W.D. MILLER, INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE THIEL, MARCH 26, 1974.

BT: The reasons why Ruskin was founded, the purposes of founding the colony.

WDM: Well, I would say the town of Ruskin was founded to carry on the idea of a cooperative and socialistic type of development that is based along the same lines as John Ruskin had laid out, but with certain modifications, due to the fact that the cooperative movement, which was not particularly a Ruskin thing, was incorporated with the ideals of boys and girls being able to secure an education through work and not because of money. And this was a principal that my father, Dr. George McA. Miller, believed very strongly in. He felt that most of the colleges were endowed at that time, before the time of land grant? colleges, and that the endowments were generally given by people who wished to have a certain philosophy of life instilled into the younger generation as they were getting their education. And this was kind of a offset to that. Father, for example, would not take a donation if it were given to the college, or scholarships, because he felt that if he did, then he would be guided, and would have to conform to the thinking of the person that had donated the money. He felt also that, if a boy or a girl had earned their board and their tuition through work, that they had done it on their own, and not because their father and mother had had money enough to go ahead and send them off to a school. this was some of the reasons that he was trying to carry this idea on, which had been started with Ruskin college, when it first was started in Trenton, MO back about 14 yrs prior to the time of his coming down here.

BT: How central would you say the college was to the Commongood Society? What was the relation between the college and the Commongood Society?

WDM: there was no relation whatever between the Commongood Society and the college. It would be just the same as saying that there is a college in Tampa, and an administration of the city under the mayor and city council. (86)

WDM: And the Common9ood Society was simPly an or9anization that was founded to take the Place of some methos of administratin9 the affairs of the town. It had nothin9 to do whatever with the colle9e.

BT: would you say that the Common9ood Society was based uPon the ideals of John Ruskin?

WDM: I don't know enou9h about the ideas of John Ruskin. It was ased more on the idea of the town hall set-uP in New En9land, where everyone that owned a Piece of land in a town had a chance to exPress themselves in oPen meetin9s, as to everythin9 that haPPened in that Particular town. And this was a town hall meetin9 arran9ement, much more than it was a cooPerative movement, whatever. The cooPerative Part of the town was built in by the restrictions which were Put in the deeds of conveyance. And there, for examPle, could not be any store that was not a cooPerative store, that everybody could buy into, therefore they had a say in it. All of the meetin9s were cooPerative meetin9s, where everybody had a say in it that owned land. and if you didn't stick to what the restrictions were in the deeds as 9iven to you, your land reverted to the Common9ood and it started back all over a9ain. this was the only way they had of Punishin9. they had no way of finin9 or taxin9. they had no tax authority or anythin9 else. It simPly was this, that for every acre of land that the holdin9 comPany, which was at first the Ruskin Homemaker's, it wasn't a comPany, it was Ruskin Homemakers, it was called. It was kind of a trustee arran9ement, and they held all of the land that was bou9ht by the four families,the three Dickmans and the Millers. And every time that ten acres were sold, a certain amount of land was set aside for the common9ood, and that could be used then for the buildin9 of roads, or makin9 telePhone e9uiPment and thin9s of this kind. but there was no actual brid9e between the Common9ood Society and the Colle9e Per se. the Colle9e was run by my father as the President and my mother as the vice-President, and the rest of our family were teachers, and we had other faculty members that came in. but the

Commonwood and the college itself were separate institutions.

BT: Did the law that was passed by the Commonwood Society outlawing liquor and tobacco sales, was that done for the sake of the Commonwood Society, or in relation to the college?

WDM: It was not a law passed by the Commonwood Society at all. They were restrictions placed in the deeds, and this was the only law that you could have, that governed these particular things, because the land did not belong to the Commonwod Society, therefore they couldn't put any restrictions on it. It belonged to the Ruskin Homemakers, which were the Millers and the Dickmans, and they could place whatever restrictions they desired on this. they were put on in order to carry on the idea of a cooperative colony. That was the reason for putting in the things that had to do with the kind of operations you could have, that they all had to be cooperative, but the restrictions as to what you could do with liquor and cigarettes and things of that kind were personal, and those had to be in the deeds. It was a very difficult thing to get those restrictions taken out of the deeds after the college quit, and after it was discontinued, and after the Commonwood Society was disbanded.

BT: could you explain the workings of the Commonwood Store and how it was used by the Commonwood Society?

WDM: It was not used by the Commonwood Society, it was used by each individual, and he did not have, as I understand it, I didn't go back there at that time, I have to look into these things and make them sink into my mind, but if you owned land,and you automatically could buy your groceries and things of that kind at the cooperative store. As far as I know, you didn't have to put any money in originally to do it. How it was originally financed, is something that I really don't know. but you could pay for things at the Commonwood Store and give Commonwood script for it, that you had earned by clearing off land and things of that kind. And a good many people did that. They used the scrip whcih they got from the Commonwood Society for clearing

streets and roads to buy their land, and also in some instances to buy their 9roceries, because that was about the only money that there was in town circulatin9, for a while, durin9 some of the Periods of dePression back in those days.

BT: How lon9 did the store last as a cooPerative effort?

WDM: I believe that the cooPerative end of the store mi9ht have lasted 2 or 3 yrs after 1918, that would be my considered oPinion. I was 9one from here. I left in '18 myself, and I didn't 9et back until '41, so I'm not certain about those dates.(218) But it was like a lot of the cooPerative thin9s that came uP. Some Persons took advanta9e of it and they would run uP bills which they had no way of Payin9. And somebody had to Put in money in order to hav cash to buy wholesale 9roceries,to brin9 down and sell them at retail. And I believe that that is the way that that chan9ed from a cooPerative deal into an individual handlin9. Now, this is somethin9 that I really don't know, becaue as I say, I left durin9 the war and I didn't 9et back, the 1st WW.

BT: Were there any other industries or Practices in the Common9ood Society that were communalistic or socialistic?

WDM: No, there weren't anythin9 in there that was communistic or communalistic if you want to Put it thatmi9ht be a coined word. but there weren't that close a combination between the two. A9ain, it would be as in any city, a 9uestion of havin9 stores run one way and havin9 an or9anization to administer the duties of a town, if you will. And that's what the Common9ood Society was, it was Purely a town hall arran9ement, had nothin9 to do with a Person's morals or his education or anythin9 else.

BT: could you tell us any more about the colle9e, what was tau9ht at the colle9e, how the colle9e was run?

WDM: Well, I can tell you how it was run, I mean, how it was, say, financed, if you would have it that way. The colle9e ws 9iven a certain amount of land every time a ten acres was sold or five acres was sold, or a town lot was

sold. A certain amount of land was set aside for the college. The college could sell it to anyone and get money from that if the person had money to put in, because it owned the land and it could sell the land. Now that was about the only wealth that there was to it, because Father was not a rich man and he would not accept any endowments, and so there wasn't cash there to run it. And then the boys and the girls that came here, most of them that came and stayed in the dormitories, of course were working for their board and room. That did not bring in any cash. If there were staying at their homes, there was a tuition, a very reasonable tuition, that was a part of, for handling the salaries of the teachers and things of this kind and buying supplies and keeping the place running. but the students worked on the farms, and if there was any produce to be sold, it was sent up to Tampa to be sold and any money that came in from that was added income. but mostly, the work that was done on the farms was used in the dining halls and things of this kind, to keep the price of just sustaining the college mess hall.

BT: did the college serve anay purpose in the community as a gathering place for discussions or ideas?

WDM: Yes, that was one of the factions of it. There was a portion of the land set aside as the Chatauqua grounds, which is now at the corner of 674 and 41. there was about 4 acres set aside there. And in building the first temporary buildng,it was the first temporary building, it was called the Chatauqua building, and there was speakers and teachers and things of this kind which were in the movement, that would come down and everybody was welcome to come in. there was no charge as far as them coming in was concerned. And it was quite, of course we had things in the school, which was open to everybody too, that they could come in. We had our literary societies, and we had lectures by emminant socialists and cooperative movement people that came in, and the people in town could go there and enjoys themselves in the facilities ofthe Commongood Hall. (310)

which were the only facilities where the Commonwood Society could meet, so that the tie was close that way, because we didn't have additional buildings for the Commonwood and the College, so that the college furnished not only the cultural end of the life, but also, the environment which you lived in was set up by the college. there was no Bible, as such, that Ruskin set down, nor did this colony attempt to, just because it was called Ruskin, attempt to go word for word as Ruskin had it in his Plan over in England. It was simply that Ruskin was the first one to break the hold of what you would call the upper class of England, in saying that just because a young man's father happened to be a yeoman, or a artisan, that his son was to be that and couldn't break out of the class consciousness that was in it. It just simply was the same sort of a thing that they had in the English military, that no one but someone who was of the upper class could ever be a officer in the army or the navy. And this was carried on almost up to this day. In fact, the majority of the Pilots in the British Army, even up to the, I don't know if it was so in the 2nd WW, but I know it was so in the 1st WW, were the only ones that could have an officer's rank. They had to be an officer and a gentleman. This was something that Ruskin did not believe in, and he knew that without education, there was a Point where these artisans and yeomen had to stop. and the only hope that they had of going any higher in the intellectual way, would be Probably to get there, to join some one of ecclesiastical colleges and become Perhaps a Priest or a minister of some kind. And then, through that, they could. but as faras going ahead and being and getting a liberal arts education, there was no Place for them because they had what you call Private schools, and then Oxford and the various universities there. And this is why he started up Ruskin college over in Oxford, England. Now, there is a tie, for example, between New College and New College, which was founded many many hundreds of years ago in England, but neither one of them are taking, for instance, this New College is not saying, this is the way they did it in England, therefore this is the way

we're going to do it over here, because the times have changed. This is one of things, they think there should be a closer tie than there actually was in a colony. because you had to take into consideration, in running a colony, you had many peoeple in there who were not people of education. There were people who, it was conviction, perhaps, and believed in the cooperative movement, believed in the socialistic movement, believed in the fact that there should be no child labor, and that there should be unions and things of this kind, and they were way over on the left. And that wasn't probably true at all of the people that were associated with Ruskin in England were of the leftist end, though I imagine most of them were. I wouldn't say that they were, because I don't know. I thought I'd just give that to you by the way, because I know that each one of the boys that I've talked to have thought there should have been a closer tie. Anybody that starts a new idea, generally writes a treatise on it, and that treatise is much the same as the Bible. It will go back and say, well, now, you can't do this, it says this in the Bible. And there wasn't any Bible running this thing.

BT: What men's ideas besides Ruskin were emphasised in the College.

WDM: well, I wouldn't say that there was anything except that Karl Marx was given the, lots of views of Karl Marx were followed fairly closely. Of course some of the ideas which my father had gotten, some of the ideas of individual people who were teaching could be carried on, but there wasn't anything to say, well, this was not according to John Ruskin, this is according to Eugene B. Debs, who ran for many years for President from the socialist colonies, the Socialist Party, I mean.

BT: How were students recruited for the college?

WDM: HOw did they come in? well, they simply wrote in and made application and were screened as to their background and things of that kind before they came, and then they might come in, and say, well, now, I want to work for my room and board and tuition, everything of this kind, and this is what they would

do if they were accepted. But I don't know too much about it, because I was rather a young man at that time. I was only 19 when I graduated, and I didn't go back and put all of these things in my mind. there was many things that were very nice and lovely about being, having a college of this kind. but there also things that weren't the finest in the world for the children ofthe president of the college, because they were supposed to act in ways which would reflect credit onto the thing and you were always held up front of it, and being held up for somebody else to do or say, you can't do that, because you have this obligation. It was no fun. and, so, many things which I can look back and find that there were many things that I didn't like about it, about as many things as I did like. There certainly wasn't any feeling on the part of the young ones of us to go ahead and carry the matter on after Father died, because it had to become our life, because there wasn't enough money to carry it on otherwise, see.

BT: What industries did the Commongood Society first have?

WDM: the Comongood Society never had any industries as such. The only thing that they had was the cooperative store, and then there was a cooperative telephone company that we had down here in an early day, which was hooked on to the Tampa system. It was not a part of the Tampa system, it just grafted onto it, we had to go through there on long distance and call on out. the college had a monthly paper, which they put out. We had a weekly paper we put out, the Ruskin Beacon. And then the industries within the college, we had a laundry which did all the college laundry for the boys and girls that were in the dormitories. And then we had a shop where woodworking was done, and then there was a shop where the girls mostly were doing leather work, some of which was sold, and those were the principal industries as far as the college was concerned. As for as the Commongood was concerned, they nothing whatever. there was a cooperative store, it was not a Commongood store, this is what I'm trying to get at, it was a separate, cooperative deal,and there was not any

other cooperative things ongoing, because there wasn't enough agriculture here at this time to have a cooperative packing house. And if so, if we'd a had it, we couldn't get it up, because they had no railroads and no hard roads, see. So that it wasn't a question of them having any industry. Anything that started up that way, it would have to be cooperative.

BT: YOu said that if anything started, that it would have to be cooperative?

WDM: If they had any industry, it would have had to be a cooperative industry. There wasn't anything in the deeds, as I have any recollection, nothing in there that would restrict you, except it culdn't be, that you couldn't have, couldn't start a farm of your own, or raise cattle, or raise hogs or sheep or anything of this kind. You could do that type of thing, but had there been a industry that wanted to come in and, let us say, can tomatoes, or do something of that kind, I imagine it would, just because everybody was inclined to think in terms of cooperation, that it would have been a cooperative thing. That would have been the way the thing would have been started. I doubt seriously whether anybody would have come down here in a cooperative colony,and say, well, now, I'm going to put up 20,000 and build a fish hatchery or something of that kind. I don't know that they would have, ad I dn't know that they ever tried and were turned down. (478)

BT: could you possibly explain how the site got chosen?

WDM: Father came down here trying to find a piece of land which was close enough to a large city that he could be in contact with it to buy and do the things that were necessary to do, and yet where the land was cheap enough that people with very little moeny could come down and buy and be self-sustaining, perhaps on their own place. and just why he chose the West coast of Florida, I really don't know, but it, I have heard this story from a ? by the name of O.L. Williams, who said that he and his mother, he was a young man at that time, just a boy, his mother had made a trip down into this area, and father was on the same train and got to talking to Mrs. Williams and explained what

he was trying to find out, he was trying to locate some land that would be close to Tampa, and preferably on water, preferably with sme buildings that culd be used, because of not being able to put up buildings, on account of not having enough money to swing the whole thing, and she mentioned to him that her husband had a piece of land down on the Little Manatee River, and it had an old hotel on it. There was only about 35 or 40 acres until it graded over into marshland, it's down where the Shell Point is at the present time. There was an immense big shell mound at that time, and there was an old hotel with about 20 rooms, 15 or 20 rooms on top of the shell mound. And it had been used as kind of a sportsmen's hotel, where people from Tampa Bay hotel could come down and put up, and go fishing and hunting and everything of that kind. So father came down to see it, and then he found that there wasn't enough land for what he was trying to get at. If he was going to form a colony, he had to have enough land, where it could be tilled, and a person could make a living on, say, the 10 or 15 acres that they would buy, in some way sustaining themselves. And this land with the 15 or 20 acres in it, was not land that could be used of that kind, because much of it was marsh land. and the hotel sat on what was an old indian mound, so it was high and dry, but all around it was marshgrass and mangroves. And so then he got to looking to see whether there was any other land available near this particular place, so that the buildings might be used to start off with. and then the land that he sold as a separate deal. And so he located the 12000 acres which connected onto it. It starts a mile and a half down this way, whereas Shell Point is about two miles down to the m mouth of the Little Manatee River. And this was owned by a group of men who were intersted in what they called at that time Naval Stores, that is, if there were pine trees, they would turpentine them until they had gotten all of the turpentine out of the pine trees that they could. and then they made Naval Stores out of that, that would be your rosins that they used in the boats and turpentine and things of this kind. and thre was

an old still on the Place, too, a turPentine still. but you couldn't buy it in under 12000 acres, because it all held in very lar9e holdin9s. And there were some PeoPle livin9 on it, but mostly they were s9uatters who had come in and just lived on the land lon9 enou9h to claim, not homesteaded on it, but the ran their cattle on it and did thin9s of this kind. It was oPen land, PeoPle could run cattle across it, or they could do anythin9 they wanted to on it, and a lot of this land was, they ran cattle on it when it didn't even belon9 to them, much as they did out west. they ran their cattle on it, and then they had their roundUPs, and they branded them just like they did out west, so father couldn't swin9 that either, because it took morre than just our family to do it, so he 9ot my mother's three brothers, the Dickmans, and they sold out their land in Sedalia, MO, and withthe money they saved uP from their farms, Puttin9 it in, and with the extra manPower that we had with the other three families comin9 in, we were able to oPen uP the first subdivision. This was a very exPensive thin9, because you had to 9o back and susrvey the whole thin9 and lay it off in town lots and farm tracts and everythin9 of this kind, and that took money to start off with. I really don't see how they did it, but they did it and that was it. and that's how it haPPened to be at this Particular Place. And then the fact that we could by boat 9o to TamPa, made it so that we could be far enou9h so that we didn't have the state and the city, the county and state taxes, which you would have had, had it been closer to TamPa. And the land did not cost a 9reat deal of money at the time to buy it.

BT: Were there any taxes in the Common9ood Society?

WDM: No, they did not have taxin9 Power. that comes only, it would have to come throu9h the state, and have some sort of an or9anization where the state or the county could 9o ahead and do it. Now, we had county taxes, certainly because we were in the county, so we had very few and very low county taxes, because we had no county roads down in here at that time to amount to anythin9.

BT: What Powers did the Common9ood Society hold for itself?

WDM: Well, they simPly had the Power of makin9 rules and re9ulations as to how PeoPle should more or less 9overn themselves,and how the land which belon9ed to the Common9ood Society could be administered. Those were the 9eneral Powers which it had. for instance, in layin9 out the land here, there was a road laid between all of the waterfront and Private land. For instance, this was one of the first houses built, lar9e houses built down here, my uncle built this, and we don't own out to the water, we only own out to the road which lies between here and the water, and over on the other side is Park land. And this was ori9inally deeded to the Common9ood Society when that land was laid off that way. Now, they could say what was to be donw with this Common9ood land. they could sell it in any way that they wanted to. They culd decide how they'd issue Common9ood scriP, or they could say which roads were 9oin9 in, and which roads weren't 9oin9 in, or whether the ditch should be Put here, or the ditch should be Put there, and whether we would have a cooPerative telePhone comPany, for examPle, which we did have. I Presume they were in on it, thou9h I wouldn't say that they were. They could issue scriP and use it as money if they decided to do that. those were the tyPes of Powers that they had. (596) (a 9uestion about the Project at at hand)

BT: How did the Common9ood Society, or how did Ruskin Colony survive durin9 WW I?

WDM: Well, it survived durin9 WW I just simPly because PeoPle had maybe a little money comin9 in, or they PerhaPs had their backyard 9ardens which they could eat in. And it was Pretty ru99ed, because there wasn't a 9reat deal of money lyin9 around in here. I know that when I was makin9 $80 a month as a member of the survey crew, I had more money at the end of the month than there was in anybody else in town. That's just how broke as far as cash was concerned. You don't necessarily have to have land money to eat, it you're raisin9 it and doin9 different thin9s and maybe swaPPin9 here and there, and

the other way you can get by. But it was just like any town that lived at that time, it was where, boys, so many of them had to go off, and of course the war had a great impact on every city and every town, that 1st WW, because there wasn't such a thing as somebody saying, I'm not going to the war. If you were drafted, you went, and there was no problem with anybody saying, well, now, I'm going to start up a movement and say I don't believe in this and I'm not going. They used to believe in patriotism back in those old days.

BT: Besides the store and the telephone company, can youtink of anay other cooperative industries that had taken place in Ruskin?

WDM: well, I could mention that some of them had, there were several groups of people that came down and they had, they brought their own group down, say, they might come from Ohio, or they might come from some other place where a cooperative group had gotten together up there and had been working cooperatives, and they felt that they wanted to come down and bite on at Ruskin. and what they could do would be to buy, say, 4 or 5 or 6 ten-acre tracts and put them together and make a subdivision of their own. And that was allowable, because you could take the farmland and break it up into 1 acre tracts and 2 acre tracts or any of that kind, and then you could have your own little center and your own little cooperative set-up. there were about three of those groups that came in. One of them was on the land that now has the shopping center there in Ruskin, there's a small group of lots around that that was a subdivision where they made it so that people could just buy one lot and put their house there and then join in farming with the rest of them, and have a central well and everything of that kind. And they had their life within their own little group, and then that group clubbed together when it came to things that had to do with the whole town of Ruskin, and that was one of the reasons that the cooperative movement broke up, because each one of those felt that they were big enough to run the whole town, and they would just try to take over the Commongood Society. And there were some kind of

rough meetings. As a boy, I remember them very well. And some of them did break away and went and bought other lands at other places and moved their whole group out and sold out what they had in here. I don't think that any cooperative movements as such, you were trying not only to introduce a cooperative movement, but to say, you can force everybody to be cooperative. I don't believe, in one place, I don't believe there's anything that's ever stood up for any length of time on a basis of that kind. It couldn't over in Russia, for example, if it didn't have the might of the Communist Party behind it. They couldn't have done the Communistic work they had there, but when they had the whole of Russia and were ironing out the maxims as laid down by Marx and then Lenin and Trotsky, they could do it because they had the whole nation in there, and they had all of the money and all of the power and could make all of the laws. And they could hold it together that way.

BT: Do you remember a Mr. Butterfield?

WDM: Yes,I remember Butterfield.

BT: What role did he play?

WDM: I don't know. As I remember, Now, I don't know that he is the one that had the little hotel or whether he wasn't. Now, it seems to me he wasn't. NOw, have you talked to somebody else about it?

BT: Dan Graves mentioned that he had at one point passed out a yellow brochure, a booklet arguing with the Commongood Society.

WDM: Well, he was one of the leftists in there. I remember the name very well, but I can't, he had no children as I remember, and therefore I wouldn't have known him very well. Of course, I would have known the younger men of the Graves, now he is younger than I am, and his father and mother came here. And h and his sister, I think they went to the, didn't go to the college preparatory school that we had, at that time he would have been too young to have gone to college. He moved here because he liked the cooperative movement.

(693)

WDM: But that's one of the things that I was explaining to you, there was a fellow b the name of Hawk that attempted to take over the Commongood Society, too. and Butterfield may have been in another one of these groups, or he may have been in Hawk's group, I'm not certain of that. Several of those groups moved out and thought that they could get some land and do the thing much better themselves. And Hawk did move, he died just a few years ago, and he must have been a very old man at that time.

BT: Mr. Graves, Dan Graves also mentioned that the college burned down, and he suggested thathe suspected for some reason, arson.

WDM: No, that, he's talking about the building here. No, that building was the Chatauqua building, that's where the meetings were all held as I said, and the boys had their dormitory on the second floor, and the class rooms and the meeting hall were all on the first floor, and things of that kind. No, that wasn't arson at all. There was one old man that used to come up to the Commongood Society then and he was waiting around outside and had a, he smoked a pipe and all of the buildings were et up on blocks in those days because of the drainage, they couldn't set down low on the ground, this house is built that way, too. And he knocked out his pipe as he was going in, and it was a dry time of year, and it got loose, and that's the best way that I cana remember. The building burned down. that was the assembly building for the Chatauqua group. I don't think that there was any arson in connection with that, and there wasn't any, it never went that far, that people did such a thing as arson. They might disagree, but it wouldn't go that far.

END OF SIDE ONE (720)

WDM: The town hall idea, which became the Commongood Society, was started so they'd have a basis for getting work down in forming a town and administerng the town, that was the waya it started. Now, as it went out, the

main thing that it had was the cooperative store, and as I say, I'm not certain how the cooperative store died, except that it did during the time of te 1st WW and because too many people were charging too much and cooperatively the thing couldn't run, so it had to be taken over by individuals and run as a regular store would be run. Cause you couldn't eat Commongood Scrip. Then it, that did not say that the land belonging to the Commongood Society could be given away. MOst of the land that belonged to the Commongood Society finally in the end of it, had been sold to people who run the Commongood Society. And then came down the fact that the only thing they owned then was one small subdivision which somebody bought out. And then they owned what was the roads, which belonged to them, the streets belonged to them, because they had to be deeded to them because they were keeping them uP and maintaining them and doing that. so, the first movement, as I understand it, and I was away until 41 and some of these things happened before I got back, was to deed the roads to the county, so that the county would come down and maintain it. At that time we had a railroad through here, and we had some county roads down in there. Well, if the county was going to maintain them,they were only going to maintain them if they owned them, so the Commongood Society deeded the roads, the streets and all of the land as laid off for, in your Platts, see, every time you Platted, you had to give roads too, so everybody could get in. I mean, land had to be dedicated. And so thoe dedications from the Commongood Society Passed over to Hillsborough County. And then that left only the land which lay between, the Commongood Park land was the only things that was left there that belonged to the Commongood Society as such. This was nothing but marshland where you see those houses over there. And the Commongood Society got together and worked with Mr. Dickman on it. He bought a dredge. And they made a deal with him, whereby if would go ahead and make a navigable waterway up here, then he could have all of the land, they would deed him all of the land that he made by this dredging operation. So he bought this dredge and he

spent something like 35000 dollars dredging it from up here at this basiin all the way on down to the river, so that a boat of 4 ft draft could come on up here. And in exchange for that, he got probably land that when he subdivided it, might have been worth more than the $35000 at the going rate at that time. but this was not a coopertaive thing. this was something that was done on a basis of, you let me have this land, and I'll do this, and this will make the town better, which it has. And then you still had some land left which was right between the road out here which belongs to the county now, dedicated and kept up by the county. But on the other side of it is Parkland running up to the water. Now, that does not hold over here. Those people have reparian rights, see, they can go all the way to the water because Dickman had been given that land for doing this particular work, and therefore he could sell waterfront property. If I were to sell this, I could not sell this as waterfront property. I have a lot behind that does go down to the water, so that is waterfront property, but along here, I don't. So, that's who was going to keep up the Park if we discontinued the Commongood Society completely. So it was decided by the board of directors and all of thte people that wanted to come in to the Commongood Society that owned land in here, wee actual members, that we would deed the Parkland then to the county. And I'm having difficulty with the county on that right now. I have, you see that pile of shell out there? I bought the shell and put it in, but there were two problems out there that were going down because people run by here too fast in their motorboats and underwash the bank. And I tried to get the county to come in and do something about this. I said, it's your land, it's not mine, I can't sell it, but I don't want those trees going down in the water and becoming a menace to navigation,and I'd like to keep them if it's possible to do. I had them work for several months on this particular thing. the county commissioners said, well, this isn't in mine, it's in Parks and something else, and they said, no, it doesn't belong to us, so I have to go and see the marine end of the county,

and, No, this doesn't belong to us, we can't do it this way, finally got back over to the county again. Well, the best I was able to do was to get them to riff-raff along the front there so that the water wouldn't wash in underneath that any further. And then, to keep those trees from going down, I bought some shell and put in behind that riff-raff. And they have not pulled all of those boats in, that come around the inlet. There isn't any continuous road going all the way around the inlet, though was originally platted that way, because this stops right here, and then picksup again on the other side and goes on around a portion of that, and then it travels on, and unless you hit some marshland, it runs pretty all the wayalong the inlet as such. And yet all of the place that was owned by Dickman was on the north side of the inlet. There are a couple of subdivisions even farther down that he put in on the south side also. (167)

BT: Were any of the first agricultural efforts at canning and packaging cooperative or were they purely capitalistic?

WDM: No, the first packing houses that we had in here were cooperative, and that was because the federal government had come in and put in money for cooperatives in those days, much as they would build housing, you know. This was not a large farming community until about 1938 or '39 and in the '40's. Because Dickman stayed here, and I didn't stay here, nor did any of my family after my father died, except the sister that married and came back down here. My mother was here. But Paual Dickman had gotten into the real estate business during the first boom, back in '17 and '18, and he saw how the land ws developing, and anybody that owned any land that was along the water would have himself a bonanza if anything started, if another boom started up. And so he bought all of the land that he could that was up for taxes and things of this kind, and he accumulated quite a lot of land. but times were rough and everybody that was farming in here was farming, just like a sharecropper more or less at 8 or 10 acres, and they would have a mule and hand machinery and

atraP a naPsack on your back and this tyPe of thin9. Well, that meant that each one of them were only able to 9et, say, to Plant and cultivate, maybe uP to 10 acres of 9round. Well, we weren't bi9 enou9h to form a cooPerative of our own at that time, and so these smaller farmers went down to Palmetto and they shiPPed the tomatoes down there. They would take them down there,and they belon9ed to that cooPerative down there. And they had some 9ood tomato years. As a conse9uence, that cooPerative 9ot shaky down there,and Dickman voted out at once, and the farmers had bou9ht some stock in the cooPerative, if the cooPerative made money, why, you 9ot shares of stock in it, you didn't 9et cash. And the 9rouP of farmers uP here then had a considerable amount of stock in that Palmetto, Manatee County cooPerative, sos they said, well, now, you have some extra machinery down here and an extra Packin9 house, and we want to buy that Packin9 house and machinery with our shares of stock, and so a cooPerative movement was started uP here, and that was the Ruskin Ve9etable CooPerative, and it ran for about ten years. But a9ain, you had some schisms, as you do in most cooPeratives, a man, there has to be some bi9 men that have more or less bi9 ideas, and Puttin9 in their shares of stock in it, and Puttin9 in their efforts and their mana9ement and their involvement in it. And then you have your smaller fellas, and they band to9ether and shake this bi9 fella and 9et that much, us should have more than this, and there's this comin9 uP. Dickman and my brother and I owned the Ruskin Ve9etable Distributors and did the sellin9 for the cooPerative, and then they resented some of use who were farmin9 were 9ettin9 money for sellin9 as well as any shares we mi9ht have in the cooPerative movement of the Packin9 house. So that was dissolved, and the Ruskin Ve9etable CooPerative went out of business in about 1952 or 3. It was made the Ruskin Ve9etable CorPoration, where some of the farmers took this over and then bou9ht out the rest of them. so that had been the end of the cooPerative movement here. (259)

END OF INTERVIEW