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JAMES LAWLER

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE _____
RUSKIN, FLORIDA

The idea of forming a community whose core would be an educational institution and whose students, boys and girls, would study part time and be gainfully employed part time, was the brainchild of Dr George McA. Miller. John Ruskin, in England, had preached the theory, but like all his other concepts it was left to someone else to try.

During the life of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) nothing smacking of unions or socialism could be tolerated in England, so his idea had to be tried elsewhere.

Dr Miller thought it could be successful in America if tied to Christian practices. He wrote, "A Life of Christ".

When Avalon College at Trenton, Missouri became available, Dr Miller, being on the faculty, took advantage of the opportunity to start the first Ruskin College. After certain adventures and misadventures, Dr Miller accepted the offer of a real estate promoter at Glen Ellyn, Illinois, who converted his hotel into the second Ruskin College. Naming it Ruskin University didn't help to bring in enough money, and with the opposition of the local trades people, it was necessary to cease operations.

Among his other honors, Dr Miller had a degree in law, had been States Attorney of Cook County, Illinois, and now accepted speaking engagements at various colleges on the Ruskin plan. Through this he became known to the socialist world.

Having experienced two setbacks, he now looked for a location far enough from a city and possible interference, but close enough to sell whatever the college produced. Thus it happened that Dr Miller landed where Ruskin, Florida is now located. This was in 1906. Although he had no money with which to start a community, his wife Adeline (Aunt Addie) who was also an educator in her own right, had three brothers who were farming in Missouri. One, Albert Peter Dickman, owned land there and was interested in Dr Miller's idea. After finding the desired location and exchanging land, it took two years to complete the business details. So in the beginning of February 1908 the Dickmans moved to Florida.

REFERENCE ONLY

The first contingent consisted of A P Dickman's wife, Aunt Rose, her twin children, Paul and Pauline, aged 11; Lorenzo Dickman's wife Aunt Elizabeth and her two children, Reese and Nedra, aged 5 and 2 respectively. They came by train to Wimauma which was seven miles from where operations were to begin and no road. The Millers with their four children, Aurora 20, Georgeadda 18, Olnton D (O D) 12, and Willard 11, had been here two years and were living in a small old hotel on Tampa Bay. There was no house for the Dickmans so they had to make-do with the remnants of a prisoners' camp. The Millers moved to the camp also. The camp buildings were of rough lumber construction and had been built for prisoners rented to turpentine camp operators, usually political figures. That practice had been outlawed just previous to the Ruskin arrangements so the Dickmans and Millers moved into the buildings 'as was'. A P Dickman arrived by freight a few days later with their furniture, mules, chickens and farm equipment.

Miss Harriet Orcutt who joined the faculty in Glen Ellyn and taught German and French, was also a correspondent for various socialist newspapers. Largely through her articles in these papers, knowledge of the new effort quickly covered socialist America. However, the Dickman and Millers had to clear enough land to start the college and other necessary buildings, to get things going. Lumber, etc, was produced in their own small saw mill. Often the trees felled and trimmed one day would be stolen before they could return to work the next day. Squatters on the 12,000 acres were more troublesome in the beginning than the mosquitoes and snakes put together.

Title to the property was in the name of the Dickmans and Millers who formed an organization called "The Ruskin Homemakers". Buyers of building lots and acreage automatically became members of a cooperative government known as "The Ruskin Commongood Society".

This latter group disposed of its last piece of property to Hillsborough County in 1970.

Students and their parents began to trickle in from all directions, two boys even coming from Japan. Some people came down, bought lots (\$10.00) per lot, and went back home. Some stayed and tried

to farm. In spite of being warned, some came prepared to stay, but had no financial reserves. This caused bitter disappointment. Another group that filtered in were the intellectuals. There was nothing phoney about this group. Some of them may have been eccentric, but they were genuine. Among them could be found singers, artists, lecturers, clergymen, writers, and performers resting between Chautauqua engagements. Aunt Rose finally having the only good house at that time had to board these people. Every subject under the sun was discussed. Kate O'Hare even obliging with her "Sex Education". Whoever could entertain, or teach did, to the general betterment of the company.

Ruskin as a community, progressed more or less satisfactorily > until 1917. Every ablebodied boy was inducted into the armed services and the girls got jobs in Washington, D C. That broke the back of the college and Dr Miller's heart.

With a war on and no pupils, the college had to close. Dr Miller went back to lecturing and recruiting and died suddenly at the home of a friend at Painesville, Ohio in 1918.

The area known as Ruskin was under the governance of the Ruskin Commongood Society, until gradually, the individual building lots, etc., changed hands, state law became more apparent and the county government showed more interest. Bridges and roads made, Tampa and other markets more available as markets for crops grown on the land that had been cleared.

With the return of the boys from the service, the development of the area began through the foresighted efforts of one individual - Paul B Dickman, the son of Albert P Dickman, the man who made it all possible in the first place.

The story of Paul Dickman's accomplishments in this development, first through lumbering then land clearing, farming, crop and packaging innovations, real estate and many other areas was only terminated by his demise in 1976. The full story, however, can be found in the Ruskin Branch Library, located at One Dickman Drive, southeast, Ruskin, Florida 33570.

Originally land was cleared by the owners. This meant felling trees, grubbing roots and stumps, and digging out palmettos, all by hand. The land had to be surveyed, streets laid out and named. The first lots were cleared and the first homes built between the inlet on the north and College Avenue on the south, with the expectation that the development would be in the direction of Wimauma. Ruskin Inlet was the main obstacle to the northern progress. The inlet was only navigable at high tide and being so shallow was the cause of much flooding at spring tides. Wooden bridges were washed out almost as fast as they were built. Work done for the Commongood was paid for by scrip which was redeemed as land was paid for. Lumber and farming progressed slowly but expanded as the cleared land came available.

Then came the "boom". Things looked rosy for Ruskin as it did for the rest of the State. When the 'bust' arrived it brought disaster. In a way, the 'bust' was a blessing. Ruskin turned to its only resource: farming. Soon Ruskin vegetables were on the markets in the north. Ruskin Brand, which was one of the names copyrighted by Paul Dickman, could be found from Atlanta to above New York City, and west beyond St Louis and Chicago.

During the depression, labor was plentiful, wages were low, but a dollar went a long way.

→ As was common all over the country, land was lost and sold for taxes. This gave the farmers the opportunity to acquire land at their own price. Some building lots sold at the Court House steps as low as 50¢ cents per lot.

Ruskin didn't grow fast, but farmland increased tremendously and made millionaires of the ones that grasped at the chance. They are the leading families today. Ruskin now has an estimated (4000 fall)(8500 spring) acres under vegetable and citrus cultivation, and is the shopping center for a population of 9,000 people.

James H. Fowler

Fowler Co.???

1961 Wade application to Ruskin College - from Africa

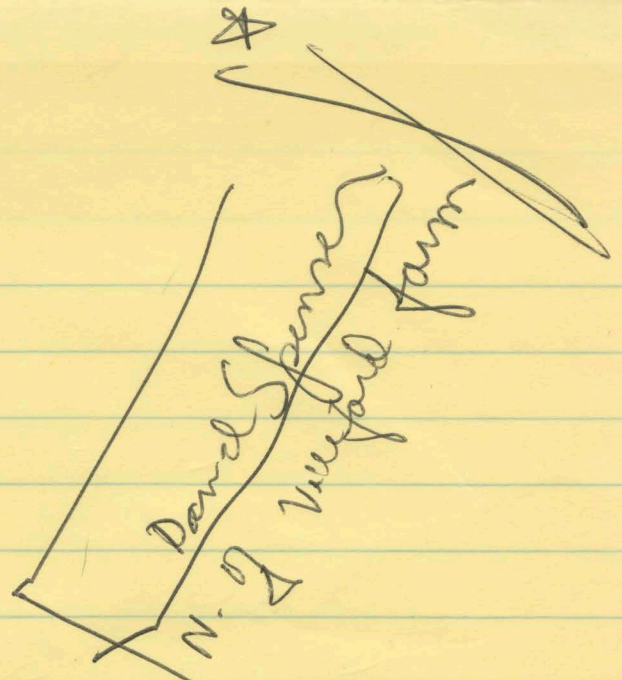
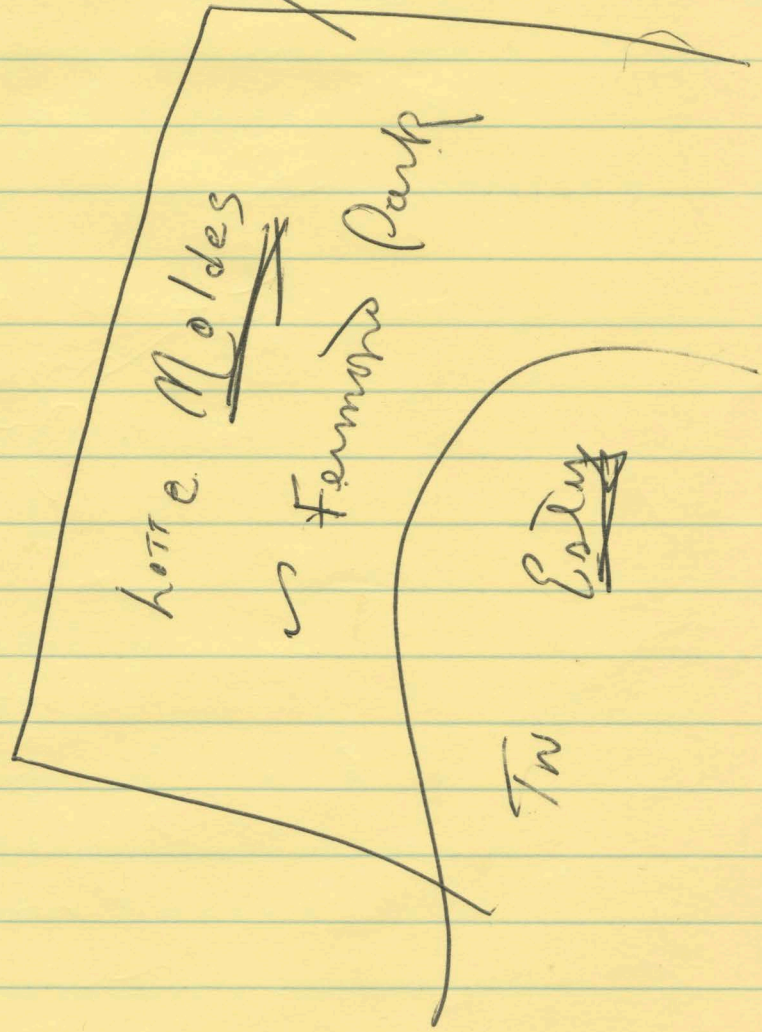
16 Oct 67. Last meeting of Commonwealth
Society

1970 A.B. Hawk Turns 100

R, F-k

Leads

✓ C. Henry



R, FL TIME LINE

Ben Moody - ~~the~~ oyster factory - lodge on shell point

3 JAN, 1906 Millers to Shell Point
- move to Hazy House

Feb, 1908 Dickmans AP NE LL
arrive
Ruskin Homemakers
~~arrive~~

3 April 1909 Seed restrictions proposed

6 NOV 1909 FHA Club → Common Good Society

17 NOV HAWK becomes
General Business Agent

Sep 1910 Still no bridge over Inlet

Nov 26, 1910 GMM report to CG's College of
no action taken

1911 David Spenser arrives

1913 Esther's family arrives