that: the mullet would swim up and jump into the boat.⁴⁹

In an early day, this “fire-fishing” was not a tall tale. If the mullet were not schooled thick enough to jump for a torch, an open basket of iron lattice work could be filled with “lighter knots,” the resin-packed core of a pine branch; these would blaze and sputter as fish splashed into the low open boat.

Against the backdrop of idyllic memories, among the families of the Ruskin Homemakers there runs a strong strain of resentment against the “freeloaders” who came to take advantage of Ruskin's communalistic ideals. The *Ruskin Beacon* frankly combined a strain of high idealism with sales pitches thinly disguised as news stories extolling the quality of life in Ruskin. The *Beacon*, which would “write about the availability and cheapness of the land, and . . . Come-to-Florida,”⁵⁰ attracted a number of people more interested in free room and board than in becoming a part of the colony. Separating the freeloaders from the idealists and the potential freeholders was made even more difficult by slow transportation. Although real estate was sometimes sold through the mail, the President's youngest son, himself a realtor in later years remembered:

It was very difficult for a person who had in mind buying to come down and find a place . . . because the boat only ran about three or four days a week; and in the stormy season it might not go over once a week because the bay was too rough to come back. . . . People had to go to Tampa, then come down by the boat [through Little Manatee River] and be brought by mule wagon on up [from the river]. In a great many instances, they had to stay at our house because there was no hotel available. . . . The fact that it would take you all week to get down and back made it very rough to make sales in any volume.⁵¹

Among the Ruskin Homemakers, the Dickmans saw themselves as being more practical. And they were. Their efforts went directly into selling land, running the saw mill, and piloting the Kilcare to and from Tampa. The Millers were more directly concerned with Ruskin's idealistic and artistic life. At its worst, the President's home would be a hotel for itinerant dreamers. As Pauline Dickman Lawler remembered, "Uncle G. M. [the President] had idealistic ideas that attracted marvelous people that didn't want to work."⁵² Bitterly enough, the President's youngest son would—half a century later—define a Socialist as someone who wanted one of your shirts if you had two, but who knew damn well that what was his—was his. At its best, the President's house was the cultural and religious center of Ruskin. The Florida colonists, like those in Tennessee and Georgia, were beset by a bewildering range of social theories and religious creeds. In Tennessee, the schism between the "old guard" and the anti-injunctionists had been—in part—that between professed anarchists and aspiring socialists. Their disagreements had wrecked the community. In Georgia, adversity had flattened out the peaks of disagreement among the traditional protestants and the more exotic sects. In Ruskin, Florida, one of the President's chief contributions was to expound a social and religious doctrine designed to be so non-sectarian as to include the entire community.

Encapsuled in John Ruskin's doctrine of education for "Head, Heart, and Hands," the protestant work-ethic was supreme. This ethic aligned with the goals of women's suffrage and the temperance movement, and was combined with a firm midwestern sense that conduct must

be correct in word and deed. Correcting the word, in fact, often seemed as important as correcting the deed. Among Paul Dickman's favorite stories was this, concerning his uncle the President:

My father [A. P. Dickman] and uncles went out and cut logs. Uncle G. M., of course, was a college professor and wasn't too handy with tools; but he was along. We had a team of oxen and two mules hauling logs to the landing where we rafted the logs down river to the saw mill. The fellow driving the oxen had one of the best swearing vocabularies you've ever heard, and he kept up a constant rhythm as the oxen were driven by verbal direction. He hollered to the Gee or Haw and he had a blacksnake whip that would crack very loud to emphasize his commands. This man would swear constantly; and Uncle G. M., after listening to it for half a day or so, said: 'Jim, your language bothers me. I'm not used to it, and I wish you wouldn't swear so much at the oxen. they haven't done anything to cause that kind of damnation.' It sort of flabbergasted Jim a little bit, and he started off with the oxen, not saying anything but Gee and Haw. But, the ingenuity of the human being is pretty good; and before he got back to the landing he had converted the 'damn' around to 'bless' and he was carrying on just as good swearing conversation blessing the oxen all the way, back and forth.⁵³

Paul's twin sister, Pauline, agreed that the deeds of the community leaders were as strict as their words. "The men were very high principled and moral. The men never stepped on the women. That was just unthinkable as far as Ruskin was concerned." She continued, "I said that, and a friend said, 'You want to bet?' And I said, I'd stake my life on that. Well, in the first place the native women weren't the kind that would attract any man anyway!"⁵⁴ The early community, nonetheless, was a rich mix of religious concerns and social standards. One man's rectitude, as always, could be another's cause for ridicule. When Captain A. P. Dickman saw that a man at dockside had a pint of whiskey in hand, so the story goes, he refused to let him board the Kilcare. Instead, he waited until the traveler drank the whiskey. Then he was allowed to board the boat for Ruskin.⁵⁵ Although some in the early community thought that, because it's an open country, "you can't keep out vices,"⁵⁶ each deed to Ruskin property maintained its ban on liquor, cigarettes, and non-cooperative commerce.

There were no charter restrictions on religion. Indeed the practice of religion in Ruskin, Florida, was as free and varied as that provided by the charter for the Ruskin Commonwealth of Ruskin, Georgia, drafted years earlier by G. M. Miller, the present mainstay of idealism in Ruskin, Florida. As noted above, his special role was to voice an overarching doctrine for the entire community. And it was a varied community, indeed. Paul Dickman remembered, “I don’t believe any community ever had the same type of religions that the Assembly Hall presented to the people coming to the colony. Practically all the denominations were represented, practically all the ‘isms’: unity, new thought, reincarnation—you name it and it was represented.”⁵⁷

President Miller had preached in the Congregational Church in Illinois, but his eldest son had undergone a “healing experience,” and had become a Christian Scientist—the religion also of A. P. Dickman’s daughter Pauline. Her mother, Rosetta Dickman, was a staunch Methodist, and southern Baptists joined in with the Assembly Hall as the community grew. The Villemaire family from Canada was Catholic, and a sizeable number of Spiritualists held a tract of Ruskin Colony land. “Until about 1918 the Assembly Hall was the religious center of Ruskin. . . . Uncle G. M. Miller would conduct religious forums in these years of 1911-1918, and anyone who came had the opportunity to take part.”⁵⁸ The College President guided each forum towards a level of discussion at which religious aspirations could easily link with progressive social ideals.

As a scholar of Greek and Hebrew, he insisted that the King James version of the Bible was a tissue of mistranslations made to support the idea of kingship, and the politics of royalism. Correct translations and correct understanding, he led one to believe, would see the message of Jesus as not so much other-worldly, but this-worldly. Although the President’s basic message was communalistic, it seems to have been promulgated at such a level of abstraction as to compel consent, or at least to dissuade his forum members from dissenting. As Paul Dickman put it, “I remember, as a youngster, hearing people going away from meetings saying, ‘Well,

that's the kind of service I like, where I can take part. I don't like to be talked down to nor told what to do.'"⁵⁹ Paul's twin sister Pauline was more succinct in her opinion of the President's lectures, "I used to listen to him and it just went over my head."⁶⁰ In Ruskin, Florida, the President was refining the ideas he had earlier expounded in *The Arena* while developing Ruskin Colleges in Missouri and Illinois.

No matter how diverse their backgrounds, the colonists of Ruskin, Florida, could at least agree to reject royalist politics. At a certain level, then, most of his audience could admire the President's new biblical translations, even without agreeing to de-mythologize the New Testament. This search for Jesus the social thinker, whose "heaven" is on earth, and only on earth, became more clear in his posthumous book *The New Order of Jesus*.⁶¹ The personal religious practices of the President and his wife were more otherworldly and occult than the results of the scholarship he displayed in the college Assembly Hall. The second floor of Adaline Miller's Florida chalet had a "silent room" where members of the family could retreat to meditate. In the "silent room," according to their youngest son, the President and his wife consult in several languages, via a Ouija board, with great people from the past, "like Homer and John Ruskin."⁶²

Although the private lives of the principal college officers tended towards spiritualism, the curriculum of Ruskin College was strictly non-denominational in religion. Unpropped by conventional mythology, religion at Ruskin College collapsed outward into life. The lives of the guiding family, and students, and faculty were tightly structured. In Florida, Ruskin College continued the work-study program it had attempted to follow in Missouri and Illinois. As. O. D. Miller remembered, in Florida, "arrangements were resumed whereby those students who needed and who so wished, could earn their board and tuition."⁶³ His younger brother chronicled a typical day for students:

The day started rather early because the first classes started at 7:00 AM. They ran for 40 minutes duration . . . until 12 o'clock. And then at 12 o'clock, everybody earning their board and keep and their tuition, they put on their working clothes. They went out at one o'clock and worked four hours in the afternoon. . . . Their work was largely on either the college farm or grubbing [palmettoes] on campus.⁶⁴

In addition to farming and clearing land, the work-study program was to develop students for a skilled trade, and was to initiate John Ruskin's educational triad. By 1917, as O. D. Miller remembered some 60 years later, there were "300 students . . . many of whom worked afternoons on the college farm, in the dining room, or laundry, or in the woodworking, leather tooling, weaving, or printshops, thus effecting a practical application of the college's motto: "a normal development of the head, the heart, and the hands."⁶⁵

As the Ruskin College catalogue for 1916-17 quotes approvingly from Elbert Hubbard's *Philistine*:

The best way to learn to be useful is to be useful. To take a young man from life for four years and send him to college, in order to educate him for life, is to run a grave risk that you will not get him back into life. . . . To do no useful work for four years . . . will some day be looked back upon as a barbaric blunder, like the Chinese method of curing epilepsy by rattling the dried seeds in a gourd.

By separating education from practical life society has inculcated the vicious belief that education is one thing and life another.⁶⁶

The catalogue for Ruskin University in Illinois, *Ruskin Rays*, had indirectly apologized for the frequency of "Miller" among the surnames of the faculty. In Florida, there was no such pretense or apology. Ruskin College was clearly a family enterprise—with the youngest being schooled by their parents, their older brother, and their sisters. As in the midwestern Ruskin Colleges, guest speakers continued to supplement the few full-time faculty. In Florida, speakers included Christian Socialist editors from Chicago, and at least one fiery feminist, whose special lectures "for young women only" were the subject of much curiosity. Some sixty-five years after

the lecture, Pauline Dickman Lawler remembered she was admonished to “beware of men . . . men have the advantage and always will have the advantage.”⁶⁷

In actuality, in the community and college of Ruskin, girls and women knew legal equality well before they could vote in national elections. In the Commongood Society women held equal rights with the men in voting: “. . . A woman could be president of the Commongood Society; she could be president of anything!”⁶⁸ And, as a matter of fact, the redoubtable Harriet E. Orcutt, who had followed the fortunes of Ruskin College from Missouri through Illinois, was for a while President of the Commongood. Riding four weeks down from Detroit, Michigan, in a Stanley Steamer with the Wheeler family, Miss Orcutt had arrived in Ruskin, Florida, to resume her role as teacher of French and German. She even tutored the French-Canadian Villemaire family in English. The eccentric and accomplished Miss Orcutt was great friends with the elder Wheeler, an electrician and inventor who “wired” the President’s home for electricity long before power lines reached Ruskin. The local marvel was, “When we hooked it up, it worked.” Wheeler was also responsible for installing Ruskin’s first telephone company, which—true to the theories of Frank Parsons—remained for years a public utility owned by the Commongood Society.

As in the earlier Ruskin Colleges in Missouri and Illinois, athletics were important. Ready for games, the ladies of Ruskin College wore outfits very like those which—twelve years earlier—had horrified the more conservative communitarians of Ruskin, Tennessee. In Ruskin, Florida, the young women athletes were known as “the Bloomer Girls.” In 1915, the first-string men’s basketball team sported jerseys still emblazoned with the crest of Ruskin College, Illinois: the capital R for Ruskin enclosed by a circle within the points of an equilateral triangle, the three points being head, heart, and hands. The second team had a less symbolic logo of R and C—for Ruskin College—intertwined. Playing on a sand-surfaced court, either team could beat a

“hardwood floor” team. But on a hard-surfaced court, the ball bounced too high for the Ruskin teams to handle.

Ruskin College was in effect a closed system within the isolated economic system of Ruskin, Florida. Commongood income was directly tied to continued sales of land, for the community had not given itself the power of continued taxation. Because Ruskin’s internal transactions were carried on by scrip, which—in turn—was redeemable in land, it followed that without land sales the community was at a standstill; for there was no quick and reliable way to exchange a surplus of perishable commodities. As W. D. Miller remembered it:

One of the difficulties was that although there were some vegetables raised, there’s not any ready market for them because we had no way of getting them to Tampa and shipping them north. We had only the boat between Ruskin and Tampa. There might be an excess of eggs or vegetables . . . they had to be taken up to Tampa on a boat . . . there was no way of shipping there in volume.⁶⁹

For south Hillsborough county, the center of political power was well north in Riverview. There was no county money for roads to Ruskin.

Within this self-contained community, then, Ruskin College itself was a small closed compartment. The college gave work-scholarships, but the agricultural products produced by student work could not be efficiently marketed. Workers for Ruskin College, unlike workers for the Commongood proper, were not paid even in scrip. A bookkeeping transaction may be equitable, but it yields no cash in hand.

To help save the college, the President hit the lecture trail. His youngest son remembers that the booklet of verses titled *Unlike Ike’s Ideas* (published in Chicago in 1898) was “bread on the table” during the latter days of Ruskin College. G. M. Miller would lecture on social thought and the new order of Jesus, then recite his heavily metered political verse. Then the booklets would sell to the audience—for between twenty-five cents and a dollar. Of the 18 rollicking

verses in the pamphlet of 64 pages, the one titled “Endowed Colleges Cornered, or the New Education” highlights the dilemma of the last Ruskin College. As his youngest son phrased it in 1973, “Father would not allow anybody to donate to the college; . . . he said that anyone who wanted to donate would want to dictate, and that he didn’t intend to be dictated to.”⁷⁰

Without donations, without significant agricultural income, and with its tuition income cut by the work-study program, Ruskin College could mortgage or sell its land from the Commongood Society, or it could seek new full-paying students. This meant that the college was vulnerable to any draw-down of young men, and the years of World War I were fast approaching. The President disapproved of usury, but the college lands had to be mortgaged; the President disapproved of charitable donations, and stood firm.

Meanwhile, the Commongood Society held meeting after meeting month after month. As financial pressure grew, dispute over the allocation of community funds intensified—who would get a new system of ditches, who would have access to a new road, which members—if any—would be allowed to split off and have “blocked votes” from their own subset of colonists. As the President’s youngest son remembered.

All matters to do with the running of the town were thrashed out at this meeting. And it wasn’t very pleasant sometimes because there were always factions constantly warring. . . . The factions were more the haves and the have-nots than anything else; in other words there was a faction of Father and the Dickman boys, that more or less came along with them in their thinking; and then there were always the parties who wanted to take over and run it themselves. And it really divided into what we used to call the ‘regulars’ and the ‘kickers,’ and one sat on one side of the aisle going up to the front and one sat on the other. Nobody ever crossed the line. So you know you had a solid vote over here [the ‘Regulars’ on the right] and a solid vote over this way [the ‘Kickers’ on the left].⁷¹

Politically, the colony was split between the earlier colonists—led by the former Ruskin Homemakers—and a set of new block-voting factions which had clustered around those who had acquired larger tracts of land, and who had then sub-divided those tracts. “It was a little like

religious schisms. . . . there were a number of groups that came in and bought 40 acres. . . . They simply divided it up and worked on a communal deal all the way through; but they wanted to push their ideals on other people who had only one vote apiece because they only owned one piece of land apiece.”⁷²

Dissension within the Commongood was no help to Ruskin College. Neither was the coming of World War I; those young people not at war were attracted by the quick money of new jobs in major southeastern cities, in Washington, and in the ship yards. “This simply made the group of students go downhill from 1917 and 1918.”⁷³ In December, 1917, the President’s son O. D. left for the war. The President’s youngest son graduated in the last class of Ruskin College, June, 1918. The Socialists had split in disagreement over the war, and G. M. Miller had left the party. In early August, 1919, he was in Ashtabula, Ohio, trying to recruit new students and arranging for the publication of “a work of research in the Greek scriptures entitled, ‘The Hidden Hope for World Democracy, or Master Class Mistranslations of the Scriptures.’”⁷⁴ The second week of August, O. D. Miller came home from World War I to learn that his father—beset by gastric ulcerations and continual stress—had died in Ohio.⁷⁵

No member of the family was willing or perhaps able to carry on the work of Ruskin College. An interview in 1973 records the tone of the family’s feelings. “The owner of the first mortgage foreclosed on the land; so there was no physical or financial assets pertaining to the college at all. So no one fought over them, because the family itself simply said, ‘We can go about now and think of ourselves, and not somebody else.’” The interviewer then comments, “There’s a limit, after all, to self-sacrifice.” W. D. Miller responds, “Yes, sometimes that limit is a long time in coming but it gets there after a while.”⁷⁶

The President’s widow continued to live in her mortgaged Florida chalet, living on weekly support from her children. The Ruskin Commongood Society survived World War I, and

multiplied its assets on paper in the Florida land “boom” of the 1920’s. The railroad had finally come to Ruskin and the rivers were bridged; just south of Ruskin, Sun City boomed into a welter of paved streets and sidewalks surrounding empty lots, which stayed vacant with the “bust” of 1929. Paul B. Dickman, the son of “Captain” Dickman, retrenched his losses and opened a Ruskin service station and restaurant, the “Coffee Cup.” He held onto his nearly worthless deeds of land, and learned southern farming techniques as he carefully bought more property at tax sales, bit by bit throughout the Depression.

To assure income from the land he was acquiring, Dickman recruited other farmers from neighboring counties; if they would work with him, he would loan them the money to purchase the land he was holding. Accumulation of interest aside, Paul Dickman’s strategy for development was curiously like John Ruskin’s far earlier plan for improving the housing in his own utopian venture, the British Guild of Saint George.

Filtered through goals of midwestern progressivism, into a quintessentially capitalistic land developer, John Ruskin’s goals are barely recognizable; but they did lead to many land-poor farmers, operating cooperatively, becoming among the most prosperous freeholders of south central Florida. In the early 1940’s, Paul Dickman was joined by his cousin O. D. Miller in forming the Ruskin Vegetable Co-Operative Association, a title reminiscent of the Ruskin Co-Operative Association back in turn-of-the-century Tennessee. During World War II, Paul Dickman was farming 1,200 acres; and the cumbersome RVCA gave way to the RVD—Ruskin Vegetable Distributors.

During the land boom of the 1960’s, the land north of Ruskin Colony Farms became Apollo Beach—a sub-division of highly varied zoning that sprawls between Tampa Bay and Highway 41.

The Indian shell mound at Shell Point, where pre-Ruskinite “Venoa” had been planned in 1906, had long since been trucked away to cover the back roads of Hillsborough County. Sixty years later just north of Shell Point, Paul Dickman’s giant dredges had built new acres of beachfront property—now Bahia Beach, a complex of marina, restaurant, and motel.

Paul Dickman took pride in making the land fit for people, and had little patience with the environmentalists who would stop him “just to save the love affair of some damn clam.”⁷⁷ Before Environmental Impact Statements were required, his dredges entered the Ruskin Inlet. Ever since the Ruskin Homemakers meeting of January 22, 1910, dredging the inlet had been a goal for Ruskinites who wanted a navigable waterway. Nearly half a century later, once again the Ruskin Commongood Society was convened, as corporate owner of the “common” lands at the bottom of the inlet. In return for dredging the inlet, Paul Dickman was deeded the new land pumped up to cover the salt-water marshgrass. Where Kilcare had stuck on mud-bars, scores of acres of built-up land soon stood. On October 16, 1967, the Commongood Society held its final meeting. Having dredged the inlet and buried the marsh, it voted to deed its remaining property—the deepened bottom of the inlet, some small parks, and some roads—over to Hillsborough County. Then the Commongood voted to disband itself.

In Florida the Commongood Society had run for 68 years. Its success in adapting to the goals of the wider society had finally invalidated it. As a legal entity, the Commongood had outlasted Ruskin College by some 46 years. Three years later, the feisty Arthur Benson Hawk turned 100. Hawk, whose schemes had been the bane of the more idealistic Ruskinites, was the only original freeholder to outlive the Commongood Society of Ruskin, Florida.

THE END

Notes for Chapter Five:

1.
For a concise overview of early central west coast transportation, see Chapter 10 of
Utopia on the Half-Shell: A Story of How Ruskin, Florida, Acclimatized to its Land and its Inventors, by Carrie Lynn Kastner. Sarasota: New College Environmental Studies, 1986). (Hereafter cited as Half-Shell).
2.
Mrs. Paul B. (Esther) Dickman in “Early Ruskin” address of November 15, 1979. Ruskin Archives.
3.
Interview with W. D. Miller (Hereafter cited as W.D.M.) by A. McA. Miller (hereafter cited as A.M.M.), March 20, 1973.
4.
W.D.M. by Karen DeYoung, April 9, 1974.
5.
Scrapbook #1 of Harriet E. Orcutt, Ruskin Archives.
6.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., March 20, 1973.
7.
Ibid.
8.
Minutes, March 25, 1909.
9.
Ibid.
10.
Minutes, November 6, 1909.
11.
Minutes, April 3, 1909.
12.
Ibid.
13.
Minutes, August 18, 1909.
14.
Minutes, November 17, 1909.
15.
Interview with Pauline Dickman Lawler (Hereafter cited as P.D.L.) by Carol Mahler, June 12, 1980. (Hereafter cited as C.M.), June 12, 1980.
16.
Minutes, May 7, 1910.
17.
Minutes, June 4, 1910.
18.
P.D.L. by C.M., June 12, 1980.
19.
Interview with Mrs. L. J. Harrold by George Depoulis, Nina Barkav, and Russel Repp, December 2, 1977.

20.
P.D.L. by C.M. June 12, 1980.
21.
Interview with W.D.M. by A.M.M., October 2, 1973.
22.
P.D.L. by C.M. June 12, 1980.
23.
Memo for record March 12, 1970. Ruskin Archives.
24.
Carol Neef, "Good Friend Nixon Wishes Tampan Well," *Tampa Tribune*, March, 1970.
25.
Minutes, March 25, 1909.
26.
Minutes, January 22, 1910.
27.
Minutes, April 29, 1909.
28.
Ibid.
29.
Ibid.
30.
Interview with O. D. Miller and W. D. Miller, by A.M.M. February 12, 1976. Hand-set type was held together with a film of water. When the unwary visitor stooped down to see the "type-lice," the printer or his devil would knock the lines of type together, spraying the visitor's face.
31.
Minutes, January 22, 1910.
32.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., October 17, 1973.
33.
O. D. Miller, (hereafter cited as O.D.M.), "Dedication," February 22, 1976.
34.
Rosabeth M. Kanter, *Commitment and Community*.
35.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., March 20, 1973.
36.
Interview with Paul B. Dickman, by Karen DeYoung, N.. D.
37.
O.D.M., by A.M.M., Summer 1971.
38.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., March 20, 1973.
39.
Interview with David Spencer by Amy Diamond, October 23, 1974.
40.
"Fiftieth Anniversary Memoirs of Ruskin United Methodist Church," transcription of talk given September 27, 1974. (Hereafter cited as "Methodist Church").
41.
P.D.L. by C.M., June 12, 1980.

42.
Ibid.
43.
“Methodist Church.”
44.
First published in March, 1900, this periodical suspended publication for three years beginning September, 1905. DLC lists volumes 2-50, through April, 1937.
45.
P.D.L. by A.M.M., April 21, 1980.
46.
Ibid.
47.
P.D.L. by C.M., June 12, 1980.
48.
Ibid.
49.
Interview with David Spencer by Amy Diamond, October 23, 1974.
50.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., October 2, 1973.
51.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., March 20, 1973.
52.
P.D.L. by Bruce Thiel, September 4, 1973.
53.
“Methodist Church.”
54.
P.D.L. by C.M., June 12, 1980.
55.
Mrs. L. J. Harrold, by George Depoulis, Nina Barkav, and Russel Repp et. al,
December 2, 1977.
56.
Ibid.
57.
“Methodist Church.”
58.
Ibid.
59.
Ibid.
60.
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61.
The New Order of Jesus, As Disclosed by Correct Translations of the New Testament.
New York: 1925. The Psychological Publishing Company.
62.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., October 9, 1973.
63.
O.D.M. by A.M.M., “Dedication,” February 22, 1976.

64.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., March 20, 1973.
65.
O.D.M. "Dedication" February 22, 1976.
66.
Also cited by Carrie Kastner in *Half-Shell*, where she develops a concise account of
Ruskin, Florida, in relation to Christian Socialism.
67.
P.D.L. by C.M., June 12, 1980.
68.
Ibid.
69.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., October 2, 1973.
70.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., March 20, 1973.
71.
Ibid.
72.
Ibid.
73.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., October 2, 1973.
74.
Obituary notice by Adaline D. Miller, privately printed, p. 4. "Hidden Hope" is a draft of the
work later titled *The New Order of Jesus*.
75.
O.D.M. by A.M.M., Summer 1971.
76.
W.D.M. by A.M.M., October 2, 1973.
77.
Interview with Paul B. Dickman by A.M.M., N.D.

