

W.D. Miller, 20 March 73 (New Coll #2)

Transcribed by  
E. Mackie

" . . . I got this from a man who was a boy at that time, his mother was on the same train coming down from Jacksonville and they, Father got to talking to the woman and this was ~~HE~~ O.L. Williams and told her that he was looking for a place somewhere on the west coast of Florida, preferably near the water, and she said, well, her husband owned a place down at the mouth of the Little Manatee river and that it was approximately 50 acres and that there was a lodge-hotel on the property and suggested that Father come down and see this; this was about 1905. So just ~~if~~ how he got down there from Tampa I don't know but he came down and looked it over and he, it was not suitable for making a colony because much of it was in marsh grass and low tide and the hotel was up on a shell mound of about five acres. But it was not large ~~enough~~ enough for what he had in mind nor was there enough land to do anything with. So he determined who had the adjoining land and there was a turpentine, well ~~they~~ really they called it a naval stores company, which dealt in turpentine and ~~the~~ rosin and lumber, that had a tract of land of 12,000 acres/ that stretched down and connected with this land of the Williams'; and he got in touch with that, there was a party by the name of Davis who was their representative, Mr. Davis lived down in Manatee, and he got in touch with him and determined what they would take for the 12,000 acres/ that lay along Ruskin Inlet and up along the Little Manatee river. And I don't know exactly what the price of it was but Father found that he couldn't swing that and, ~~XXXXXX~~ with just one family, it was very difficult to do much with it because it would require more help than he had and he didn't have the money. So he wrote



to Mother's brother, A.P. Dickman, --- Albert P. Dickman, he was the father of Paul Dickman, and suggested that he come down and go over this with him with the idea that perhaps they might sell their farms up in Sedalia, Missouri, where the Dickman boys were living; that was A.P. Dickman, ~~E.K.~~ L.L. Dickman, and N.E. Dickman. So Uncle Burt came down -- this was about 1908 -- . . . and they went out and looked the land over and ~~they~~ then Father and went back up to Sedalia and talked to the other boys/<sup>and</sup> they decided to sell out up there and bring ~~their~~ their farm equipment and animals down which would give a start to the home building. But there was on this land a turpentine still . . . up on 674 right where Grady lived. There was a still up there which had turpented most of the 12,000 acres and it had been a still that was run by convict labor. The convicts could be rented for about 75 cents a day from the state and then it was up to whoever rented them to be sure that they didn't get away, they had to guard them and feed them and handle them but that was a very easy way of having a supply of labor at a very cheap price. And that was not being handled that way at the time, they had closed down ~~the~~ as they had turpented most of the 12,000 acres at the time. But there were a number of houses up there and some of them were the people who had been in authority during the time that the still was running. And then there was a very large building up there that had been what they called the stockade. It was a building of considerable size where the convicts were housed at night, it was inside a fence that had guardposts up on top of it and so those buildings were utilized.

“ And in 1910 -- don't know the exact date -- the three

Paul D  
says 1908



Dickman families put two mules and some pigs and chickens and their farm animals on the train and they took the train down from Sedalia, ~~Miss~~ Missouri. Uncle Burt rode the train down with the animals ~~xx~~ but the only railroad connection was over at Wimauma, <sup>which was</sup> 7 miles to the east, so that they came in there during 1910 and then everybody settled down in these house<sup>s</sup> which were up on, at the old still. And then the surveyors started in and surveyed the land/<sup>and</sup> laid off the 12,00<sup>0</sup> acres into a town site and into five and ten acre farm~~x~~ sites. And that's the way it was known ~~xx~~ as Ruskin Colony Farms. And then as those were sold out why they would open up another division. But the town itself was laid out along the Ruskin ~~xxx~~ inlet. And they, there was no way of having any county government down here because it was entirely divorced ~~xxx~~ from Tampa and no way of getting down by any ~~xxx~~ <sup>thing</sup> except boat at that time because there was no hard roads and no bridges/ and no railroads except the one that came in<sup>over</sup> at Wimauma and went on down to Manatee and Bradenton, at that time the Seaboard Air Line. And so they had to have some sort of town government, and the town government was laid off similar to the town hall government that was prevalent up in the New England states. And everyone who -- and the Commongood Society was established. And because there was no idea of incorporating they had to have some method of taxation in order to put in the streets and ~~x~~ roads and any utilities that they needed. So ~~they~~ that arrangements were made so that for every tract of land sold by the owners, which were called the Ruskin Homemakers, and that was Father and the three Dickman boys and ~~the~~ their wives.



And for every acre that they sold a certain amount of land was put aside and earmarked for the Ruskin Commongood Society. And so that if someone wanted to ~~buy~~ buy a piece of land and they had no money ~~to~~ to buy it was possible for them to work on roads or ditches or something of that kind and then have their labor ~~credited~~ credited to buying the land at a very reasonable amount. . . . They were given work chits, they called them Commongood scrip, and during the time of panic -- and there were several panics that came along during that time -- that was ~~the~~ practically the only currency that there was in town; I mean a person would, ~~he~~ could take his Commongood scrip down and buy groceries at the store or something of this kind ~~and~~ . . . . But it was <sup>they were</sup> redeemable in land. . . . No, ~~it was~~ not redeemable in cash, nobody could cash 'em, there was no cash for it. . . . Denominations in so much per hour . . . in units of 50 cents and a dollar, I don't remember exactly now...~~Now they had then~~

"Now they had then once a month a ~~town~~ town hall meeting and this, everyone who owned a piece of land in the original subdivision had a vote. Someone that didn't own any land of ~~course~~ course had no vote. But they would, had a secretary and <sup>matters to</sup> no particular president or chairman. But all ~~matters~~ ~~do with~~ do with the running of the colony were thrashed out at this meeting. And it wasn't a very pleasant (unclear) sometime because there were always factions, the factions were constantly <sup>against</sup> warring ~~with~~ each other. . . . (The factions were) more the haves and the have-nots than anything else, in other words there was a faction that Father and the Dickman boys, that more-or-less came along with them on their thinking, and then



there was always the parties who wanted to take over and run it themselves. And it was 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 knew you had a solid vote ~~xxxxx~~ over here and a solid vote over this way."

Q: About who made up the two groups, early and late colonists or colonists ~~xx~~ and natives to area.

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not accurate. W

"No, there were no natives in the matter at all because there wasn't but two families/ that ~~x~~ lived on this 12,000 acres, the Royals and the <sup>Saffolds</sup> Sapplewoods (??). So that there was no friction in the Commongood Society with the native population at all. 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 man put it, 'The old spoon has been laid aside.' And they objected to the fact that their way of life, which was a fairly ~~xxxx~~ easy way, was being phased out. No, it was individual groups coming down, in other words, there was a faction that came from Ruskin, Tennessee, and they wanted to get their group together and they bought say 20 acres and they started to make a <sup>kind</sup> ~~xxxx~~ of communal arrangement with ~~thxxx~~ their own buildings and everything of that kind and have their own life there. But in the restrictions which Father wrote into the deed there was only one store of a kind, in other words, everything was cooperative. ~~You~~ bought in on it and the only store you had for groceries was the grocery store which people had put money in and they had shares in this particular . . ."

Q: Couldn't have two grocery stores or . . .?



"No, not two grocery stores or two hardware stores or anything of this kind. And of course that was, there wasn't much conflict there because the grocery store handled everything that there was to handle."

Q: Remember any names of Ruskin, Tenn., people?

". . . Ray G. H Edwards's father, . . . Ray himself came down and he was a very competent violinist, he had been in the Boston Symphony Orchestra for a number of years and he also was one of the editors of ~~the~~ a music magazine and did quite a bit of composing. He came down and joined the faculty when they activated the college in 1910. . . . He ~~K~~ was not a printer . . . But he had, liked to do work like carpentry and woodworking and working with leather and things of this kind. And he had spent quite a long time at the Roycroft shops, there was a, quite a colony of those up in New York, and, the Roycrofters. And he had come down from there and he had been up there working with that group. His father had been more in the deal than Ray had and I don't know the background of that . . . because he married Aurora and he died up in Washington, DC.

"But the college was activated in 1910 and course it was then in temporary buildings ~~which~~ which were at the corner of what is now College Avenue and US 41. And the first building put up was the Chautauqua building which was a rough <sup>five</sup> (?) building of two stories and it had a meeting room on the first floor and a dining room and a kitchen and several ~~xxxxx~~ classrooms. And then upstairs was the boys' dormitory. And then there was a second building, across from Ruskin Inlet at that point, about where Lucia <sup>He</sup> Tabb's (?) house is now. And that was the girls'



dormitory which was built the same way with two stories in the center and wings on each side. That was the building that Father and Mother moved into, and that was our home for a number of years. The girls's dormitory was upstairs in that, the same as the boys' dormitory was in the larger building, which was the central building for the school. Course there being no school down in this area, except the public school in which Aurora taught for a number of years, was only an eight grade school, and so there was no way of the boys and girls that were out of the eighth grade qualifying ~~to~~ <sup>that</sup> to go into the college so/they started a preparatory school in connection with it. And by going through the preparatory school you could save one year in the seven year deal, <sup>rather than</sup> /an eight year deal. O.D. and Paul and Pauline and <sup>a good</sup> many of the other younger people, course we couldn't go to high school and this was where we had to get our basis of going on up. You could take some college studies for credit if you were, if it was possible for you to handle them, even when you were going through the preparatory school, which made it a little bit easier to get on through."

Q: On group from Ruskin, Tenn.

"Each little group; and ~~that~~ the cooperative movement had probably the one core which was at Trenton, MO, where the college was ~~first~~ first opened, that was about '98, and was moved from there to Glen Ellyn and from GE on down here. But though the core of the movement was there there was a general movement over all which was tied in in some ways to the Socialistic thinking. The cooperative movement was something that was not Socialistic in essence. It was Let's get ~~that~~ together and



be~~s~~ able to buy things wholesale, and cooperate that way, much like farm cooperatives are at the present time. And there were say (groups that came here to form groups together) There were two groups that started in on that particular thing. One of them where the present shopping center is -- there's an old well that was put ~~in~~ down there, I think the first big well down anywhere around here still out in the center of that place out there. And a special subdivision was made out of some acreage there that was known<sup>as</sup> ~~in~~ the Emory Mannering subdivisions at the present time which is where the Keyhole? People? Kehoe? Building is in that particular place. The farms then were around that particular place; and on the other side of the US 41 there was another group that started up and they~~made~~ their ~~own~~ own subdivision, divided up the acreage that they bought and sold town lots and then were going to have cooperative farming, but I don't know that they ever did any cooperative farming because I was rather young at that time . . . Each one of them (the groups) had a leader and the leader then wanted to take over and say well, I don't like the way this is being done, and they particularly didn't like, some of them didn't like, the idea of the restrictions of in the deeds because there were restrictions put in all<sup>of</sup> the deeds that no tobacco could be sold, no cigarettes could be sold; they did not limit pipe tobacco, but all cigarette papers had to be pulled (?) out and burned when they came down -- they all came with cigarette papers in those days. And no liquor could be sold, and there were restrictions in the deeds so that if you -- you couldn't sell liquor or even offer anyone a drink in your house or offer them a cigarette without the chance of your



land reverting to the Commongood. And all of the streets that were laid off in the original plat were given to the Commongood together with all parks and, so that the Commongood had what was, would have been the power of county commissioners, far as saying which roads could go in and which roads wouldn't and things of that kind."

Q: Group from Tenn was one of these two groups?

"That's right, . . . I think they took the left-hand side over there where Bright's (??) cabins are now, I think there were a, that was divided into some town lots whereas originally that was all farm on that side, and the entire town was on this side. The original town itself was to be laid off right where <sup>Casella's</sup> ~~Casella's~~ (?) little barn was, that's where the original commissary, they called it, was set up. There were several (blocks? plots?) large lots/that went in at that point."

Q: on largest enrollment ever in college.

"It was figured at 300, and of those there were probably 45 or 50 of them were the, from the town itself, of people ~~in~~ who came down with their families in order to ~~in~~ take advantage of the college as well as the other movement. . . . It (the college) was a drawing card to the original community because we got ~~x~~ out a weekly paper, it was called the Ruskin Beacon, and Father was the editor of it and my oldest brother, Admer, was the manager of it~~XX~~. Close to (?) 35 acres of the, that was laid off for the college campus, that's what is now in Campus Shores, . . . and ~~XX~~ laid off 40 acres for the college farm, that's where Georgeadda had part of that, and I was given some of that after the college closed, and Admer got some of it~~x~~



But, the boys would come down and then they could work out the girls could come, and they could work out for their board or tuition; see, they would go out and scrub <sup>8 rub</sup> (?) the palmettos by hand. And it wasn't anything that was where we could ~~xxx~~ sell produce because we were too far away from the market, we would send some things up north, up to Tampa and sell them, but they had to go up by boat. But it did help out with the school boarding house . . . . "

Q: on files of Beacon?

"I don't think that any of those files were kept, they probably were at one time, but of ~~xxxxx~~ course in 1918 or 16, 17, 18 the war was coming on . . . and the boys were being drafted and there just wasn't enough people to keep the college open. And Father developed a stomach ulcer, that's what he said, I don't know but what it might have been something more than that, but he was in ~~xxx~~ very frail health at that time. And ~~Adm~~ Admer had to be a business manager and run most everything; all of the college were up on what was ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ the Chautauqua grounds, that's right opposite where the Neighborhood Plaza was . . . And that building burned down, too, some man -- they were having a Commongood Society meeting and he knocked his pipe out right by the front steps ~~and the whole building~~ going up and the whole building burned, and that's where all the <sup>and</sup> classes were being held, the library was and everything, and (unclear) So that put a pretty bad crimp into it, and that's when we were building what is now the Ruskin Women's Club. And that was built back in 1913 and 14, that was after this [orig. home  
AP. Dickman] house was built. And there was quite a bit of room in there



and of course this was our home but the, that was turned then into classrooms upstairs on the third floor and the ~~downstairs~~ downstairs (unclear) the thing (?) that was used for classrooms to keep the college going and then there were some rooms down where we had a complex that had the woodworking shop and the laundry and the college office which were down on the campus, and all the buildings that could be utilized ~~were~~ utilized for ~~xx~~ classrooms."

Q: What was a regular day like when you were in school there?

"The day started rather early because the first ~~xxx~~ classes started at seven A.M. They ran for 40 minutes' duration, about 45 minutes, I guess, and then strung on out until 12 o'clock. And then at 12 o'clock why everybody that was there earning their board and keep, you know, and their ~~tuition~~ tuition, they went and put on their working clothes and they went out at one o'clock/ and worked four hours in the afternoon . . . from one to five. Then they were given credit, of course, against their tuition for the work that they did; their work was largely on ~~the~~ either the college farm or <sup>scrubbing</sup> on the campus . . . "

Q: On supervision of work crews, deciding on what kind of Job.

"I presume that Admer had as much to do with it as anyone. He had by that time finished up his, he had gone to Ruskin College in Trenton, MO, as had Aurora and Georgeada, and then he had just about finished up when we was in Glen Ellyn. And so then he finished and took a law degree in Chicago University and he came, he got married and came and brought his wife down and they lived down there on 4th street. And then Aurora <sup>or</sup> was a schoolteacher here, she taught, Admer taught, he taught business



and typing and shorthand and business machines and things of this kind and was the secretary of the college and did a great deal of the work on the Beacon also. And the printing office was down on the inlet, it was a g big double building ~~xxx~~ down there one half of which was the printing officxe and the other half of which was the laundry/ and the woodworking and the crafts (unclear)." (right where 4th <sup>between 1st and 4th</sup> st crosses the inlet)  
The office bldg <sup>for</sup> ~~at~~ the college was on Ruskin boulevard at that point and the other buildings were in behind that."

Q: Enough family members to go around, supervising?

"Well, yes, and each one had to do different things; of course there were various faculty members did different things. For instance, the McHargues came down at that time and they were ~~xxx~~ Tennessee people but ~~xxxx~~ they weren't from that Ruskin Tennessee group. There was one of them who lectured, one McHargue who had graduated from Tennessee in agriculture and . . . ~~xxx~~ he supervised the farming and the preparation of the land and things of this kind. And he later married Georgeadda and he died during the First World War in 1918. Then Ray G. Edwards came in, the son of the man that had been interested a great deal in ~~xxx~~ Ruskin Tennessee . . . he taught music and harmony and woodworking and crafts and things of this kind and then only one of the original faculty came down from up in Chicago. And that was Harriet E. Orcutt. Miss Orcutt had taught languages, mathematics, and she taught some literature, ~~x~~German literature and things of this kind. So she came down with one group that came down from up in Detroit, ~~xxx~~ the Wheelers brought her down, and made the trip from Detroit to Ruskin in the Stanley Steamer. It took 'em



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four weeks to make it with the roads as they were at that time.

. . . . And the Wheelers had a number of children that they wanted to put in school, which they did, that was the time the ~~Crawley~~ Gawleys (?) came down and, Ester and Lou -- that was a big family, too. There were six kids."

Q: Did Esther go to the college?

"Yes, she went as (?) I did; she had never finished in high school and her sister, ~~MY~~ Ruth, who later married Clarence ~~Larson~~ <sup>Leisey</sup> who came down to go to school. They, both of them went as did their brother, John. The other boys were too small. Boys and girls -- they just kept having them, they had about nine kids. . . . Paul <sup>DICKMAN</sup> <sup>(ESTHER)</sup> married one and two or three of the other farmers married them. . . .

"In 1918 was the last year (unclear) was the last year of the college -- that was when I left here, in 1918; I was in the last graduating class. . . . Aurora thought (2) <sup>started?</sup> I was teaching and public speaking/some of the literature classes and Mother, who had a degree in literature, she ~~was~~ taught many of the classes in literature, and Father taught ~~Greek~~ Greek and Hebrew and the Bible (unclear) philosophy and the humanities, more/ than anything."

Q: Any difficulty in having staff/faculty being mostly the one family? Academic disputes being family/dispute? or between Miller family and other people?

"Wasn't too much of that because the preponderance of the teaching was within the family itself, wasn't enough/ <sup>really</sup> to really cause a schism. They just married into the family, that's all. Absorbed. . . ."

Q: Any graduates of the college around?



"No, there aren't any more of them, they're nearly all concentrated right here. That ~~was~~ would be Paul; ~~and~~ Pauline never did go through and get her degree. But there was O.D. and myself and Paul and , would be about the only ones that I could give you any addresses on. . . There were a number of them but they have since ~~all~~ died. Course I was rather young and in on the deal, ~~but~~ I started in on the preparatory end of it and I was only 17 when I graduated (from the college)."

SIDE TWO

". . . Pretty good athletic program in Glen Ellyn, Illinois they . . . when we were there ~~we~~ had a football team and a ~~basketball~~ -- basketball wasn't an item at that time . . . but they did play baseball and football with such colleges as Wheaton and several of the colleges in Chicago. But down here there wasn't, we didn't have much time for things of this kind; the only thing that we had of any athletic nature was that we did have a very good tennis team/ From one family that came down here, the Carrs, and they had been very good tennis players and they had 2 or 3 boys and a couple of ~~girls~~ girls that went to school and they also helped out on our basketball team. But we had to play on outside courts, just a sand court or a grass court, and of course we were pretty hardy because we did have to play outside that way and we were at a great disadvantage when we would go into or any other college Tampa/and play because we didn't have the equipment, the floor, you know." "Admer did most of the coaching on athletics, he was quite athletic. . . We went up and played the University of



. . . we beat Rollins and Stetson."

Qs&As on publications anyone might have. Catalogs printed every year. 1914-15 was the first catalog that was published, pub. July 1914. Clara Cushman Miller was Admer's 2nd wife. 2 girls and 3 boys in McHargue family, came from Tennessee. ~~They had~~ Mother's degrees (ex. AB) were honorary. Don't think there was any definite tie-in between this college and Ruskin Coll Oxford. Vrooman interested in coop mvt in Trenton and staked the college to start off with, took over old Avalon Coll; Vroomans interested in that whole set up on nationwide basis. "It wasn't a socialistic college per se; it was a college that <sup>on the</sup> because it was ~~only~~ left naturally leaned over toward the left and the cooperative movement was a leftist deal, more or less, and as such it had I would say psychological ties with the socialistic movement and with the temperance movement. Course there weren't too many people in the cooperative movement that were capable of handling a college and Father had gone out to L.C. and (?) Oregon in an early deal -- see, the girls were born out there -- and he taught in a school ~~out~~ there, I don't know just how high grade(?) it was, it was out in the Willamett country up there . . . he had had this college education, of course, and the ~~x~~ teaching background/<sup>and</sup> when ~~they~~ they were trying to find somebody capable of starting a college so as to bring, educate the young people in the movement, why that's when they got him, and brought him in from out in California -- he was in the ~~i~~San Joaquin valley at that time, I don't know where . . . but ~~they~~ they came on back to Trenton, MO/. And then Father had in the



meantime interested himself in the socialist movement and, so that, and Mother had interested herself in the WCTU movement, which was also very leftist at that time, . . . so they knew, I mean, people like Maxa (?) Floyd (?) and Susan B. Anthony and that whole group, and Father was quite an admirer of Eugene B. Debs who ran about four times for president -- was no ~~thing~~ chance of ever winning. But he then got interested in the sweatshop and the underprivileged and things of this kind which is where it tied in; and those people also followed, so that this was more <sup>of</sup> a socialistic movement than it was <sup>actually</sup> a cooperative movement as far as the people that started coming down, because they were more attracted to the socialistic end because there were more socialists ~~than there were~~ and they were better organized."

Q: to here rather than Trenton?

"Oh, ~~yes~~ yes, they came here because it was growing all of the time, it wasn't, it had the basis of being a cooperative deal. But Father, for example, would not allow anybody to donate to the college; it wasn't kept going by donations because he said that anyone that wanted to donate would want to dictate, and he didn't intend to be dictated. And of course a great deal of money would want his ideas of education carried out rather than the teaching that Dad did. I never knew the Vroomans . . . but there was a man who ran the Christian Socialists up in Chicago, the Carrs, and they came down and lived on us for some time and the boys and girls went to school, but so many of those people were sponges, I mean they expected somebody to take off their shirt and give it to 'em, and if they had two why give me



one of 'em, but if they had a second one why they'd keep it, . . .  
It got to be pretty rugged, there was not much money coming in,  
the only thing that there was was Father's portion/<sup>I guess,</sup> of what he  
had in the land originally more than anything else. But a  
certain amount of the land was donated to the college because  
it was a drawing card for it, you see. And of course the paper  
itself was not a money maker." (i.e., the Beacon)

Q: on the Triangle.

Publication of the school itself, voice of the students to  
let them show their stuff.

Q: Printing press intended to make money?

Never made money; nothing down here to advertise. "Was  
more or less a holding of the groups together and a way of  
interesting people that were interested in either the socialist  
movement or the other . . . Also it was used for promoting the  
sale of land."

Identifies The Coming Nation.