

WOMEN IN THE CO-OPERATIVE COMMUNITY OF RUSKIN FLORIDA

1906-1967

A Senior Thesis in  
Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Arts  
New College

by  
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## PROJECT OUTLINE

### I. Introduction

- A. Statement of Purpose
- B. Need for Background

### II. Literary Background

- A. Frustration at Implementation
- B. Literary Utopias
  1. social commentary
    - a. More Utopia
  2. Imaginative Utopias
    - a. Butler Erewhon
  3. definition of Utopia
    - a. Plato
    - b. play on words
- C. Blueprint Works
  1. Charles Fourier Design for Utopia
    - a. actual Fourierist communities
- D. Method of Evaluation

### III. Ruskin: Where, How, When

- A. The Millers
  1. early years
    - a. college
    - b. need to work
    - c. marriage
  2. Oregon
    - a. Philomath College
    - b. Portland
  3. Missouri
    - a. People's University College
    - b. Avalon College 1900
- B. Walter Vrooman
  1. co-operative education in England
  2. Ruskin Hall
    - a. John Ruskin
      1. social awakening
      2. Guild of St. George
    - b. work credit system
  3. return to America
    - a. plans for a college similar to Ruskin Hall
- C. America at the Turn of the Century
  1. activism
  2. communication
    - a. newspapers
    - b. lecturers

- D. Miller and Vrooman
  1. Sept. 26, 1900 Avalon College becomes Ruskin College
  2. statement of purpose of College
  3. move to Glen Ellyn, Illinois
    - a. friction with community
    - b. fires
  4. need for a supportive community
    - a. Ruskin, Tenn. and Ruskin, Ga.
    - b. connection of all Ruskinite communities

- E. Florida
  1. Garden of Eden
  2. Miller's train trip to Florida
    - a. child on train
  3. Captain Davis
  4. land purchase
    - a. 12,000 acres
    - b. trade for Dickman's farm in Missouri
  5. Millers move to Florida 1906-1907
  6. Dickmans arrive in Florida 1908
    - a. conditions
    - b. turpentine still
    - c. "fly up the creeks"

#### IV. Ruskin Co-operative

- A. Organization
  1. Florida Club
  2. Commongood Society
  3. land sales
    - a. script system
  4. Commongood Store
  5. By-Laws
    - a. statement of purpose
- B. Idealism
  1. community goals
  2. educational emphasis
- C. Ruskin College
  1. financing
  2. refusal to accept outside support
  3. College Bulletin
    - a. subjects
    - b. faculty
    - c. philosophies

#### V. Ruskin: A Women's town

- A. Chapline's Article "Fascinating Florida"
  1. Miller's quote from New Order of Jesus
- B. Position of Women in Ruskin
  1. Northerners living in the South
    - a. Orcutt's comment about segregation

- C. Adaline Dickman Miller
1. background
  2. early interest in the Temperance Movement
    - a. Oregon
  3. home life
    - a. drive
    - b. delegation of responsibility
  4. role in Ruskin College
  5. Women's Club
    - a. historical perspective on the Club movement
- D. Rose Beary Dickman
1. background
    - a. reason for coming to Ruskin
  2. personality
    - a. contact with Captain Davis
    - b. "always had something good to say"
    - c. strong character
      1. refusal to put obey in the marriage ceremony
  3. church work
  4. home life
- E. Harriet Orcutt
1. background
    - a. education
    - b. faculty at Glen Ellyn
      1. taught German and French
    - c. trip to Ruskin in a Stanley Steamer
  2. addiction to books
    - a. started the first Ruskin Public Library
  3. Secretary of the Commongood Society
    - a. ads in Socialist papers
  4. active in the Suffrage Movement
    - a. convention in 1916
    - b. quote from "The Model Magazine" 1909
  5. personality
    - a. place in community
    - b. important rôle in the dissemination of Ruskinite ideology
- F. Aurora Miller Edwards
1. background
    - a. responsibility for younger brothers
  2. taught the local elementary school
    - a. Walker's letter on tape
    - b. Walker's letter of Nov. 7, 1974
    - c. loved by all who knew her
    - d. exerted a great deal of influence on the people she taught
  3. move to Washington, D.C.
    - a. theater group
    - b. family reunion in 1921 description
  4. returned to Ruskin for visits
    - a. "she would get a yearning"

## VI. Post War Years

## A. W.W.I

1. men leave community
2. money is scarce
3. college closes
  - a. O.D. was expected to take over school but he was not willing
4. G.M. Miller dies 1919

## B. Core Community

1. women's club
2. churches
3. "a good town"
4. 1967- last meeting of the Ruskin Commongood Society

## ABSTRACT

Women in the Co-operative Community of Ruskin, Florida  
or  
Yes, There is More to Ruskin Than Tomatoes

The purpose of this project was to explore the role of women in Ruskin, Florida during the years when the town was an active educational co-operative. I felt that there was strong evidence that women had played an important part in the development of the community and that they reflected elements of the various women's movements that were active in America at the turn of the century. I felt that such a study could serve as a petri dish in which one could see the development of a feminine consciousness. I proposed to undertake an in depth study of the Ruskinite community in Florida and with a thorough understanding of the events occurring in the community, to form conclusions on the part women took in the undertaking. My task seemed straight forward enough but I soon encountered difficulties. Simply, the lack of information on my subject. The Ruskin Co-operative is ignored by all of the comprehensive studies on co-operative communities in America. I am certain that this is not a deliberate slight, just an unawareness of the existence of the community. Florida is an unusual part of the country and has eluded the historians' hand on many occasions. I attempted to locate information on the women of the south. There is a wealth of excellent books on the subject and thanks to the Libraries of Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill there is an excellent collection of original letters and journals from many southern women. Though fascinating to read these were not applicable to the women I was interested in. The women in Ruskin had all been born and raised in the North or the Mid-West

and had come to Florida because the climate of the state, (literally as well as figuratively) was conducive to the experiment that they wished to undertake. It has been shown that a prime factor in the Southern agitation for the vote was the compulsion that the Southerners felt to insure white supremacy at the polls, and the only way they could be certain that this majority would exist was to give women the vote. It would be unfair to assume that the same feelings motivated the women in Ruskin, but on the same token, it would be hasty judgement to assume that it did not just because they came from the North. I realized that the only way I was to learn about the women in Ruskin was to be by a first hand study. This brought me into the field of oral history and first hand research.

I began my study with a series of personal interviews with the people who now live in Ruskin. Obviously the dates of the community were going to cause problems. The people whom I was interviewing had come to Ruskin as young children and had grown up in the town. They were now quite old and I had to remember that they were relying on memories that were often dim or tainted with the desire to preserve a certain ideal that had little to do with reality. It was essential for me to constantly question the reliability of my sources and if possible, document everything from information in a printed source, or see if several people provided me with the same information. I was not too fortunate in finding primary sources, though one of the local residents had made an effort to collect the old records and had placed them in the Library under the care of a very helpful librarian.

I found that helpfulness was the norm in Ruskin and not the exception. Everywhere that I went I found people who were willing to talk and share. I think that there are two reasons for this. Firstly, the openness of the townspeople when dealing with me. As one woman put it, "Sure is a pleasure to see and talk with someone who looks like college students should look." and secondly, the fear that their death would obliterate all record of their community. When they were all young and hearty pioneers the idea of preserving the history of their origins as a town had little appeal, but now that these people are in their 70's they want to insure recognition of their town's history.

I ate a lot of delicious pie in a local coffee shop waiting for appointments and thinking over interviews that I had conducted. I learned that when people in Ruskin say morning they mean before 10 a.m., afternoon starts at 12:00 and ends at 4:00 p.m., night comes at 6 and who knows what they do with the rest of the hours! Time and money placed unfortunate limitations on my research. I found that a lot of information could be gotten from letters. I wrote to anyone who had even a remote connection with Ruskin and was surprised at some of my replies! One letter would often lead to another as each person told me of other people they remembered from the early days at Ruskin. Often weeks would elapse between letters, in fact there are still some outstanding. It would be wonderful to read the articles Adaline Miller wrote for a magazine in Portland, Oregon but to secure these I would have to go to Portland's public library and that was impossible.



As I learned about the history of Ruskin I saw that my original premise was accurate. While the women in Ruskin were not instrumental in its founding, (that was primarily the work of one man, George McA Miller) they did influence the character of the community in many and diverse ways and to a degree that was greater than a mere reflection of their numbers. It was the women of Ruskin who determined its character and, I feel, its caliber. As a whole they were well educated and interested in improving their own lives and that of those around them. I don't doubt that these efforts may have been misguided at times, people bent on improvement can be over zealous and I am sure the women in Ruskin were no exception but they are remembered as "the most elegant, charming group of women to ever grace this earth" so their efforts must have met with appreciation.

It was in 1922 that Lewis Mumford wrote the following in his Story of Utopias, "My Utopia is actual life, pushed to the limits of its ideal possibilities." In Ruskin many dreamed of Utopias and the women worked to push their lives to the limits of its ideal possibilities.

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Jim Lawler, October 23, 1974.

Pauline Dickman Lawler, October 23, 1974.

Judy Miller, November 12, 1974.

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