

Troubled Paradise

Melbourne Village, Florida

By

Georgiana Greene Kjerulff



Kellersberger Fund of the
South Brevard Historical Society, Inc.

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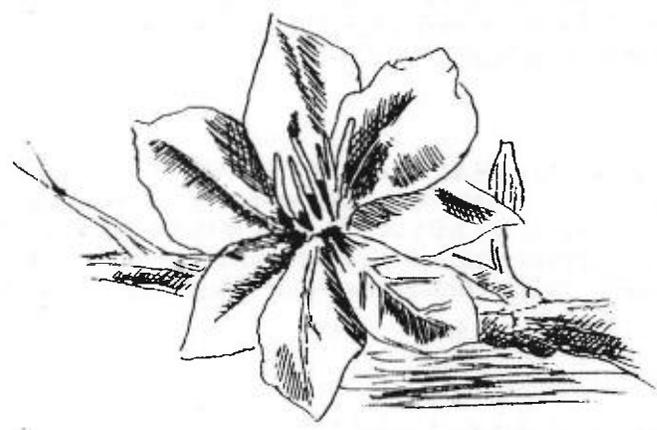
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**TROUBLED PARADISE -
MELBOURNE VILLAGE, FLORIDA
by
GEORGIANA GREENE KJERULFF**

Artwork by Jon Schultz



Kellersberger Fund of the
South Brevard Historical Society, Inc.
Melbourne, Florida, USA



TROUBLED PARADISE - MELBOURNE VILLAGE, FLORIDA
VOLUME NUMBER XIII IN THE LOCAL HISTORY SERIES OF THE KELLERSBERGER FUND OF THE
SOUTH BREVARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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FOREWARD

One morning in the summer of 1965, at my home in Melbourne Village, I looked out of the window and saw Dr. Elizabeth Nutting pedalling her bicycle up my driveway. She was dressed in a simple blouse and shorts and looked tanned and fit. Elizabeth was over 80 at the time, still lively as a cricket.

"Whoo-hoo Georgia, I have a proposition for you," she called. "You can make lots of money." Elizabeth always had a scheme to make lots of money, but as far as I can remember, no one ever did. This morning Elizabeth wanted me to start work on the history of Melbourne Village. Unfortunately, local histories are a labor of love; no one ever makes any money. Dr. Nutting and Virginia Wood offered to make their personal records available. Melbourne Village and the American Homesteading Foundation are a unique social experiment and I welcomed the opportunity to gather the material while primary sources were still available.

I am not a homesteader or a Georgist. Dr. Nutting actively recruited my family and myself to join the American Homesteading Foundation. We came to Melbourne in 1959 when my husband, Lauritz, an electronics engineer, was employed by a firm then known as Radiation. I met Elizabeth and Virginia at an American Association of University Women meeting. Elizabeth thought that with a family of five children we needed lots of space and the Village needed children. As the prime real estate salesman for AHF, she also knew that settlers had to have enough money to seek private mortgage financing.

After months of searching, Elizabeth found a house situated on nearly three acres. The property had a house, a guest house, a pump house and a persimmon orchard. The house had been constructed in the usual Village manner, an original self-built one room with additions, and had recently been remodeled. The pump house provided water from a sulphur well. The water

had to be aerated to partially remove the sulphur before use.

When we moved to the Village, the roads were rolled sand. The nearby ranchers pastured their cattle close by, and cattle and horses sometimes roamed the property. We were plagued by forest fires in the spring and mosquitoes, bugs, snakes and small wild life all the year. Birds hooted and whistled through the night; in the spring and summer they made such a pre-dawn racket that they woke us up. There were so many social and cultural activities that the Villagers rarely left the Village, so they became known as clannish.

I am a journalist and I began to write a column of Village news, and soon was employed by the Melbourne Daily Times. Over the years, I covered a wide variety of assignments. I was also active in Village life, serving on many committees and later on the Town Commission.

In the 1970's there was an abrupt slump in electronics, and my family returned to California, vowing to come back to the Village to retire. Because I returned to Melbourne Village every year and maintained my contacts, I was able to make tapes of discussions with many of the Villagers. Through courses at a number of colleges, I studied social anthropology, the anthropology of cities.

The Village has gone through predictable cycles, and today there is a revival of interest in home industries, crafts and the kind of social activities associated with Village life.

The Town of Melbourne Village and the American Homesteading Foundation function in their own spheres. This book is a study of the American Homesteading Foundation experiment over the years when the AHF was the sole governing body.

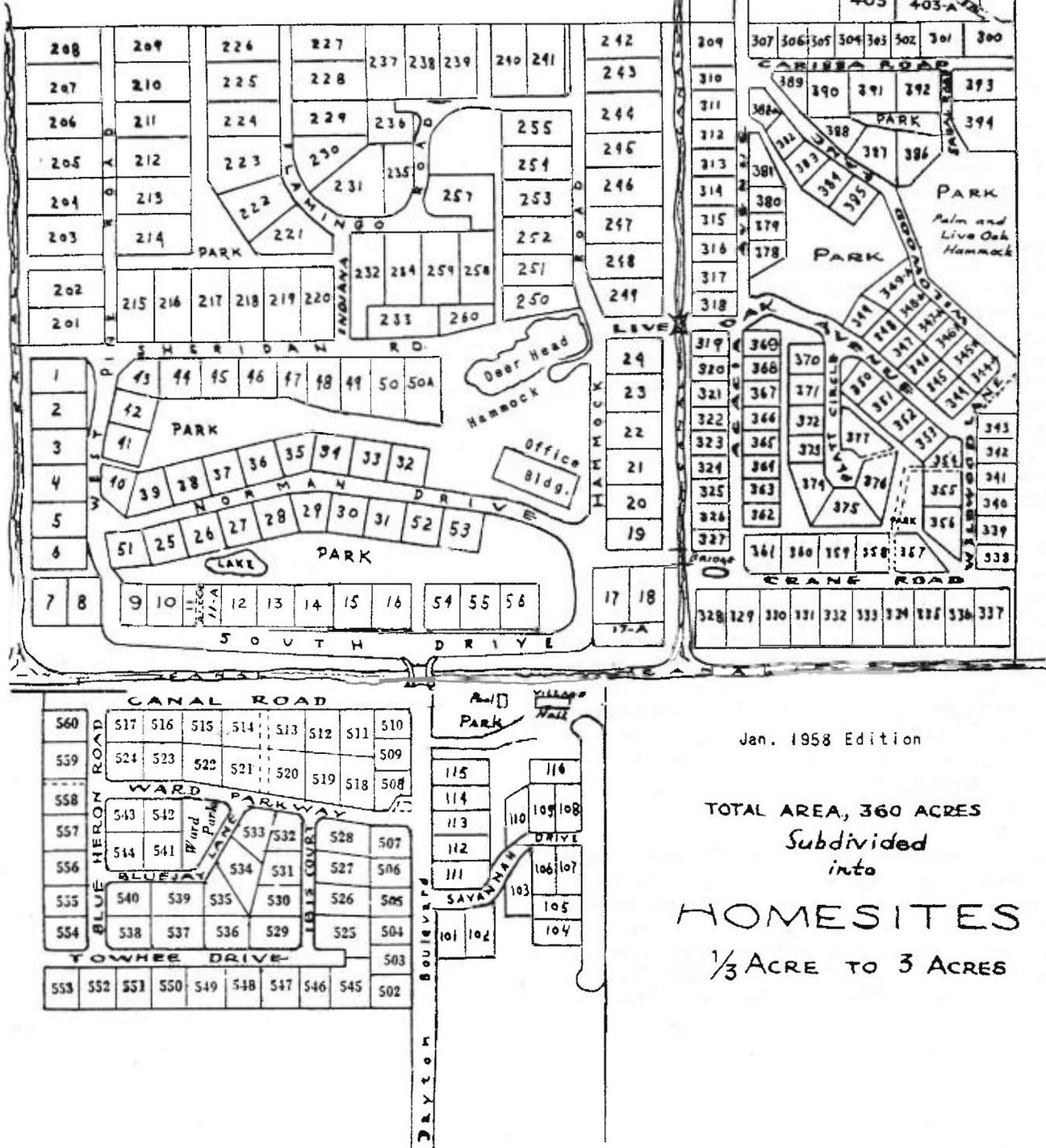
Georgiana Greene Kjerulff

MELBOURNE VILLAGE

Founded 1946 by

AMERICAN HOMESTEADING FOUNDATION
A Non-Profit Membership Corporation

MELBOURNE, FLORIDA
 R.R. #1, Box 747



Jan. 1958 Edition

TOTAL AREA, 360 ACRES
 Subdivided
 into

HOMESITES
 $\frac{1}{3}$ ACRE TO 3 ACRES

TROUBLED PARADISE - MELBOURNE VILLAGE, FLORIDA

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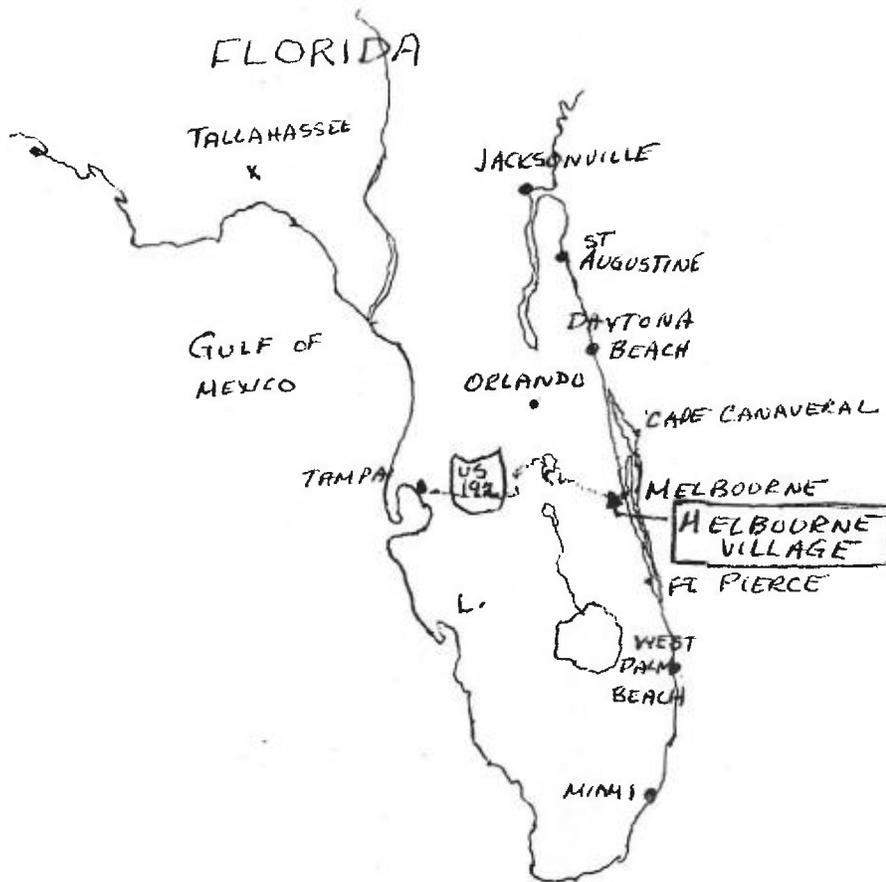


MELBOURNE VILLAGE

"The purposes of the said community are to establish homesteading groups to provide therewith opportunities for those to study the principles and practices and further possibilities of modern homesteading."

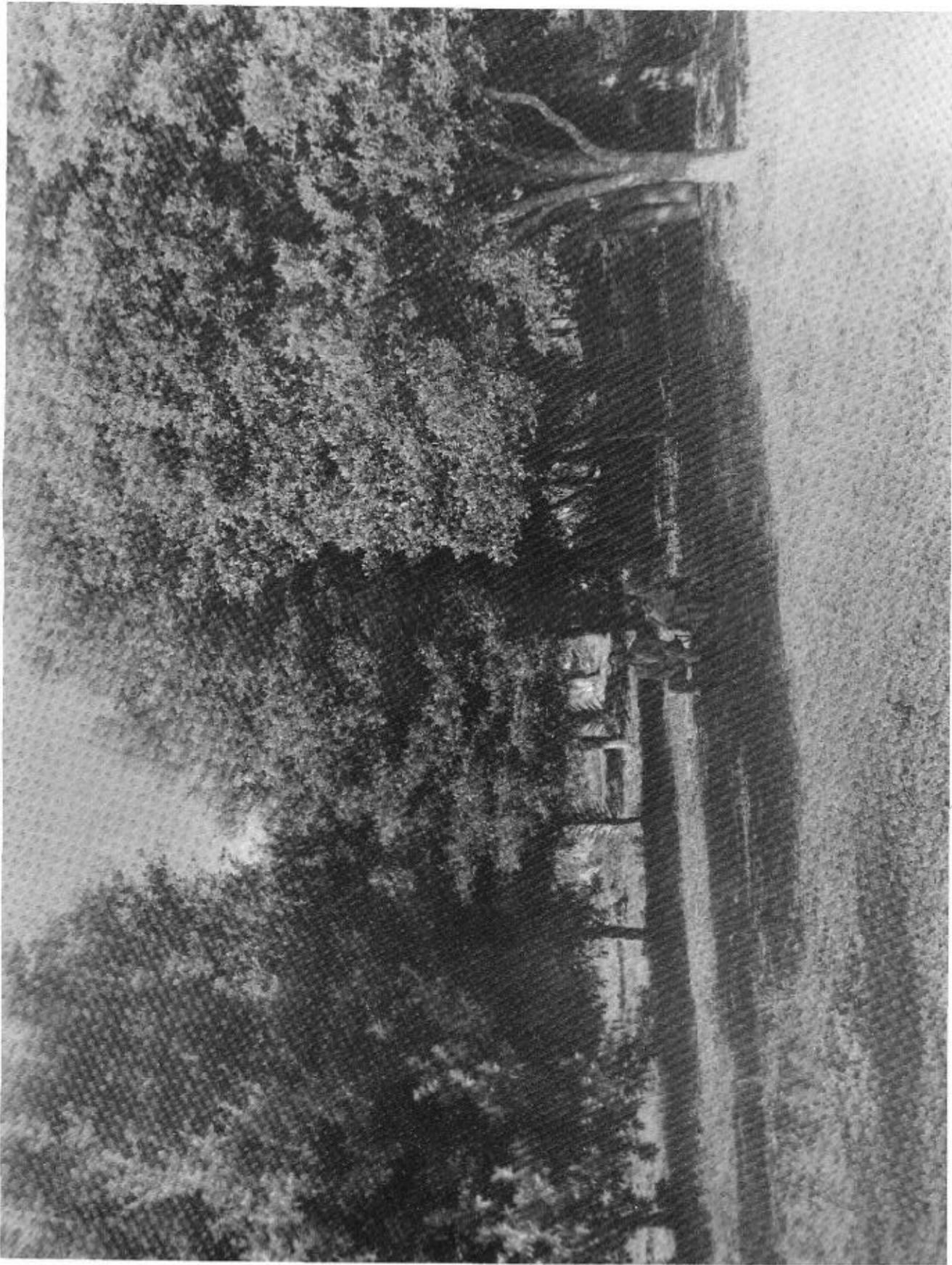
Articles of Incorporation of Melbourne Village
May 24, 1946

Records of Incorporation, State of Ohio
Vol. 508 p. 269



B.P. 87

Melbourne Village was incorporated under the laws of the State of Ohio and sponsored by the American Homesteading Foundation.



Melbourne Village as the first settlers saw it...Louis and Flora Jessaph

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN OF THE DREAM

The green and golden state of Florida has welcomed many experimental communities founded for utopian, religious, or ideological purposes but few of these communities lasted more than ten years. Melbourne Village, an intentional community sponsored by the American Homesteading Foundation, can take pride in the fact that it is still a viable organization after more than 41 years.

Melbourne Village in Brevard County, Florida, was founded as an intentional education-centered community dedicated to the possibilities of modern homesteading. The community was designed to accommodate "productive homesteads" - family units with the capability of being self-sustaining in the event that economic conditions made necessary a homestead that could combine both home and industry.

Today Melbourne Village has grown from a small group of isolated homes to a town with a population of over 1,117. The community is no longer isolated, although it is rural in character. It is surrounded by light industry, subdivisions, shopping malls and traffic on all sides. It still permits only two entrances and has sealed off all stub-end roads.

The roots of this community can be traced back to Dayton, Ohio, where two Depression-born social experiments of the 1930's, "The Dayton Plan" and "Subsistence Homesteading," functioned from 1933 until the rise of the National Recovery Act.

THE DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio, in the pre-Depression 1920's was a prosperous city with a social conscience. The "Community Chest" plan that combines charities was born there.

Dayton felt the effects of the great Depression, heralded by the 1929 stock market crash, earlier than many cities due to the fact that it was an industrialized city dominated by a few large industries. When the major plants closed, the service industries followed. Thousands were unemployed; many were destitute and considered paupers. A segment of the unemployed population lived in a ramshackle collection of frame and cardboard huts covered with tin cans, dubbed "Tin-Town."

At the forefront of organizations seeking to provide social, moral and religious uplift was the Dayton YMCA-YWCA. It employed two young women in its "Character Building Division," Elizabeth Nutting who held a doctorate in Religious Education, and her assistant, Margaret Hutchinson, who was an instructor of Religious Education in the Dayton public schools.

At the time, Mrs. George Wood (Virginia) was president of the "Y", a volunteer post. The three women were drawn together by efforts of the combined charities to help the poor during the early Depression days. Dayton's social workers took a unique approach to the plight of the poor. Dr. Elizabeth Nutting, who also served as the secretary of the Dayton Council of Social Agencies, devised a self-help plan that combined self-employment and barter to demonstrate to the unemployed how, through organization, they could sustain themselves. The Plan was named "The Dayton Association of Co-operative Production Units," popularly known as "The Dayton Plan." Often Dr. Nutting and Margaret Hutchinson appeared before groups carrying a can of fat and a cake of soap to illustrate that people could collect fat, make soap and trade the soap for what they needed. The purpose of the demonstration was to prove that even if they thought they had nothing, with some ingenuity they could produce something to trade. It was Elizabeth's brain-child that surplus, wasted or abandoned materials could be used and bartered. Her next step was to organize the self-help effort by forming groups. The stricken areas were divided into eight (later twelve) units. Each unit produced something everyone needed and turned the goods in to the city relief store where the articles were redistributed to other work units.

They started by securing an unused factory, borrowing commercial sewing machines, scrounging surplus fabric and manufacturing work clothes. The women made simple work shirts and overalls. Flour sacking from a closed flour mill was cut and stitched into underwear. Felting from a closed tire factory was carded and made into comforters and overcoats.

A section of unused land was turned into garden plots where families were encouraged to grow their own fresh vegetables. They raised rabbits for meat and goats for milk.

The men worked in the parks, cleared debris and sawed wood to distribute as fire wood. A bakery was opened and a shoe factory was operated. As the plan expanded, the workers were paid in chits that enabled them to buy other work-unit products in the relief store. As a morale-building activity, square dances were held. Dance teachers who taught children to dance were able to earn work chits.

The program ran into trouble, however, when the units were encouraged to produce better products and sell them in the open market. The broom factory is one example. When everyone in the barter program had a broom, the surplus brooms were offered for sale, but the merchants objected. The surplus tire-felting coats are another example. The coats were a drab grey. When the units asked for dye to make the coats more attractive merchants again objected.

The units were not entirely self-supporting, but they did offer a cheaper way of helping the poor. The leaders of the units believed that the morale of the unemployed was improved when they were working instead of receiving a handout. Dr. Nutting, who always believed in the magic of words, changed the name "Tin-Town" to "Opportunity Acres."

The Dayton Plan involved only 700 families, all at the bottom of the economic scale. Many of these families were Negro, with just a sprinkling of white units. The publicity about the units was mostly favorable but there were a few cat calls and hisses. Some critics even used the words "red menace," an indication of the real fear of group cooperative political action during the 1930's.

RALPH BORSODI'S PRODUCTIVE HOMESTEADS

Dr. Nutting wanted to expand the work-and-barter plan to the middle class unemployed. Her assistant, Margaret Hutchinson, heard of a popular economic writer, Ralph Borsodi, whose ideas might harmonize with the Dayton Plan. Margaret suggested that Dr. Nutting read *FLIGHT FROM THE CITY* and *THE UGLY CIVILIZATION*, both written by advertising consultant and now fledgling economist Borsodi.

Borsodi's scheme envisioned a productive homestead where the workers could produce much of the food they needed for their families and still find time to commute to work. The plan had been tested by the Borsodi family when it moved from New York City to Suffern, New York, to live on a small farm while advertising writer Ralph Borsodi commuted to the city by train.

His wife, Myrtle Borsodi, was a home economist. According to Helen Smith, a resident of Melbourne Village, Myrtle Mae Borsodi tested electric kitchen equipment for one of the power companies. At home, she grew vegetables and canned the surplus, using the most modern equipment, raised chickens, kept a sheep and a cow. She sheared the sheep, carded and spun the wool and then wove it on a loom. She kept careful cost

records of her activities. She also wrote articles for the "Home Economist," "The Commonwealth and the American Home" on the productive home she had created.

Ralph Borsodi's book *FLIGHT FROM THE CITY* was based on Myrtle Mae's careful cost accounting. With a little embroidery of words and a dash of economic theory, Borsodi gave birth to the productive homestead idea.

Ralph Borsodi began his writing career with a book, *DOUBLE ENTRY BOOKKEEPING*, followed by *THE DISTRIBUTION AGE*, a condemnation of the influence of advertising. In 1929 he published *THE UGLY CIVILIZATION* and in 1933, *FLIGHT FROM THE CITY*.

Ralph Borsodi was not the only author to advocate a return to the land, but Borsodi's solution of combining city workplace and the country life was attractive. He was also a firm believer in the theories of Henry George, a 19th century economist who advocated a single tax as a solution to the expanding powers of wealthy conglomerates. Through his book *PROGRESS AND POVERTY*, George's ideas became a powerful doctrine.

Using it, Borsodi developed a plan to get out from under the thumb of big business. This was heady stuff at a time when many believed that the errors of capitalism and big business had brought the economy to a halt.

By the time that Margaret Hutchinson went to one of his conferences in New York, Ralph Borsodi, who had an uncanny talent for pyramiding success, had expanded his "Productive Homestead" into a successful book, successful seminars and a successful school that taught people how to create a productive home. When Margaret returned from the seminar, she was an enthusiastic follower.

Dr. Elizabeth Nutting thought that Borsodi's productive homestead solution to the middle class dilemma might be applicable to the plight of the middle-class poor in Dayton. As a result, they invited Ralph Borsodi to Dayton, Ohio.

At the same time that Borsodi was about to introduce the idea of a productive homestead to the social workers of Dayton, Ohio, critics of his ideas were publishing caustic articles claiming that this type of home required a considerable outlay on household "machines" before any savings could be realized. Home economists ran parallel time, utility and price studies and they were highly critical of the amount of time Borsodi allotted to each task.

Myrtle Mae Borsodi retorted that women should return to their true tasks, housekeeping. She wrote that there were many inept homemakers who had never developed the housekeeping skills they needed. According to the Borsodis, personal problems and attitudes were as important to the ideal home and the ideal community as was an efficient homemaker.

Borsodi wrestled with the problem of the productive home and his Decentralist theories until 1945 when he finally worked out a suitable relationship. In an article published in "The Interpreter," he wrote "Science and industry are vast new powers beckoning man back towards the land. Here on the land lies the continued exploitation of large cities with eventual rule by dictators and human slavery as the result. Down the other path lies individual freedom and family security achieved through decentralization of America's economy and the world's economy."

Margaret Hutchinson's enthusiastic approval of Borsodi's ideas paved the way for a warm welcome when he arrived in Dayton in January 1933. It was Dr. Nutting's belief that if a single productive homestead could help one family, a community of homesteads could help the struggling middle class. These two social workers proposed to set up a demonstration homestead and a demonstration community to show the way. Borsodi and Nutting believed that by establishing successful productive communities they could encourage others to do the same. While Dr. Nutting worked on the problems of establishing one community, Ralph Borsodi envisioned a new type of city-country complex. A ring of homesteading communities would encircle the core city to provide industrial jobs, culture and shopping areas. The suburbs would encircle the city, and exurbia, the homesteading communities, would provide the outer circle in the complex.

THE BEGINNING OF LIBERTY ACRES

Borsodi's plan for a self-sustaining exurban community drew favorable attention. Borsodi referred to his scheme as "subsistence homesteading." The plan settled a family on a plot of land where it could grow most of its food and also have a part-time paid job for cash income.

The first homestead unit, sponsored by the Dayton Council of Social Agencies, began in the spring of 1933. A 160-acre farm outside of Dayton was purchased for \$8,000. The farm was divided into 35 three-acre plots, 55 acres were reserved for community pasture, woodlot, commons and public roads.

One of the features of the subsistence unit plan which became relevant to Melbourne Village is the system of land tenure. The land tenure plan was adapted from Henry George's theories on land ownership. It became one of the most controversial features in the Dayton experiment.

Ralph Borsodi explained land tenure in "Survey Graphic," January 1934: "The title to the land of the original farm buildings used for community purpose is vested in the homestead unit as a whole. Separate plots have been leased to each homesteader on annual terms fixed by the unit in accordance to the relative desirability of each plot. Leases are automatically renewed each year; there are provisions for terminating them at any time, if terminated by the homestead unit,

as they may be for violations of provisions of the lease; the buildings and improvements of the plot may be sold by the homesteader or disposed of if he fails to find a purchaser. The homesteader has title to all improvements upon his plot and may sell his property at any time to any one who is eligible to become a member of the unit."

At the dedication of the 160-acre tract, located four miles west of Dayton on the Dayton Liberty Road, Ralph Borsodi said that more than economic survival was involved. "Two hundred years ago at the time of the Industrial Revolution, when machines moved out of the homes, we lost the key to living. I believe the way is planned here to return the key."

Dr. Elizabeth Nutting and Margaret Hutchinson were enthusiastic and optimistic settlers in the project. They named the homesteading adventure "Liberty Acres" as the first homesteaders moved into the old Shaw farm house which served as their cold, uncomfortable headquarters.

From the beginning, it became evident that the homesteaders who arrived at the project had different ideas about the purpose of the experiment. Some supporters believed that the project would help families that had a reduced income; some thought it would help the cities reduce the burden of relief by placing families on a self-supporting farm.

Ralph Borsodi saw the community as the first of a series of homesteading communities. He shuttled between Dayton and Washington, D.C. to promote his concept of a ring of homesteading communities. He secured funding for the first community, but his goal was a federal grant to build a ring of these communities. The time was right for a plan to help the middle-class unemployed by providing land to farm and aid in building productive homes.

Borsodi presented a plan to ring Dayton with homesteading communities, including a segregated black community. A grant to explore the possibilities of this plan was obtained. Critics fumed when the grant was announced. They wrote that the one existing subsistence unit had not advanced beyond two homes.

Dr. Elizabeth Nutting later recalled the early days of the Liberty Acres project. When Harold Rugg (a New Deal economist) came to visit the homesteading unit, he was enthusiastic with the progress made. Elizabeth remembered Rugg said, "This is an experience-centered education; don't let anything keep you away from this most significant educational experiment."

Elizabeth recalled, "We had a good architect and people studied to know something about architecture as they were building their own homestead. While they farmed, they learned something about agriculture, and we had somebody there to teach it."

The experiment of having people learning to farm while they farmed and learning to build as they built

their homes irritated a reporter who also viewed the farms. He saw poorly-constructed homes and struggling fields planted by middle class people who knew nothing about building and less about farming.

The opposition to the project was led by the "Dayton Review."

The newspaper opposed Borsodi's plan for a ring of homestead communities. Editorials excoriated Borsodi's personality; reporters zeroed in on what they called his "questionable bookkeeping, capricious personal judgements" and his homesteading theories. The newspaper objected to Borsodi's Georgist single tax plan and land tenure theory and its editorials focused their wrath on Borsodi.

There was something about Borsodi's personality that made him a lightning rod for bolts of anger which foreshadowed problems that arose in Melbourne Village.

THE END OF LIBERTY ACRES

The Liberty Acres project ended January, 1935. The end was swift and not merciful. Ten flagstone houses had been constructed and much of the construction was faulty. The farm was liquidated at a fraction of its cost. The residents were given three weeks' notice to find their own homes in Dayton. It was the middle of winter, and the homesteaders had no funds for housing.

The settlers were bitter; they felt that if they had invested their own money in the project, they could have made it work. They believed that they had surrendered control of their lives when they accepted money from the government. The members vowed that if ever they had the chance again, they would repeat the experiment but without federal funds.

There were lessons they could have learned but did not. Within six months of the beginning of the project, a second group had challenged the leadership. They objected to Borsodi, criticized his bookkeeping, and disliked his Georgist land tenure scheme. The farm was plagued by fires and arson was suspected. This pointed to inadequacies in the water supply which was the official reason for the abrupt closing of the farm.

Liberty Acres was purchased by the Ohio Rural Rehabilitation Corporation. A few members stayed until 1936 when all the paper work was completed.

Undaunted, Borsodi returned to Suffern, New York, determined to demonstrate that such a project could succeed.

In a 1973 interview Dr. Nutting expressed to the author the belief that the experiment ended due to the opposition of financial groups who feared that the people were being taught to live independent lives. "If the people learned that they did not have to depend on

their wages, but could live in their productive houses, they could hold out for better wages, and they would not be as easy to manage. The belief that a worker, living in a productive home, could fare better than his city counterpart was very deep in our thinking."

WHY DID LIBERTY ACRES FAIL?

"The Dayton Review," the one newspaper that kept up a steady drumfire of criticism, centered its criticism on ineptness, false promises and Borsodi. The newspaper drew attention to the inexperience of the settlers as builders and farmers; it pointed out that the productive homestead was not all that productive. It noted that pictures of looms used in publicity had not been made at Liberty Acres. The paper leveled more criticism at Henry George and his land tenure theories than it did at productive homes. Finally, it did not like Borsodi's grand scheme for fifty communities ringing Dayton.

Ralph Borsodi actually had plans on paper, and grants promised to establish fifty communities of productive homes. If these fifty communities all reflected Georgist theories of land ownership, there was cause for the conservative capitalist alarm expressed by "The Dayton Review."

After the collapse of Liberty Acres, Elizabeth Nutting, Margaret Hutchinson, the Preston Miles family, a few stragglers, and the goats from the dairy project at the farms found a dilapidated house on the outskirts of town. New projects were open to them. The New Deal took over the task of helping the unemployed, and eventually the war effort took everyone's time. During the war Elizabeth Nutting and Margaret Hutchinson kept their goat dairy herd. Elizabeth discovered that some people had to have goat milk. She would rise at dawn and personally deliver the milk before she went to her full-time position.

BORSODI'S SCHOOL OF LIVING

Borsodi returned to his farm at "Dogwoods" in Suffern, after the failure of Liberty Acres in 1935, but the "Productive Home" was far from dead. People all over the nation wanted to learn how to create a productive home and how to set up a productive community. In 1936, Ralph Borsodi initiated "Bayard Lane" and, in a short time, had 16 self-supporting, creative homes, built without government grants, functioning in Suffern.

The center of the community was "The School of Living," designed by Borsodi to teach people how to create productive homes. Borsodi discovered that his followers wanted more than the mechanics of production. They looked to Borsodi to teach them how to live. They yearned for a simpler life, a return to the basic wholesomeness of contact with the earth. Ralph Borsodi may have been explosive, abrasive, charming, charismatic, and sometimes unrealistic, but when he pointed to his followers and told them they were the "elite-minded," the "selected leaders," they believed him.

The Charter of the Suffern School of Living reads: "Believing that the full development of each human being is of supreme value, the School of Living has as its primary purpose to assist adults in their study and use of the accumulated wisdom of mankind."

"Believing that the wisdom is best forthcoming from the universal and perpetual experience of human beings, the School of Living aims to assist adults in becoming aware of, and in defining and dealing with major problems of living, common to all people, everywhere."

Borsodi made himself Chancellor of the school he created. He had received an honorary Doctorate from St. Johns University, Annapolis, Maryland. He was a many-talented man with so many interests that he was like a fireworks display going off in all directions at once but his ultimate goal was to define the major problems of the world. He hoped that the School of Living would help adults define and deal with these major problems

The Borsodi-centered School of Living flourished from 1936 to 1940. William and Helen Newcomb of Melbourne Village attended one seminar at Suffern during Ralph Borsodi's administration, but they reported that they spent more time picking beans than attending the seminar.

Borsodi thought that his community of productive homes should be a haven for the "QUALITY-MINDED"

person who tried to develop "NORMAL LIVING" patterns within the shelter of the community. On the outside lived the "HERD MINDED" individuals who had succumbed to the wiles of "OUGHT TO" advertising.

The capitalized words are a part of Borsodi's special vocabulary as described in *DECENTRALISM: WHERE IT CAME FROM: WHERE IS IT GOING*, by Mildred Loomis, School of Living Press, York, Pennsylvania.

Borsodi's economic theories were labeled "Decentralism," and the vocabulary conveyed special meaning to his followers.

The School of Living did not seek to convert the herd-minded person, realizing that this individual would not seek out the school. If a "STUDENT OF LIVING" desired to develop into a "QUALITY-MINDED INDIVIDUAL," then the School could open the door to a new way of life.

After the Liberty Acres experience, Borsodi followers wanted to stress that the attempt to develop a productive way of life was an investment in independence and quality living. The goal was to create independent people in control of their own lives. If you were trapped in the rut of an advertising-dominated, centralized, industrial civilization, then a productive home and an active school of living could help you develop the desired independent way of life.



Dr. Ralph Borsodi
(Photo by E.T. Whitney)

CHAPTER II

TRY AGAIN - AT MELBOURNE?

Many of the people involved in the Dayton Plan and Liberty Farms kept in touch with Ralph Borsodi in Suffern. Dr. Elizabeth Nutting served several terms as Regent and Dean of the School of Living.

The intervening years of World War II kept the settlers occupied, but in 1946 they held a reunion. The dream of an intentional productive community had not died. The meeting was held late in the summer at Virginia Wood's suburban Dayton home. Virginia had remained active in volunteer work and was in close contact with both Elizabeth Nutting and Margaret Hutchinson.

Dr. Nutting hoped that the Dayton group might try once more to establish an INTENTIONAL community of productive homes. While attending the new School of Living in Suffern, she had met Dr. Norman Lennington of Melbourne, Florida.

Dr. Lennington is a shadowy figure in the cast of characters of those who selected Melbourne as the site of an intentional community. He was a Melbourne resident who headed a company called "Southern Lands". His address was 26 Prospect Street, Melbourne, Florida.

He was a Borsodi follower and a Georgist. He was a Regent of the Suffern School. Bill Newcomb of Melbourne Village remembered that Lennington was present at Georgist meetings in Chicago. Lennington was also instrumental in setting up the Police Foundation in June Park, West Melbourne. He was known to police departments in the middle west where he promoted Florida retirement schemes.

Basically, Lennington was a land promoter who used the back-to-the-land movement as his hunting ground. When a group was ready to go back to the land, he had suitable land for sale.

At a School of Living seminar, Dr. Lennington observed Dr. Nutting's enthusiasm. He suggested that she lead a group of settlers to Florida to set up an intentional community of productive homesteads. Dr. Lennington just happened to know of some beautiful land outside of Melbourne, Florida. It was fertile land,

suitable for bountiful home gardens, located in the "Health Belt" of Florida. Under the lovely, moss-draped land was an artesian lake. According to Lennington, this prehistoric water would never run dry.

Dr. Lennington was invited to speak to the reunion of former Liberty Acres settlers and Dayton Plan workers, all "country-minded people" who were nostalgic for their days of social experiment. (Country-minded is a Borsodi term that means belief in the independence and the advantages of country living with its closeness to the soil).

Dr. Elizabeth Nutting was eager to try again to establish a country community of productive homes. Margaret Hutchinson was willing to go along with Elizabeth. Virginia Wood was at a point in her life when she could be open to the possibilities of homesteading. Preston and Ashley Miles, former settlers in the Depression homesteading experiment, thought that 1946 was a good year to try again.

When the prospective settlers met Dr. Lennington, they had not seriously discussed a possible site, but Lennington was persuasive. He painted glowing word pictures of the possibilities of the Melbourne site.

Why Melbourne? It did not meet the requirements for a country community near a city that would offer employment opportunities, but never underestimate the power of persuasion of a Florida land salesman with prospects in sight!

Elizabeth Nutting, Virginia Wood, and Preston and Ashley Miles decided to drive to Melbourne, Florida, to meet Dr. Lennington and view the land.

The prospects stayed at the Melbourne Hotel in Melbourne where Dr. Lennington and his lawyer, Locke Davidson, met them. They drove a few miles west to a point beyond Minton's Corners, south west of the Police Foundation, to the very edge of the St. John's Valley where they were encouraged to get out and walk around. In spite of the super salesmanship of Dr. Lennington, they were disappointed with the site presented. The land was low and the trees were few and

scattered. They returned to the hotel, hot, dusty, and discouraged.

There must have been some frantic consultations around Melbourne that evening, because in the morning Dr. Lennington phoned to say that he had located higher land. Dr. Lennington and lawyer Elton Hall drove the group west on Kissimmee Highway (U.S. 192), until they reached a gate, then north on a rutted road to a primitive bridge. They walked down a cattle trail, through a woodland of pines and palms, until they reached a natural cathedral, the hammock now known as "Deer Head Hammock." Virginia and Elizabeth looked at each other and whispered, "This is it!"

Dr. Lennington offered them the land at \$75 an acre and an option on the land to the north. They decided to accept the offer at the price quoted; later they discovered that the going rate for the land was \$30 an acre. (Dr. Lennington cannily took an option on the land east of Melbourne Village. After Melbourne Village was developed, he sold his land as a community to be called "Melbourne Gardens," and he received \$385 an acre for the raw land).

The prospective settlers returned to Dayton, Ohio. There was much work to be done before a new community could be established.

PLANS FOR AHF AND MELBOURNE VILLAGE

Elizabeth Nutting, Virginia Wood, and Margaret Hutchinson are called "the founding mothers" of Melbourne Village, but there were many other willing workers. Preston and Ashley Miles and Gertrude Martin were outstanding.

The town planners wished to create the best possible small community. Ralph Borsodi suggested that they consult a personal friend of his, Dr. Arthur Morgan of Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Dr. Morgan was a unique personality. He is remembered as an engineer, although he did not have a degree in engineering. He designed the system of dams that protect the Miami Valley of Ohio from flooding. He was the first head of the Tennessee Valley Authority. When he left TVA, he joined Antioch University. The University granted him an honorary doctorate and then elected him President.

Dr. Arthur Morgan was interested in establishing small communities. He set up an organization called Community Service, Inc., to help such communities. Morgan advised the members of the American Homesteading Foundation and introduced them to city landscape planners Louise and Richard Odiorne.

Dr. Arthur Morgan continued his interest in Melbourne Village, but his active role in its affairs consisted of his initial advice on how to plan and govern a small community.

Richard and Louise Odiorne were willing to barter their services for membership and land. Melbourne Village was now on the drawing board.

The American Homesteading Foundation was incorporated as an Ohio corporation in May, 1946. Enough memberships had been sold to finance the first land purchases. Melbourne Village was designed utilizing pasture lands, woods and fields once owned by the Platt family. Growth in the Melbourne area was so slow then that the corporation could afford to wait and purchase land section by section until it reached its planned limits.

As an Ohio Corporation, the AHF sold land under the laws and jurisdiction of the state of Ohio.

On July 25, 1946, the organizational meeting of the American Homesteading Foundation was held at Virginia Wood's home in Dayton, Ohio. Present at this meeting were Virginia Wood, Dr. Elizabeth Nutting, Dr. Norman Lennington, his secretary, Mrs. Miriam Olds, Margaret Hutchinson, Gertrude Martin, Louise and Richard Odiorne, Barton Meyers, Preston Miles, Ashley Miles, Shirley Miles, and E.H. Kilbourne.

Dr. Lennington turned over the deed for the first section, accepting a down payment of \$2,000. He was then assigned the task of preparing reports for the by-laws, ground rules, and deed restrictions and ideas for the promotion of land sales. This assignment was the last tie to Dr. Lennington, for the AHF members decided that Lennington did not truly understand the purpose of the AHF. His by-laws and sales promotion schemes were not used.

Preston "Pret" Miles, a dedicated Georgist, wanted to organize the community along the lines of a single tax enclave. The AHF did not believe that enough people would buy land in a Georgist community and asked Preston Miles to modify his proposal. The Henry George land tenure theories had been a controversial issue in the Dayton subsistence housing experiment.

The question of financial support for the settlers was discussed at the meeting. They were searching for a community industry that would develop a cash income. According to Virginia Wood, "There were some people with cash who were ready to do a little investing and some people who were ready to work. The question was how to get the two groups together." An "Industrial Development Committee" was appointed to work on this problem.

The planners discussed the type of people they wished to attract as settlers. This led to a review of the Dayton subsistence housing experiment difficulties with land tenure. The Georgist land tenure theory proposed that on resale, the private owner would not get the entire price of the sale of the land, but that some of the money would accrue to the community as a new membership fee known as the "increased increment." Georgist theory holds that this increment was produced by the WORK OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, therefore

one person should not benefit from the work of everyone in the community at resale. The "increased increment" is meant to be an anti-speculation provision.

The first seven members to buy lots were made Trustees in the AHF. The Trustees were assigned the task of writing the Charter.

It was decided that the desired goals for the homes to be constructed were durability, suitability and attractiveness, rather than monetary (or speculation) value.

TROUBLES ARISE

The AHF was off to a good start, but trouble was just ahead. Since AHF was an Ohio corporation, the Ohio Securities Commission had to investigate the corporation and the land it proposed to sell before sales could proceed in Ohio. It was the task of the Securities Commission to protect Ohio residents from unscrupulous real estate promoters. A representative inspected the proposed site of Melbourne Village and decided too few people would buy land in that open area north of Crane Creek Canal so it demanded that securities amounting to the value of 14 memberships be placed in escrow.

Virginia Wood decided to put up her own stocks and bonds to cover this demand. Seven lots had already been sold and, with the interest expressed in the proposed community, she felt that seven more would be sold quickly.

In September, 1946, community planner Louise Odiorne drove to Melbourne to design the community. She studied aerial maps in order to create the layout. The planners were headquartered at the Melbourne Hotel. Dr. Lennington joined the group to help with local introductions. The planners had decided to call the proposed town Melbourne Village because they felt that they were a part of Melbourne.

Dr. Lennington brought two Borsodi followers with him, Helen and William Newcomb. The Newcombs did not join the group at this time. They were on their way north to accept a job proposal that later fell through. The Newcombs returned and became members, bartering promotion services for membership and land. Bill Newcomb was an ardent Georgist. He joined forces with Preston Miles and their combined influence set Village policies. Newcomb suggested that all the advertising for the AHF be limited to "Organic Gardening" magazine, and the monthly, two inch, one-column ad brought a number of interesting settlers.

At the same time that Melbourne Village was being planned, United States Naval Air Station, Banana River, was being phased out after World War II. The settlers purchased two 16 x 16 cabins from Navy surplus and had them moved to the site north of Crane Creek. Later four more buildings were purchased. One became the Village Hall.

ACTION

Virginia Wood contracted for the first house built in Melbourne Village. She insisted that the house be built north of Crane Creek, although the contractor protested her choice. The Melbourne Chamber of Commerce secretary, Sara Knight, approved of the north of Crane Creek site because she felt that this move would open the land to the north and west of Melbourne for development.

A Melbourne resident, Norman Lund, Sr., accepted the paid position of town supervisor. Norman Lund was a good liaison between the town and the Village, although he often was puzzled by the Villagers. At one time, he was supervising the building of Hammock Road and he ordered that a huge pine be cut. Elizabeth Nutting insisted that the tree be spared and that the road be split around the tree just as it still does today.

As soon as Hammock Road was built, over the protests of contractors and supervisors, the surplus cabins were put in place near Hammock Road in the middle of the woods.

Alice Carr, who was Louise Odiorne's aunt, joined the group. Alice was well known for her work in Greece after World War I as a sanitarian. Because she had taught the Greeks how to combat mosquitoes and yellow fever and had brought modern sanitation to Greece, she was called the "Savior of Greece."

Alice joined Elizabeth Nutting and Margaret Hutchinson who were camped out in the screened cabins. She showed them how to fashion newspapers into temporary curtains, how to cook over an open fire in a sand pit, and how to build an outdoor latrine. While the women were setting up housekeeping, the Platt's free-roaming cattle came to investigate. A huge steer poked his way through the window screens, rattled the newspaper curtains, and bawled at Alice. Both Alice and the steer were startled.

The "Melbourne Times" commented favorably on the new community and the publicity drew the attention of a local school teacher, Katherine Smith, who joined the pioneers in their wooden cabins.

The house designed for Virginia Wood set the standard for Village homes. The dwelling was designed for Florida's climate. It was angled to take advantage of the prevailing winds. Because unique clerestory windows allow the circulation of air, the house remains cool even on the warmest days. A screened porch permits indoor-outdoor living. Mrs. Wood planned her Village house as a winter retreat and maintained her Dayton residence.

Building activity in the Village caused the price of the surrounding raw land to rise. The AHF decided that it had to purchase the front acres while the land was still \$100 an acre.

There wasn't enough money in the treasury to buy the land, but Reverend Frank Breen, an AHF member, suggested that Miss Vera Snow, of Bloomington, Illinois, who was interested in intentional communities, be contacted. Miss Snow did advance the \$4,000 and Elton Hall of Melbourne agreed to sell the land. The loan was secured by the land, but it was paid off in 18 months

by budgeting 33 1/3 of all income for this purpose.

Virginia Wood suggested that the land be named Snow Acres, but the suggestion was vetoed. Later, Virginia wryly noted that this was not the only time her suggestions were turned down.



Dr. Elizabeth Nutting, one of the "founding mothers," at the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the founding of AHF.



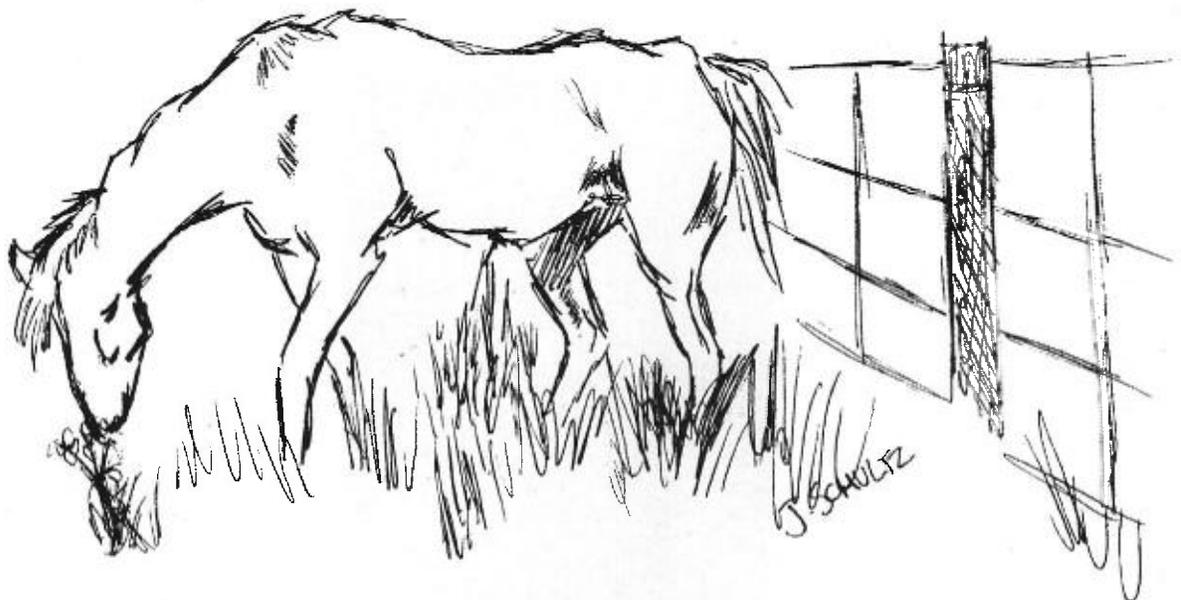
Virginia P. Wood, first of three "founding mothers."



Margaret Hutchinson, one of the three "founding mothers."



Deer Head Hammock, the cathedral in the woods, as the settlers saw it in 1947. The Hammock is the site of weddings and ceremonies and a favored site to scatter the ashes of departed Villagers.



CHAPTER III

THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING

THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING

The year of preparation, 1946-47, developed a nucleus of settlers, the proposed charter and by-laws, a site for the Village, the purchase of the first sections of land and a plan for 80 acres.

Virginia Wood stated in a 1973 interview, "The Charter is a very simple instrument, purely legal, only two or three paragraphs, giving us the power to establish homesteading and homesteading groups. Then when it came to the by-laws, that was to tell us how we were going to do these things. Pret and Ashley Miles, Gertie Martin, Liz and myself, and Hutch (Margaret Hutchinson) were the basic ones working on the by-laws."

The 1946 meeting had decided that the meetings of the total membership would be of two types: Annual Meetings and Special Meetings. One month before the Annual Meeting, the President would give the date of the meeting and announce the agenda, resolutions and legal documents to be the business of the meeting. At the Annual Meeting, three new members of the Board of Trustees would be elected for a three-year term to fill the vacancy of retiring members for a total Board of nine members. The Board of Trustees would meet to elect its own officers. A special meeting of the total membership could be called at the Annual Meeting.

The American Homesteading Foundation was ready for its first Annual Meeting. It was held at Virginia Wood's home, Oakwood, Dayton, Ohio, June 28, 1947. Mr. Louis Jesseph was elected the President of the Board of Trustees. Mr. Jesseph was an attorney who planned to move into his home in Melbourne Village in July of 1947. Dr. Elizabeth Nutting was elected Second Vice-President; she planned to move to her 16 x 16 cottage quarters in July, 1947. Mr. Richard Odiorne, husband of Louise Odiorne, the town planner, was elected Second Vice-President.

By-laws and deed restrictions were thoroughly discussed. Peirce Wood, corporation attorney, covered the legal questions involved. The by-laws were unanimously accepted.

When Louise Odiorne presented her plan for the proposed town, it featured unique curvilinear roads that divided the town into neighborhood sections. Each section was provided with a small park or open space. The town was designed with cooling green-belt strips of land and a unique inner walkways system. There were six park areas that could also serve as playgrounds for young children. These smaller areas were expected to help each neighborhood develop bonds of friendship.

The total effect of the design was that of a woodland campus. One of the early settlers, Professor Horton of Antioch University, Ohio, always called the Village "The Campus."

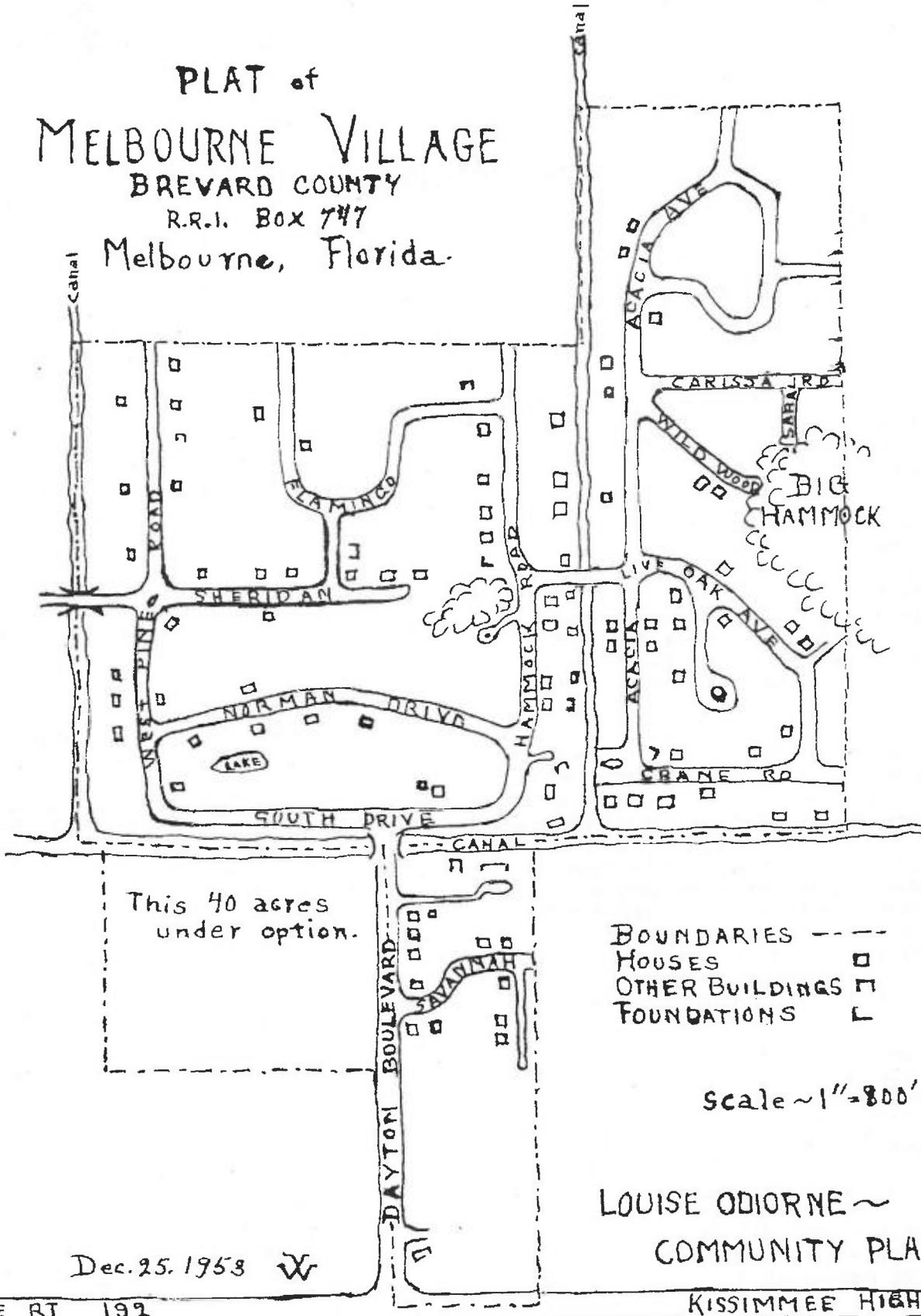
Richard Odiorne suggested opportunities for cash incomes and a group discussion on income possibilities followed.

Dr. Willis Nutting, brother of Elizabeth, spoke to the group on "WHY WE HOMESTEAD." He stressed the real and satisfying life possible in this type of stable homestead setup. He believed that a family could live on its own homestead and raise most of its own food the year round. In the case of a depression, most families could barter skills, thus maintaining a higher standard of living regardless of the value of the dollar. Dr. Willis Nutting was deeply interested in the new community. He had a word of advice for Elizabeth as he viewed the members of the first Annual Meeting: "Don't let all your people be college-educated people because they will fight all the time!"

When the first Annual Meeting closed, the members felt that they had established the framework for the conduct of real democracy in a small community setting.

In an interview given in 1973, Elizabeth Nutting stated, "When we started here, one of our fundamental beliefs was that people must not be too dependent on an employer; they must have a certain independence in themselves. Now, we came down here with the idea of a set up with large enough lots so that people could raise an appreciable amount of their own food."

PLAT of
MELBOURNE VILLAGE
 BREVARD COUNTY
 R.R.1. BOX 747
 Melbourne, Florida.



Dec. 25, 1958 W

"As long as people are dependent on some force over which they have no control, they are not free people. In Dayton, we were dependent on the government for grants to create homesteads. When the manufacturers found out that we were working towards independence, they said the government could not give us grants; that is, they did not say it to us, they said it to the government."

Elizabeth continued, "We came to the point that we thought we ought to have people coming on the land with their own resources, their own financing. Now it could be a very limited resource but we did not want to subsidize them because we found out what happened when a subsidy has strings."

"As each person joined the AHF, they came in with money for their own lot. \$750 for a lot and membership was certainly low enough. Charity cases couldn't make it, but anybody with any kind of income could. It would have to be people who were willing to work, who were willing to pioneer."

A COPY OF THE FIRST PROSPECTUS 1948

"This Prospectus is being sent to you because we believe you are really interested in our rather unusual little community. It is unusual because it seeks to combine those qualities which made America great in the first place, with the advantages of modern scientific and technological advancement in any sense. We have another reason for offering you this frank and comprehensive view of the Village. While there is nothing we want more than congenial members, there is nothing we want less than misfits. If what you read here appeals to you, you will in all probability turn out to be one of the ones we are looking for."

What is the purpose behind this intentional community? Melbourne Village is an intentional community as the result of years of planning by a small group of interested people who wanted to develop a community where people could live a simple, peaceful, wholesome life. Where they could live close to God and close to the good earth, enjoying sunshine and fresh air and all year out-of-door living. Now as a much larger group, we seek to realize the American way of life as we understand it. Real democracy in the conduct of community affairs, communitarian, productive homes with emphasis on the development of people rather than the production of material wealth.

The Village layout has been planned so that each property has a motor front facing a street and a park or pedestrian path facing a park alone. There will be a system of walkways throughout the Village connecting the parks which will provide protected pedestrian access to all points in the Village. This is a significant factor to remember in envisioning potentialities and the unusual amenities provided in this exceptional but very normal community.

WE ARE NOT WORKING FOR A SUBSISTENCE STANDARD OF LIVING, WE ARE WORKING FOR A HIGHER, MORE CREATIVE STANDARD OF LIVING, THAN WE HAVE EVER KNOWN.

We are not thinking of ourselves alone but we are working mightily to demonstrate a way out which can be adopted by others to the benefit of all concerned. To attain these ends, we are using all the energy and intelligence the good Lord has given us.

"When we stress Village life, neighborly cooperation and home production, we do not mean to go back to the primitive way. It just means that with the use of modern scientific and technological advancement and homesteading, we will have modern productive homes and a modern Village life and enjoy advantages of which our forefathers never dreamed."

A COPY OF THE ORIGINAL APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP 1948

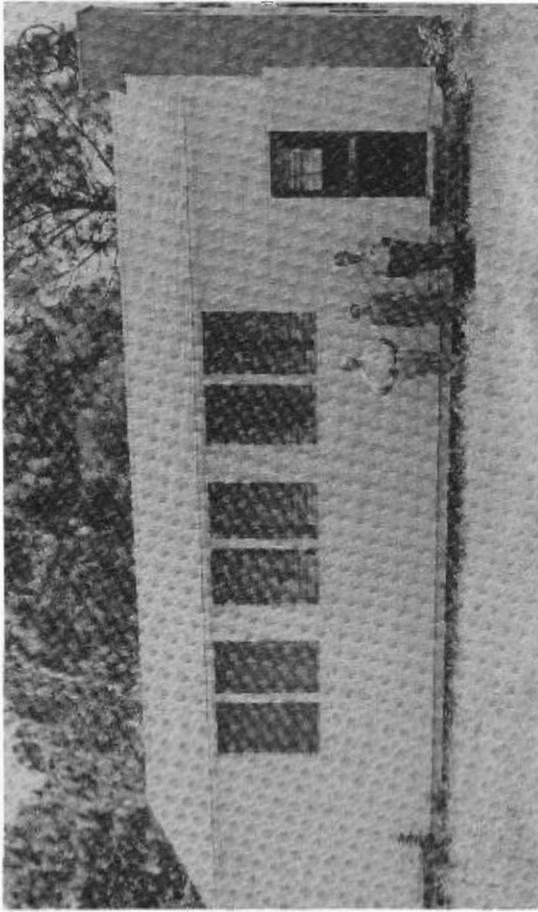
I hereby apply for Founder Membership in the American Homesteading Foundation, a non-profit organization, organized under the Laws of Ohio authorized to do business in and operating in Florida, where property is owned.

For this membership, I agree to pay the sum of \$600 cash, and in return, I am to receive a deed of Warranty subject only to building restriction, future taxes, and existing oil and mineral leases, to a home site in Melbourne Village, Brevard County, Florida, and to enjoy the full rights, privileges and obligations as a member of the Foundation, including a vote at all meetings of the Foundation as set forth by the by-laws.

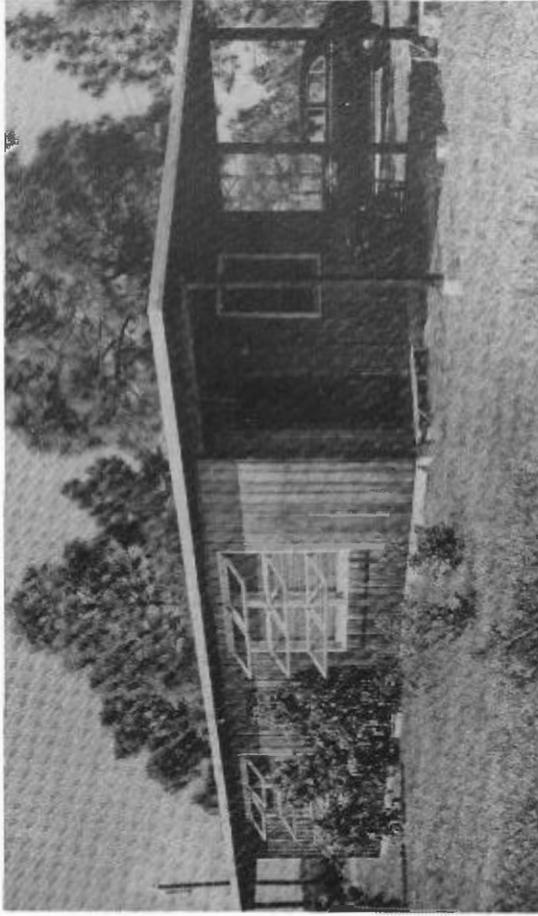
1. I understand the purpose of the Foundation to be the establishment of Homesteading Groups and the provision therewith of the facilities for community activities, education in homesteading and creative living.

2. I understand that plans for all buildings and other structures of each homesite must receive the approval of the Building and Grounds Committee before a building begins.

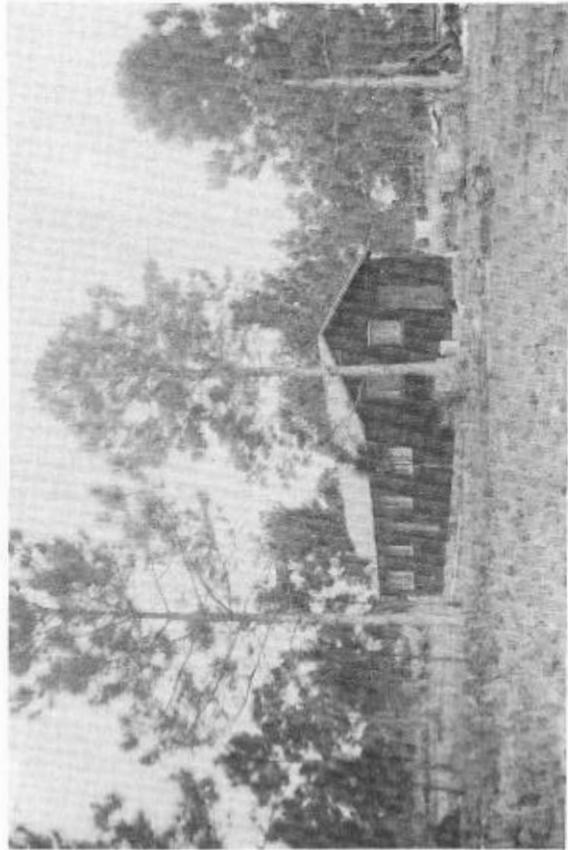
3. I understand that all costs of clearing and improving the homesite assigned to me will be at my expense. I further understand that I will be required to pay such maintenance dues as may be voted by the members, on recommendation of the Board of Trustees. I understand that there is a state exemption on the first \$5,000 of a Florida Homestead, when occupied by the owners. This application is accompanied by a check of \$600 in full payment for a lot.



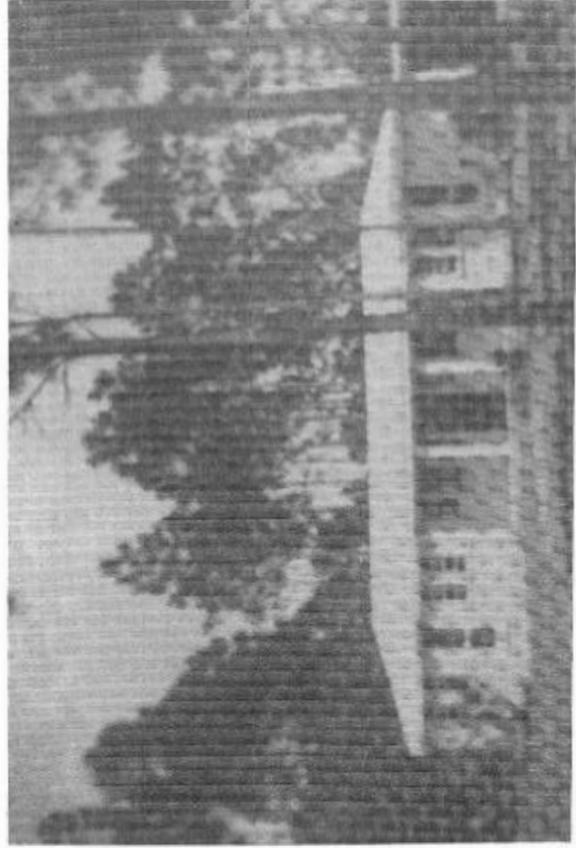
The Print Shop--This building is a reconstructed barracks. The bell was used as a fire warning. Fires, set by the cattlemen, were spring time threats to the Villagers. Ralph Borsodi, Virginia Wood, and an unidentified Villager standing at the entrance.



Melbourne Village Guest House, built to accommodate prospective villagers and sometimes guests.



The first home of Helen and Bill Newcomb. The Newcombs were among the earliest settlers in the Village.



The White House-- This building served as the office and the temporary dwelling for newcomers. The only phone in town was housed in this office.

CHAPTER IV

MEMBERSHIP IN THE AHF

The Membership Committee of the American Homesteading Foundation is one of the controversial and misunderstood features of life in Melbourne Village. In order to own property in Melbourne Village, you must become a member of the American Homesteading Foundation; in order to become a member of the Foundation, you must pass the Membership Committee. Today, the Membership Committee meets with the prospective member and interviews the prospect and family. In the next step, the prospect's name is posted on the bulletin board, and the membership of the AHF can either approve or disapprove of the prospect. If a prospective member is cleared by the committee, and no objection has been heard, the individual or family may now pay the membership dues and purchase the land. The family now has clear title to the land.

When the family wants to sell the land, it may do so, but the prospective purchaser must also be approved by the Membership Committee. Memberships are not bought and sold and do not go with the land. What happens if the home owner has negotiated for sale and the prospect is not cleared by the Membership Committee?

Most home owners try to avoid such a situation, but in the early days, the American Homesteading Foundation was authorized to step in and purchase the home and land.

In 1950, membership cost \$750 and installment payments could be arranged. Interest payments of 6% began after 30 days. For this payment, the member received a warranty deed to a lot of his choice. For \$650 more the member could purchase one adjacent lot. A \$50 down payment was required for each lot. This does not mean that a prospective member, or a member, could buy up lots for speculation. The two-lot privilege still meant ONE homestead.

A lot can be inherited, but the person inheriting the property must pass the Membership Committee if he plans to take up residence.

A limited amount of bartering went on, exchanging membership and land for specified services. Louise Ordiorne bartered her services as the landscape architect for the community for membership and land.

An artist set up his studio and bartered his services for the land. William Newcomb bartered his services as a publicist for membership and land. The hydroponic garden enjoyed a rent-free status.

When the committee met prospective members, it first judged them on general compatibility. Would the new member be cooperative in an education-centered, small, intentional community? The principles, aims, and goals of the community were explained. The committee did not look for Decentralists or Georgists, although a few of Borsodi's followers did join the American Homesteading Foundation and one Georgist came from a Georgist enclave in Alabama.

While few of the 1950 prospects had even heard of Ralph Borsodi or his theories, the prospectus is Decentralist.

"REAL DEMOCRACY calls for more than voting, but advocates constructive group thinking and voluntary cooperation."

"PRODUCTIVE homes, where with their own roofs over their heads, families can produce much of what they need for themselves, instead of buying everything. This makes for the development the development of individual resourcefulness and for security in time of financial crisis. It also makes for independence, good sound, early-American independence."

"EMPHASIS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLE even more than on the production of things; at least a tendency to rate normal living above the accumulation of material wealth."

"AN EDUCATION CENTERED COMMUNITY. The education provided through our Community School of Living will be (1) Voluntary; (2) For those of all ages; (3) Responsive to the needs and interests of the Villagers; (4) Dedicated to the development of WELL BALANCED effective human beings."

The later folders dropped these terms. A prospective member was invited to consider "A Home in Melbourne Village, as an entrance way to a WAY OF LIFE based on a beautiful homesite, friendly neighbors and group recreation, and the advantage of belonging to the American Homesteading Foundation."

One of the most important factors to be discovered by the Membership Committee was financial responsibility. Although it was not stated in the brochures, it was difficult to secure bank loans. For many years, the Village relied on artesian wells for water supply. This added to the home owners' financing and fire insurance problems.

In order to become a member, the prospect had to have at least enough cash for an installment payment on the land and membership and probably cash to start building. It was estimated in the early 1950's that a basic house could be built for about \$1400.

Dr. Elizabeth Nutting was the star salesman for the AHF. When Elizabeth Nutting gave you the grand tour, she sold not only the land but also the dream! People who did not know which end of a hoe to chop with could see themselves as farmers. A single hive of bees could become an apiary. The AHF was looking for country-minded, craft-orientated families.

Did the Membership Committee ever have any racial or religious bias?

The American Homesteading Foundation had little appeal for blacks. At one time a search was made for at least one black family, but the family they wooed turned down the Village because they did not want their children to grow up in an all-white neighborhood.

Did the Membership Committee ever have any ethnic bias?

Not really. Although one member of the committee stated that she did not like foreign names, the membership roster demonstrates a mixed group.

Did the Membership Committee ever turn down anyone?

Yes, for when two opposing factions developed, the Membership Committee was used as a weapon. Sometimes the membership rejections were almost capricious. A prospective member who announced that she liked to do her ironing in the buff was not invited to pursue membership.

Was the Membership Committee ever sexist? No, single women were welcome. Melbourne Village has three "founding mothers" and women have always played a better-than-equal role.

Were children welcome?

The Membership Committee always interviewed the children with the family. A member of the Membership Committee stated that at least on one membership interview, the prospects were turned down because their children were rude. Children had special programs, volunteer instruction and care from the entire village.

Did the Village discriminate in choosing special employment backgrounds?

The Membership Committee tried to encourage artisans to join the community. Ralph Borsodi was a self-educated man who had learned the trade of printer in his youth.

The first inklings of the coming space boom showed up in the 1950 candidates for membership. The vocabulary of the membership brochures changed subtly. Fewer candidates who wanted to develop a craft and live off the land knocked on the membership door. Twenty years after Social Security made its debut, more retirees were able to come to Florida and they discovered Melbourne Village.





Board Meeting, 1951. Front row: Professor Horton, Virginia Wood, A. Tippie, Ferdinand Fick; Back row: Bert Kay, William Fisher, Lee Bauer, George Tynan.

ILLUSTRATION

PROGRESS OF A PROSPECTIVE AHF MEMBER - 1948

1. Prospective member tours Melbourne Village, star Salesman Elizabeth Nutting paints an enthusiastic picture of the advantages of a productive home in an intentional community, prospect meets Membership Committee.



2. Membership Chairman (Elizabeth Nutting) explains aims and goals of the Village and (AHF) approves of the member.



3. Homesteader (and new member) selects a lot, pays \$750 for lot and membership, cash or installments, 1/2 acre the smallest lot.



4. The homesteader and wife are now members of the American Homesteading Foundation. Their address is Melbourne Village.



5. Member plans a house, but plans must be approved by the Building and Grounds Committee. A substantial house is expected, no shacks, no trailers. This will be a home, built to live in, no speculation.



6. The homesteader is encouraged to start a garden, compost heap, and raise earthworms.



7. Homesteader learns the art of local government. The homesteader has one vote in the corporation, vote may be split, or a proxy may be appointed for the Annual Meeting.



8. If the member does not have an independent income, or an outside job, he is encouraged to start a small business. There is not much industry outside of Melbourne Village in 1948. The advantages of homesteading in an education-centered community of productive homes is not always evident.

CHAPTER V

THE SETTLERS ARRIVE

The first members of the American Homesteading Foundation, the sponsors of Melbourne Village, were from Dayton and vicinity. Only Elizabeth Nutting, Margaret Hutchinson, and Preston, Ashley and Shirley Miles actually were colonists at Liberty Acres. Other interested persons who attended the first meeting were men and women who had served with the various charities and boards involved in the "Dayton Plan." Some of these "country-minded" prospective settlers bought land with the intention of retiring to a rural community sometime in the future. Other prospects heard of Melbourne Village through Dr. Morgan of Antioch University and were settlers interested in small communities as he was. The ads in "Organic Gardening" brought the west-coast settlers to Florida. Rev. William Reece said that he hitch-hiked from Portland, Oregon to Melbourne, Florida, to join the settlers. He claimed he arrived without shoes because his shoes had worn through while hiking.

Most of the settlers were not Decentralists or Georgists, but "country-minded" people who wanted the experience of building a truly democratic community.

Enthusiastic news features in "The Miami Herald," "The Melbourne Times" and other papers brought visitors to the new community where they met Dr. Elizabeth Nutting, a very persuasive salesman. Another source of membership was a few Quaker families who seemed to prefer small communities. Others responding to the publicity included the so-called "health" fans. A few Borsodi followers were later settlers, but Melbourne Village was never a Decentralist community.

Melbourne Village failed to attract many young families. The middle-aged pioneers had certain advantages; they tackled their problems with a seasoned point of view and they had an income.

The residents of Melbourne viewed the experiment with suspicion. Melbourne residents whispered that the settlers were nudists, vegetarians or communists or perhaps all three. Other residents viewed the settlers and came to an opposite conclusion. They whispered that Melbourne Village forbade swearing, smoking, chewing tobacco, and dancing on Sunday. Melbourne residents called the Villagers stand-offish and cliquish. The Villagers were not much on mingling outside the

Village and they were too busy to sit and chat. Homes had to be constructed, septic tanks dug, and roads built.

The Villagers had large lots to accommodate their gardens. They were encouraged to build a guest house first and to live in the guest house while they constructed the main house. The guest house could serve as a source of income by renting it to winter residents or other Villagers who needed shelter while they were building.

Trailers were not permitted except as temporary housing while the main house was being built. At that time, the trailer had to be removed. The Building and Grounds Committee did not want to encourage the idea that a family could live in a trailer.

Guest apartments were built near the entrance to the Village. These apartments were comfortable and convenient. After the need for this type of accommodation passed, the apartments were rented to non-members, but this did not suit the image of the Village and the rentals were dismantled. Renters have never been welcomed; tolerated, but not welcomed.

It is not an easy task to build a home, but the settlers were encouraged to build their own homes. Those who were successful, or had previous building skills, formed "The Village Guild of Carpenters." This is one example of people with highly developed skills in one field accepting lesser skills in another. Reverend William Reece, Swedenborgian minister, was a skillful carpenter and cabinet maker. When he joyfully accepted carpenter tasks, he had a good example in mind.

Professionals did not want to turn blue collar and few blue collar workers were attracted to the Village. Borsodi believed that a cooperative community offered a better way of life, but artisans were not convinced that trading below-scale wages for folk dancing and lectures was a better way of life.

After World War II, home buyers looked for housing in developments or sub-divisions. The Village pattern reversed this trend. Each house was built singly, either by a contractor or by the owner.

Building a house in Melbourne Village was not an easy task. There had been very little construction in Melbourne since the fabulous Florida boom days. When Melbourne Village began constructing, there was little industry in Melbourne beyond tourism and the military. Villagers did not live in Melbourne while their houses were constructed. Many of them had their houses built by Brevard County contractors while they remained "up north."

Ferdinand Fick kept a detailed record of the frustrations of contracting a house. It took nearly a year to construct and the price was almost double the original quote.

In 1948-49, the Village was bustling with activity. The School of Living met every Friday night to discuss the problems of building homes and the more personal problems of the residents.

Future retirees were cautioned that retiring was a serious step and that coming into a new environment required some adjustments. The pioneers coming into the Village did not have to worry about idleness or boredom. There was plenty of activity.

The Village Hall had some activity every night: informative or entertaining lectures, square dancing, movies, slides, classes, womens' groups, and on and on.

The School of Living was working on the problems of earning a living.

By late 1949, something seemed to be stirring at Patrick Air Force Base across the Indian River from Melbourne. No one seemed to be sure what was planned, but the opening of the Joint Long Range Proving Ground there in 1950 forever changed Melbourne Village.



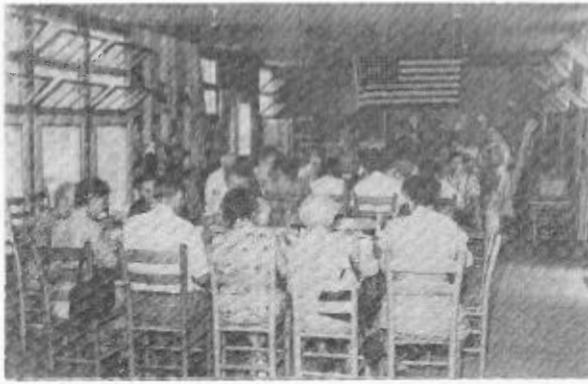
Concrete Block construction was favored by the villagers. The settlers who could afford it had Melbourne contractors build their homes.



A typical First Home--Professor J. Horton inspects a tree in the front of Delia Tynans' home. Note the trailer that served as a home during the construction period; when a settler could afford it, new rooms were added.



The Hedman "A" Frame home on West Pine Road. It is the only home of this type in the Village.



Sunday Lunch--Palm Salad!



Early Morning Pancake Breakfast--Mayor Harold Peters presiding at the traditional breakfast. Peters was the leader of the "Betterment League."



Oscar Schaeffer
Hamburger Specialist



Tea-Time--Marian Van Atta is serving tea at the end of a summer program for teenagers. In the back row, Virginia P. Wood, Jane Goatley, Karen Satterlee, Sandra Gilley, ?, Ruth Ann Shuey, Georgiana Kjerulff. In the front row, Clarice Kjerulff and Miss Gilley.

CHAPTER VI

HOMESTEADING AND HOME INDUSTRY

The early settlers in Melbourne Village had either a retirement or an independent income. Very few settlers secured employment in the Village. Elizabeth Nutting received a small percentage on sale of memberships and for many years this was not considered dealing in real estate. She also had the use of a station wagon to show prospects around the Village. In the early days, she kept records and Margaret Hutchinson kept the books. Although Margaret had been trained to keep records in her father's business, she was not considered an accountant. Elizabeth also ran an earthworm business.

The two women lived in the surplus cabin. The AHF had a few employees beyond the Village Manager position, but the salaries were penny-wise.

In order to attract and hold young families, some local industry or saleable product had to be developed.

Don Werkheiser, who arrived with the Newcombs, was a devoted Borsodi follower. Werkheiser touted a product called Permadobe, which was really the old southwest rammed-earth brick. The brick was not suitable for Florida for it melted in the rains, but Bill Newcomb's over-enthusiastic copy praised the product. Bill had bartered his promotion services for land, but his hyperbole often disturbed the more low-keyed promotion favored by the founders.

A remarkable resourceful settler who was not blessed with a big income was Alice Carr. Alice started with the tropical jam business and progressed to other garden projects. The large kitchen range in the Village Hall was used to cook the jams and jellies but the tropical jam trade needs a cheap labor force and a good distribution system, both lacking in the Village.

When the jam and jelly business failed, Alice Carr grew flowers, carnations and gladiolas, to be shipped to New York City by an early air freight line, Melbourne's Robinson Airline.

Hydroponic gardens provided tomatoes for the early New York market. Ten tons of tomatoes were raised in one season. The hydroponic gardens were encouraged by the AHF. The land was loaned to house the maze of hydroponic containers. The industry failed because cheaper grown tomatoes could reach the market at the

same time as the hydroponic-grown tomatoes.

Fields of Sansevieria were grown for fiber content. Irish setter pups were raised by one settler.

The Chinchilla-raising fad kept several Villagers busy.

A silk screen fabric studio was funded by Melbourne Villagers. For a short time experimentation in the industry went on within the Village, but it needed loft space to create hand-screened curtains. The industry was moved to Melbourne and a crew of women were hired. This was a quality, high priced product and it failed due to under-funding, according to Mimi Britten.

Handcrafted copper enamel jewelry was produced and marketed in New York.

Village artists created a Christmas card line.

It was Elizabeth Nutting's dream to use the "Front Twenty," the Village-owned land that was reserved for an industry, to help support the Village with an artistic cluster of smart shops that would market handicrafts, jams and jellies and Village products.

Melbourne is a resort town, and a few Villagers decided to invest in the resort industry. A fishing camp was set up on the Sebastian River. The camp failed when the caretaker absconded with the boats.

In 1950 David Stry began to develop his low cost health ranch. Clients were housed in surplus trailers or other no-frills accommodations. Their diet was restricted to vegetarian meals. There were a number of vegetarians in the Village who were not connected with the ranch so Stry received a warm welcome. The clients could swim in a shallow pool, play tennis, bicycle or sun bathe. They enjoyed chuck-wagon meals and often invited the Villagers to their parties and square dances.

Among the group of vegetarians in the Village were the Wayne Taylors who not only ate a vegetarian diet but also taught others its joys. They also taught astrology, although I do not believe that casting horoscopes could be listed as a Village industry. The Wayne Taylors were mystics, but agnostics outnumbered mystics in the Village.

One industry that supported a few families was plant nurseries. At least one of the nurseries was organic and devoted to exotic plants.

A Village decal and printing plant supported one family.

A private group under the banner of the Village funded some of the industries. It has been claimed that one stock holder held too high a percentage of the stock, but the combination of private enterprise and community dependency did not work. If the income is low, the quality of life has to be high, or skilled artists take their talents elsewhere. It had been hoped that homesteading, living close to the land, would produce that better way of life.

MORE WAYS TO SURVIVE

One of the basic practices in Melbourne Village in the early days of the homesteading period was the custom of growing a kitchen garden and a crop that could be traded. Barter was one of the ways advocated to stretch your income. Villagers had an almost mystical feeling about the value of growing some of their own food. Each home had its own compost heap; every blade of grass was saved to return to the earth.

Villagers had established several chicken ranches to produce meat, eggs, and chicken manure. The tropical summers and a large chicken farm close to a residential area did not harmonize. The flies, the odors, and an early-rising rooster all combined to make the other residents unhappy.

Goats were tolerated. Wayne Taylor and Ralph Newcomb kept goats for many years.

The sandy soil showered by acidic pine needles was not ideal farm land. The Villagers worked to enrich the soil. A grinding machine was purchased to produce mulch from branches and leaves. Work parties were organized to go to the beach to gather seaweed, another practice that drew protests.

Someone had the brilliant idea that septic tank sludge would make good fertilizer. When they pumped out their septic tanks to use the sludge, the wrath of Florida's State Health Department descended on the offenders.

Villagers believed in organic gardening; they used only organic sprays and fertilizers, but their efforts were in conflict with the Brevard County Mosquito Control which sprayed the area with a mixture containing DDT. Brevard County continued to spray the Village in spite of its protests.

Villagers did not want paved roads. They believed that the soil breathes, and they did not want any part of the Village paved over. They had to compromise in order to accommodate the Brevard County school bus. The paving of the roads turned into a bitter battle.

During the first eight years, the Village set up a cooperative store. The store operated on self-help and

trust. If no one was in attendance, the customer could make his own change. Village produce was placed on sale in the same manner. This project lasted for several years, but outsiders discovered a wide open store and helped themselves.

A credit union was successful for fifteen years. Ferdinand Fick and William Reece both had credit union experience and between them they kept the "poor man's bank" going and helped many people.

A cooperative buying club was set up, and the club kept Villagers supplied with health foods before they were accepted in Melbourne.

Not all the Villagers were happy with the natural approach to living. They were not all Decentralists; the term "country living" meant different things to different people. While the romantics liked the dirt roads with the white shell sheen, others complained that the roads were dusty when dry and rutted when wet.

If you didn't enthuse about worms and compost heaps, you probably belonged in a more conventional setting. The worm business not only enriched Village soil, it put at least pocket change in some tills. When you visited the first Village Hall, the refurbished navy shack, you had to step over trays of worms. Everyone eventually had to visit the "White House" as it was called. There was only one phone in town, and that phone was in the White House. Faith Strohmer recalled her early days in the Village when she answered the only phone and learned to know all the residents.

The Village became known for its nurseries, but some outsiders thought that Village plants were free for the taking. They would brassily walk into a garden, dig up the plants and take off.

The dearest hope of the founders was that artists would live in the Village. Nina Davidson arrived with her kilns and many Villagers learned the craft. An artist, who was not a Villager, wanted to open a school in the Village but permission was denied.

There were rumors that there was at least one loom in the Village but, if one existed, I never saw it.

The way was not always smooth for the transplanted northern settlers. Flies from the chicken farm, sand flies, palmetto bugs, and other insects were a constant nuisance, as were Cecil Platt's free-roaming cattle. The cattlemen believed in spring fires that scorched the earth and encouraged green nutritious grass shoots, but the fires frequently got out of hand. The fire-lines often resulted in warm friendships and they fostered the pioneering feeling.

STILL MORE WAYS TO SURVIVE

A group of Villagers wanted to bring exotic fruits to the Village. They envisioned a Village dedicated to fruit that could be sold at a stand to outsiders. Residents were encouraged to grow liches, persimmons, calamondins, key-apples, kumquats, loquats, surinam cherries, lemons, limes, varietal oranges, custard-

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apples, and even bananas. Many Villagers did devote their acreage to plants, but the capricious weather killed the tropicals. Villagers did barter the fruit, but once again, it was not enough to support a family.

Elizabeth looked around and noticed the bountiful crop of wild mushrooms. A mushroom-picking party was organized and while there were many sick Villagers, fortunately, there were no fatalities. It is never safe to pick wild mushrooms in Florida; only the experts can tell the safe mushrooms from the poisonous.

The "Health Industry" was a possibility. Melbourne had long advertised itself as the "Health Belt" of Florida. A spa flourished for a number of years in what is now Palm Bay. The famous, or infamous, sulphur water was thought to be a cure for many ailments. Elizabeth Nutting believed in the health qualities of the water, and from the time the Village swimming pool was built, its icy artesian water was billed as bracing. Brave Villagers swam in it winter and summer, splashing and frolicking and turning blue.

Dr. Wendell Diebold, an osteopath, was attracted to the Village by the famous two-inch ad in "Organic Gardening" magazine. He purchased a surplus building from the Navy base and planted one of every type of tropical fruit tree he could purchase. Many of them died

during a spell of cold winters. He had hoped to open an office in the Village, but Villagers did not encourage an industry that would increase daily traffic. Diebold was not the only one who was turned down because of increased traffic possibilities. A church, a school, and a college met similar disapproval.

Another money making scheme that died before it was born was a roadside stand. Ralph Borsodi had had a roadside stand in Suffern. He outlined the success of his stand in the book *Flight From The City*. The money from the stand was one of the factors that made his productive home profitable.

The Villagers thought of selling honey from the hives, eggs from the chicken ranches, vegetables from the gardens and fruit in season. The stand never developed but Villagers did place surplus fruit out in their front yards; a bucket for the fruit and a plate for the money. You were expected to pay for the fruit and leave the change in the plate.

Villagers could also place surplus food out to barter, but if you had beans to barter or squash to trade, it was likely that everyone else did, too. Borsodi taught that you did not have to be grim about the task of earning a living, but the full flavor of Borsodi teaching could only be savoured in a School of Living.





The Ross Home near the Hammock. This home illustrates the unique village architecture. Note the clerestory window at the roofline. The house is angled to the wind, eliminating the need for air conditioning.



A party at Virginia Wood's home. It has been said that Virginia kept a baby alligator in the pond.



Mr. Tippie's pool.

CHAPTER VII

MELBOURNE VILLAGE SCHOOL OF LIVING

"The purpose of the school shall be to furnish leadership in dealing with real problems. The method by which this purpose is to be realized shall be restricted exclusively to education and re-education. The subject matter of the school's activities shall be based on systematic research. The school shall conduct projects or enterprises that are educational in nature."

From the Charter
Melbourne Village School of Living
Granted by
The School of Living
Suffern, New York

A group of residents of Melbourne Village, followers of Ralph Borsodi, applied to his Suffern School of Living for a charter to establish a School of Living in Melbourne Village. The charter was received and the Melbourne Village School of Living functioned from 1948 to 1952, the date that the records ended. The Melbourne Village School of Living never was a part of the American Homesteading Foundation. It was simply an organization that functioned in Melbourne Village. It could consider Village problems but it did not supercede the Town Meeting. The school had as its goal the re-training of members of the Village or other intentional communities.

Some of the training was practical instruction in homesteading crafts. In this phase, the school was modeled after the Danish Folk Schools. (The Danish Folk Schools re-taught folk arts to citified Danes.) The Melbourne Village School of Living never taught folk arts, but it sponsored "The Carpenter's Guild," a group of carpenters in the Village who were mostly self-taught. The American Homesteading Foundation, through its Education Committee, taught some of the skills needed for homesteading in Florida by sponsoring classes in gardening and living off the land. The Women's Guild, an AHF organization, sometimes devoted meetings to instruction in pine needle weaving. The AHF also invited the Department of Agriculture and the US Home Demonstration Clubs to Melbourne Village.

The school had a more hazy and less well defined goal of re-training people from our hectic, capitalistic, industrial civilization into homesteaders who chose a more arcadian, utopian way of life in the spirit of Emerson, Thoreau, Noyes and Allcott.

Elizabeth Nutting, who often spoke of saving civilization, spoke of the school and its re-training as one of the ways of saving civilization.

The clash of personalities that eventually developed in Melbourne Village was the juxtaposition of two forces: one force wanted utopian, country-minded way of life and sought it through developing productive homesteads; a second force wanted a suburban, conventional, restricted community.

Several of the leaders of the suburban group were former members of the Melbourne Village School of Living and some of the seeds of conflict were sown at the School of Living meetings.

Melbourne Village, as a new intentional community, made excellent newspaper copy. William Newcomb sold several glowing stories and the Florida newspapers wrote enthusiastic stories. Each story brought letters of inquiry. Dr. Elizabeth Nutting, the Membership Chairman, replied encouragingly to the prospects. Many of the letters asked about employment. Elizabeth replied that there were possibilities for self-employment, for indeed the School of Living had one of its committees working on the problem.

Elizabeth Nutting always bubbled with enthusiasm. She and Margaret Hutchinson had convinced the Dayton poor that they could barter for necessities. In this spirit of optimism, the School of Living encouraged the American Homesteading Foundation to set up classes in marketable handicrafts. The Melbourne Village School of Living held seminars; the American Homesteading Foundation sponsored the classes. The classes were held in the AHF Village Hall. Every homesteader was a member of the AHF, but not every homesteader was a member of the Melbourne Village School of Living.

The members of the School of Living paid dues and sometimes they paid fees for seminars. The members of the school wrapped themselves in titles of academic glory. There were regents, deans, and chancellors. The non-members felt that the School of Living members thought of themselves as the elite, and they characterized the seminars as "shoving ideas down our throats."

By 1948-1949, the School of Living was functioning well.

In December, 1949, Ralph Borsodi was invited to hold a series of seminars at the duly-chartered Melbourne Village School. A tuition fee was charged for the series. The Borsodi lectures were a function of the School of Living, not the AHF. Most AHF functions are limited to members of the AHF, but these seminars could be attended by fee-paying non-AHF members.

In December, 1949, Ralph Borsodi had been recently widowed. His first wife, Myrtle Mae, died of cancer after non-surgical treatment at a Mexican diet-centered cancer treatment spa. Ralph Borsodi was a strong advocate of the advantages of diet so his Suffern School had become a center for holistic education. In 1949, Borsodi was at a low point in his life, not only because he had lost his wife, but also because in the process he had incurred debts.

Melbourne Village rolled out the welcome mat, eager to encourage Borsodi to take up residence and to write and publish in the Village.

Mildred Loomis, a Borsodi disciple, warned that Borsodi was a difficult man. She wondered if the Village was ready for Ralph. But ready or not, the guru of Decentralism descended on Melbourne Village.

The seminars started off well, but the 1949-50 winter series of Borsodi seminars wound up with only twelve die-hard members who remained to the bitter end. At that time, there were 150 AHF members in residence. This dwindling attendance did not bother Borsodi; he realized that not everyone would understand his mission of saving civilization.

Ralph Borsodi granted an interview to the "Miami Herald" on February 4, 1950. The following is an excerpt from the interview:

"Any small community, whether incorporated or not, sooner or later runs up against problems which its local council fails to solve. The problems are "solved" at the ballot box by the administration in office being voted out."

"But frequently the incoming local government is unable to cope with the problems, won't call for adequate special knowledge, and town after town goes haphazardly along the way without meeting its street, water supply, sewage disposal, police and other problems."

In Melbourne Village, the problems facing the Board of Trustees were not always met successfully. A groundswell of complaint arose and the local School of Living, with its research facilities, took over the problems."

Borsodi further stated that as Dean of the School of Living in Melbourne, he had eight co-workers who composed a council to examine without bias such governmental problems.

Usually a committee of one is appointed. The Committeeman may call on as many members as he wants and can secure. Some may be Village members, other university professors who have made a specialized study; sometimes an attorney and sometimes an accountant.

Borsodi clearly stated these theories as fact. There were lawyers who were members of the AHF as well as professors and accountants but the school was not funded to hire outside experts to solve Village problems. When questioned on this point, Borsodi suggested that school members could chip in for the fee.

Mimi Britten stated in an interview that she had been a member of the School and that its membership was small in number. Articles like the one quoted gave rise to comments that members thought they were the elite.

In 1952, Dr. Elizabeth Nutting, then Dean of Melbourne Village School of Living, asked Ralph Borsodi what action might be taken by the school to overcome the feeling in the Village that the school was a dictatorial group that tended to exert pressure on the Board of Trustees. "It is the opinion of some of the residents that all educational facilities should be under the direction of the Board of Trustees."

Ralph Borsodi replied that the School of Living should be a completely independent group, organized on a tuition and membership basis, which, through diligent study, sought to find the truth. Having found the true solution, it would correctly apply it to the problem. In order to do this, it would be necessary for the school to have contact with informed sources. The cost of having informed people speak to the school should be borne by the members.

BORSODI'S EDUCATION FOR LIVING

Borsodi settled down in the Village and began to write his gospel of Decentralism entitled, "Education for Living." The AHF made a surplus Navy building available for his use.

Borsodi's theory was that the major problems of the world could be codified and that this framework could be used in dealing with community, personal, national, and world problems.

When Ralph Borsodi came to Melbourne Village, he had worked out twelve major problems, and he kept on working on these problems after he left. At the time of his death in 1977, he had defined seventeen major problems. Borsodi called these definitions "The Universal Problems of Living."

CODIFICATION OF UNIVERSAL PROBLEMS OF LIVING

1. Intellectual (Noetic) problems
2. Human Nature (Antropic) problems.
3. Events Current problems.
4. Truth
5. Value (Axiologic) problems.
6. Ethical problems.
7. Economic Values
8. Teleological problems (or what is my worth in living?)
9. Problem of living (Praxiologic problems or re-education for living.)
10. Production problems.
11. Production problems, how and where.
12. The distribution problem.
13. The possessional problem.
14. The organizational problem.
15. The Civic problem.
16. The Institutional problem.
17. The Educational problem.

Source: DECENTRALISM, Mildred Loomis

According to Helen Smith, resident of Melbourne Village, The School of Living functioned wherever Ralph Borsodi was. She spoke of dinner parties that turned into School meetings. She stated that the members often used Ralph Borsodi's Twelve Problems (those that were defined when Borsodi lived in the Village) as the basis of their discussions, and she considered the discussions as a session of the Melbourne Village School. There is no doubt that the School of Living had a great influence on Melbourne Village.

Cooperation was one of the by-words of community living while Melbourne Village was in its Utopian phase. During the years of Borsodi's residence, the Village came to life. Villagers cooperated in cleaning the roads, grooming the parks, running the Village Hall. They constructed a swimming pool and held a barbecue to celebrate the opening. Days and nights were filled with classes, committees and meetings. Music groups met for playing and listening. A drama group gave readings and skits. Book reviews were popular, and travelogues always drew a crowd.

"Festivals" were a part of Borsodi's plan for the good life, a part of the re-training in which volunteer work could be fun. Every holiday was greeted with an appropriate celebration. Christmas brought "The Hanging of the Greens," an evening of putting up Christmas garlands in the Village Hall, accompanied by music, punch and cookies. This was a preparation for the holiday parties that culminated in the New Year's Day Reception.

In one sense, the biggest party of the year was the Annual Meeting of the American Homesteading Foundation. The Foundation meeting was conducted like a combination corporation meeting and town meeting for it combined governing, debates, arguments, discussions, factions, counter-factions, moments of tension and moments of humor. It all climaxed with some decisions and the annual dinner.

The Melbourne Village School of Living did not have an official role to play in the annual meeting, but the problems that surfaced at the annual meeting were sometimes discussed at the School. Members of the School began to mix religion, psychology and Decentralism in the political fray, and this was the undoing of the School.

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY

Ralph Borsodi was pleased with the progress of Melbourne Village, but the productive homesteader's cottage with a housewife minding children, tending one or two farm animals, shearing sheep, spinning wool, weaving cloth, gardening, canning, and relaxing with square dancing, festivals and lectures never materialized. The male homesteader who was secure in the knowledge that he could hold out for higher wages because he was backed by a productive home simply did not apply to Melbourne Village. The Villagers were slow to develop a home industry that could support a family. Elizabeth Nutting pointed out that you can't be a pauper and yet be able to buy land and a membership, build a home and set up an industry in Melbourne Village. Other critics had pointed out that equipping the productive home with the latest electrical equipment was expensive.

But in 1952 Borsodi was a happy man. When he came to the Village, he was broke and living on the proceeds of his seminars. Although he was still known to other homesteaders who had fanned out and established other schools of living, his national reputation had been overwhelmed by world events.

The AHF had loaned him a surplus building; he had written and published EDUCATION AND LIVING; he had defined twelve basic problems of living; and, above all, he had met and married Claire Kitteridge, a charming wealthy widow who appreciated Borsodi's brilliant mind and forgave his irritating ways.

Now Borsodi had the most dazzling idea of all. He would set up a graduate school for the scholars of the world that would teach just one subject - re-education for living. Borsodi called this course "Praxiologicall Philosophy." It was one of the twelve problems that he had defined.

Borsodi and his followers thought that Melbourne Village was the ideal spot for the university. Melbourne Village was a functioning community of productive homes with an active School of Living, a working press and a beautiful location.

As the plan was originally presented, the school would have thirty students selected from American universities with a few foreign students admitted by invitation.

The American Homesteading Foundation lawyer, E. Trader, gave the opinion that jointly-owned AHF parkland could be used for educational purposes without changing the tax status.

The University of Melbourne was incorporated under the laws of the State of Florida, March 11, 1952. The opening date for the University was set as January 5, 1955. Loans for the initial construction were put up by Virginia Wood and Claire Kitteridge.

When Ralph Borsodi had secured the initial loan for the Dayton project, Liberty Acres, he rapidly moved on to secure a \$50,000 grant to explore the possibility of a ring of homesteading communities. According to critics, these plans were made when Liberty Acres only had poorly tilled fields and two jerry-built homes. The "Dayton Review" had also criticized his handling of the money he received as grants.

The Dayton monetary problems were repeated in the University of Melbourne project. Before the first building was erected, Borsodi talked about an impressive building and dormitories. The prospect of dormitories, a campus, and classrooms springing up like mushrooms in the meadow had a few Villagers worried. They also worried about the financing. It was rumored that a loan was sought from Village funds, with the jointly-owned lands as security.

Dr. Elizabeth Nutting wrote, "Concrete plans have been made for the opening of a small graduate school, headed by one of our members, Ralph Borsodi, Decentralist. The graduate school will open to thirty students. Degrees will be awarded in the Philosophy of Education. The Faculty members will represent different points of view on the basic problems faced by man, such as earning a living, health, esthetics, etc. The faculty will serve on a rotating basis for seminar discussions. These men and women will be leaders in their fields, in the United States and other countries. Students will come from American colleges and there will be an exchange plan."

The first Board of Regents included: Ralph Borsodi, Chancellor; Jane Button, T. J. Wood, Claire Borsodi, Margaret Hutchinson, Tom Sweeting, Elizabeth Nutting, Shirley O'Donnell, Rhoderick Taylor, and Rose Smart.

Strong objections to the selection of Melbourne Village as the site developed. As Borsodi's plans expanded, the opposition grew stronger. The stumbling block was the dormitories. Borsodi insisted that the dormitories should be built in his expansive style at the same time as the seminar hall and the classrooms.

Borsodi realized that money was needed to make his dreams come true. He considered himself a business man, but there were wiser and more cautious investors in the Village who did not approve of risking University and Village funds. As a result, permission to build the University in Melbourne Village was not granted.

Melbourne resident V.C. Brownlie donated low-lying land in Melbourne as the university site. An astute real estate man in Melbourne Village purchased nearby land and profited in the resale.

Plans for the unique university progressed. A simple cinderblock library was constructed about four miles from the center of Melbourne. The building still stands

today on the Florida Institute of Technology campus. This building was not exactly the impressive building envisioned by Borsodi, but it could hold thirty or more students. Melbourne Villagers swept their shelves of surplus books to create a library.

While financial problems hampered the development of the university, Borsodi's personality proved to be another serious problem. There were hints of mismanagement of funds. Borsodi wanted this school to be the saving force in the troubled world. He was willing to risk all to accomplish his goal. In spite of his firm self-belief, his name and reputation were not sufficient to open and sustain a university. It was then decided to introduce the university by holding a seminar featuring several world-renown scholars. The topic was "Man, the Problem." The scholars selected included Dr. Paul Tillich, Professor of Theology, Harvard; Dr. Joseph Krutch, Editor-at-Large, "Saturday Review of Literature"; Philip Wylie, social critic; Dr. Willis Nutting of Notre Dame; and Ralph Borsodi.

The scholars and their wives were offered a trip to Florida and a chance to be present at the opening of a new university.

There is no record of their comments when they discovered the university was only a single cinder-block building. However, there is a written record of their chagrin and anger when they discovered that Borsodi intended to dominate all sessions and would not allow his visitors to speak.

Borsodi was physically deposed from his place on the podium by both students and scholars. His Melbourne Village faithful politely stayed with him but the seminar was a shambles.

Although summer seminars were held in the cinder-block building, the University of Melbourne failed as soon as it opened. One Melbourne couple faithfully attended seminars and meetings and one Villager was a full time student.

The concept of a university dedicated to solving the world's problems was an attractive proposition which drew the attention of major scholars, but Borsodi could not let others share center stage.

The University played an important role in the history of Melbourne Village. The idea of a world university was supported by the members of the American Homesteading Foundation, who were the founders of the Village. They were opposed by members of the AHF who did not want the jointly-owned Village lands to be used by the proposed university.

The split over the university widened the gap between the visionaries who saw the Village as a demonstration community of productive homes and the growing group of so-called hard-headed businessmen who thought of the Village as a "nice place to live."



Cultivating the Banana patch--David and Elizabeth Stry, mulching their tropical plants at their health farm.

CHAPTER VIII

PROBLEMS

In an interview in 1973, Elizabeth Nutting and Virginia Wood said: "One of the things we did want to do in the Village was to develop the kind of education that teaches people how to live together. I have seen a very great change come over this community. In the early days, we were ready to fight at the drop of a hat, and boy, how we fought. Little by little, because we were doing things together and because the only way we could get what we wanted was to be able to stand together, the community has matured in its ability to cooperate."

When the AHF was incorporated under Ohio laws in 1946, each property owner had one vote at the Annual Meeting of the Foundation even if he owned three lots. If a man and wife wished, they could split their vote, each voting 1/2 vote. A member who was not going to be present at the Annual Meeting could vote by proxy, assigning his vote to another member.

In the early days of Melbourne Village, out-of-town members often assigned their vote to Virginia Wood, trusting that her vote would be in the best interest of the Village. As differences in opinions developed, an absentee voter tried to match his vote to a friend with the same opinion. When conflict developed, one side or the other began to solicit proxies.

The Annual Meetings of the American Homesteading Foundation were never rubber stamp affairs. Because members were highly literate and vocal, an Annual Meeting could last three days. The members took breaks, consumed gallons of fresh-squeezed orange juice and, so refreshed, returned to the fray. Parliamentary procedure was an art form in the Village.

The question of proxies provided a severe test for both AHF and the Villagers. Some of the actions involved were discussed by Alice Normile in an unpublished thesis on the Village.

Article Eight of the By-Laws states, in effect, that any member of the Corporation, in good standing, may exercise his right as a member by means of proxy voting.

In the By-Laws, the members of the Board are given the right to make all contracts, to conduct all business of the corporation, and to serve as officers of the corporation as well as officers of the community without compensation.

In 1951, at the Annual Meeting, a proposal to revise the proxy rights in Article Eight was presented by Rollo Britten who was presiding. The so-called revision was actually an unqualified elimination of proxy voting and a substitution of a mail vote on all pre-determined issues.

The discussion that followed involved a large number of Villagers who wanted the opportunity to speak for their preferred method of voting. Each side was quick to point out the possible abuses of the other method of voting. The opponents of proxy voting pointed out that one group or the other could pool votes and control the vote on vital decisions.

The mail-vote side thought that the danger of a reduced number needed for a quorum if proxies were eliminated would outweigh the possible abuses in the proxy system. They reasoned that the elections could be decided by a bare majority of voters.

No action could be taken at this meeting since members had not had the necessary thirty days' notice to decide a major question.

The proxy question was the first clear evidence that two groups seemed to be vying for control. The "founding group" was being challenged by a so-called "business-oriented group."

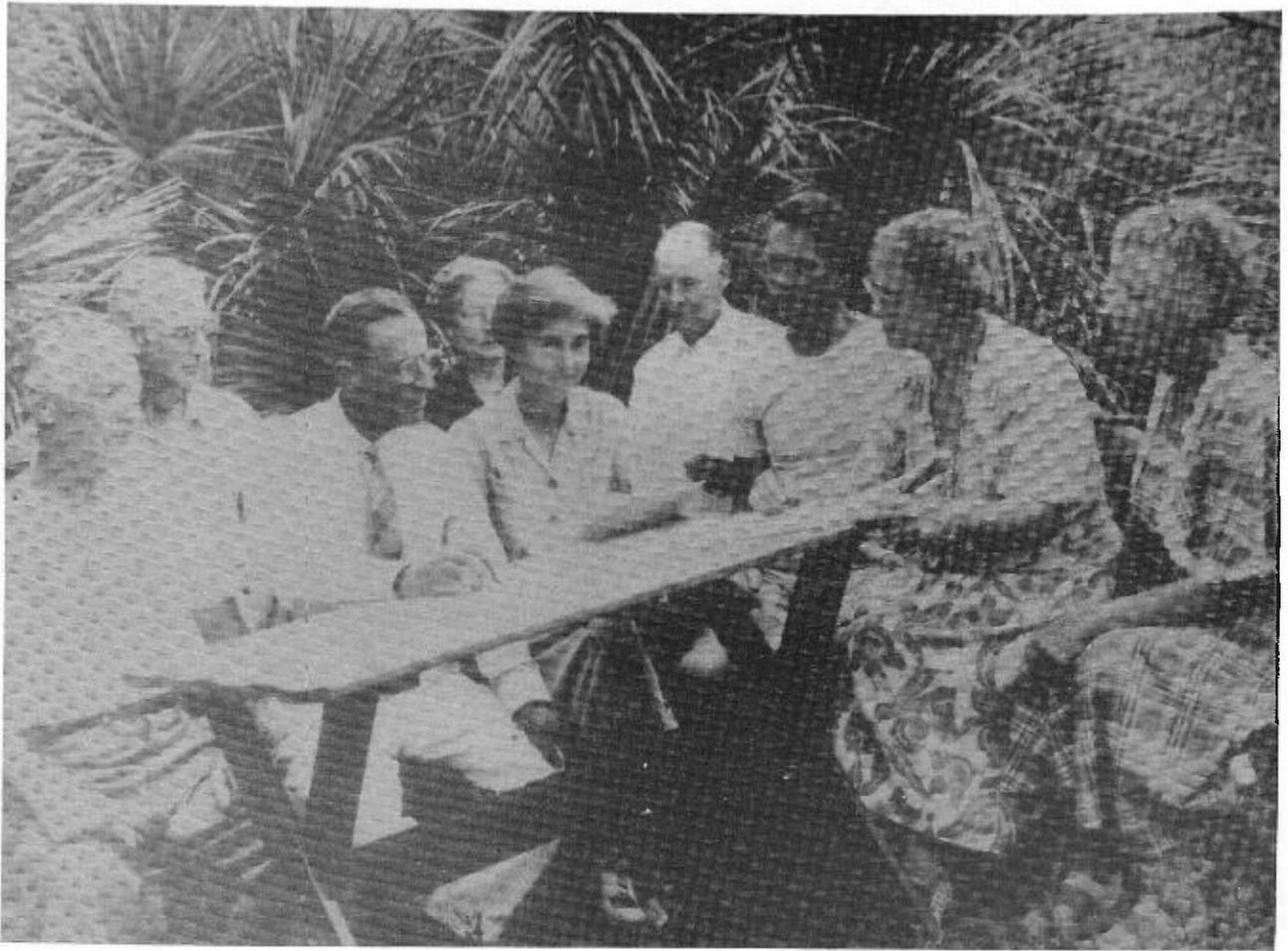
In 1952, the question of the proxies was again brought up. Pro-proxy was in the majority. As a compromise, the idea of referendum was presented to replace proxy voting, except on matters involving the dissolution of the foundation, permanent changes in the plats and ground contracts, or debts involving more than \$5,000. This proposed by-law was defeated.



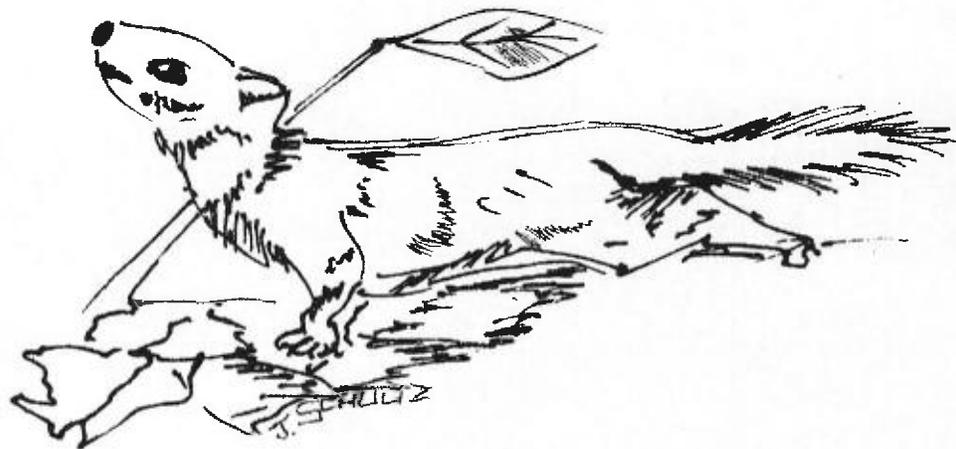
Arts and Crafts exhibit



Dr. Wendell Diebold home by a man-made lake. The house is a remodeled surplus building from Banana River (NAS). Dr. Diebold planted at least one of every tropical fruit tree he hoped would flourish. A series of cold winters killed most of the tropicals.



Three Melbourne Villager Founders are present at this early morning meeting: Margaret Hutchinson, Virginia Wood, and Dr. Elizabeth Nutting. Participants in the meeting are: George Tynan, Louis Jessaph, Alice Carr, Margaret Hutchinson, Barton Myers, Wayne Taylor, and Dr. Elizabeth Nutting.



THE PROBLEMS WITH REFUNDS SHALL WE GIVE IT BACK?

Although the proxy vote seemed to be the hot issue at the 1951 AHF annual meeting, the problem of refunds of "unused" memberships fees also emerged. It was to prove equally potent as a divisive issue. In 1951, AHF was a corporation that still maintained its ties to Ohio. Besides its Board of Trustees and President, there were a plethora of committees. The proxy question was considered an internal affair. Some of the founding party took the position that it was an issue only because the members did not understand the role of the proxy vote in a corporation.

Some members believed the membership fee took the place of a one-time, all-time tax. Other members felt that the \$500 membership fee was a non-returnable membership fee. They reasoned that if you joined a club and did not use the facilities, you could not ask for return of the fee.

In the early years, the membership turn-over was as high as 40% during the first year of membership. This dropout rate was due to the fact that no one could really live off the land and a viable home industry was not developed. Of course there were other reasons members left the Village, but when they sold their lots to a new member, the new member also had to apply for and pay for membership. The departing member did not want to lose the entire \$500 membership fee. The AHF worked out a schedule of refund in which departing member forfeited \$100 if he left during the first year. AHF refunded the remaining \$400.

In 1951, the AHF refunded approximately \$2,000. Since the maximum possible refund to one member under the formula was \$400, at least five members resigned after selling their lots to five new members, each of whom paid \$500 in new membership fees before the refunds were made. \$2,500 in new income, less \$2,000 results in a profit of \$500, according to the 1954 Newsletter "For Your Information," published by Wood and Nutting. The \$400 refund would apply only if the member resigned in his first year of residence or membership.

The formula required that for each additional year the membership had been retained, the membership refund would be reduced \$50. The theory behind the reduced rate was that the member had benefited at least \$50 per year from the work of all the people of the community. During the years 1951 to 1953, Clark Strohmer emerged as the leader of a self-labeled "business oriented" group.

Under Strohmer's leadership, this "business group" obtained control of the Finance Committee and recommended to the Board that there be no more refunds. The Board voted approval at once.

The Villagers' reaction was printed immediately by Elizabeth Nutting in her broadside "For Your Information" in this way.

In the light of all this, you will understand with what unusually thorough consideration on the part of both Board and membership, this refund schedule had been adopted; and you will also understand the shock that came to the Villagers when, with no warning, no open discussion, the Board (of Trustees) acted immediately on the recommendation of the Finance Committee that the schedule be rescinded, followed by a letter from the President of the Board of Trustees, Clark Strohmer, announcing "NO MORE REFUNDS."

Many members of the Village believed that this move was ethically unwise. Members had been promised a refund. A single committee had recommended rescinding the refund policy and the Board had immediately acted without consulting the membership. The discussion sputtered during the heat of a south Florida summer. In 1953, the Village did not have air conditioned meeting places. Many of the members traditionally escaped the summer doldrums in cooler areas.

It wasn't only the muggy weather that made the founding group hot under the collar. They felt that bringing the matter up when only a handful of Villagers were sweating out the summer weather smacked of questionable politics. A petition to either restore the refund schedule or rescind the May 1953 action of the Board was prepared and presented to the Board on August 6, 1953, (Petitioners on list: Adams, Auer, Beerend, Barclay, Brown, Britten, R. Taylor, W. Taylor, G. Tippie, W. A. Tippie, Ward, P. Wood, V. Wood, Calhoun, Davidson, Drummer, Fick, Fuller, Hansen, Haver, Hudson, Kay, Larkin, Maslen, Miles, Muller, Normile, Nutting, Oliver, O'Neil, Roach, Ross, Rothery, Schaefer, Yancey.)

Clark Strohmer attended the protest meetings that followed adoption of the policy. Villagers believed that his no-refund policy was not entirely a conservative financial move but also an attempt to discredit the membership salesman, Elizabeth Nutting.

Ralph Borsodi returned from a trip around the world and analyzed the situation. He urged the Villagers who had signed the August referendum petition also to start a recall petition. The Board of Trustees questioned the necessity for such a petition.

The petition for a referendum on the question of refunds or perhaps a recall would have forced the issue to a quick showdown. Instead, the squabbling escalated.

LAND PROBLEMS

Another financial issue that was brought into the discussion generated by the referendum petition was the purchase of two sections of land, the "Borsodi Forty" and the "Bottomley Twenty." It had always been the AHF policy to buy land only as needed. Fortunately, at that time, they could be reasonably certain that when they were ready to purchase land from the ranchers, it

would still be available.

The mortgage on the "Borsodi Forty" at the north end of the Village was being paid off as land was sold. An option on the "Bottomley Twenty" at the south end of the Village was the issue. The lots were large and designed for agriculture. There was little doubt the mortgage would be paid or that, in dire circumstances, the mortgage would be extended; therefore, it was a phony issue. However, the financial responsibility group cried that a capital assessment would be needed to satisfy obligations.

The whole issue smacked of financial flim-flam. No one was pocketing money, but the new business group was waving budgets and spouting financial terms until the Villagers were in a dither.

The business-oriented group claimed that Elizabeth Nutting was "unbusinesslike," a vague term that the group used without specific definition. Clark Strohmer believed that some of the people who wanted to become members of the Village but did not have the money in hand were really people who wanted to be "taken care of." Elizabeth Nutting felt that if a young couple sincerely wanted to become homesteaders and were willing to work, arrangements should be made for installments or perhaps a loan along with efforts to find work for them.

The group favoring financial accountability questioned the use of the Village station wagon to show prospects around the Village. They also claimed that the use of the station wagon was a tax dodge since they could not show how its use benefited anyone as deduction.

When rumors are spread, proof does not have to follow. The rumor becomes garbled in transmission and the damage is done. Elizabeth Nutting was permitted to resign, and homestead sales plummeted to zero.

The business group also wanted to change the purpose of the community from an intentional community designed to practice homesteading to a conventional sub-division of rock-ribbed, pre-Roosevelt capitalism, no social experimentation, no Utopia, no democracy of the type the anti-new dealers called "socialism."

Elizabeth Nutting then wrote in her broadside "For Your Information" in 1953:

"As a confirmed 'believer' in the practical possibilities of group discussion for turning differences into mutually satisfactory plans, I find the present situation downright frustrating. A difference of opinion develops between a majority of the Trustees on the one hand and a majority of the resident Villagers on the other. There was nothing that a reasonable amount of patience and a few hours of good group thinking couldn't have cleared up; but no- we waste our energy generating heat where light is needed. So what? Is the Village going on the

rocks? Not at all. We are just having growing pains. But we are all neighbors. We all speak the same language and should be able to understand each other. One of these days we will learn how to put our energy, now destructive, to better use!"

PROBLEMS WITH THE MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

The split over the proxy question revealed that an organized opposition to AHF Board policies was operating in the Village. It called itself "The Melbourne Village Betterment League" and chose the membership committee as its next target.

If the American Homesteading Foundation was stripped of its power to select the members of the community, there would be no need for a Membership Committee. Then Melbourne Village could become an open community. AHF would thus lose its one-time tax to fund the Village. The Georgist influence would be wiped out.

By destroying the Membership Committee, the fees derived by Elizabeth Nutting as the membership salesman would also be eliminated. If, by picking off one member of the trio of founding mothers, the opposition could break up the power of the founders, then it could take over that power itself.

The first step in eliminating the Membership Committee was to suggest that it was undemocratic.

So, it was suggested that recruiting for the Village was underhanded. It charged that when a prospect was introduced to the Villagers, the prospect and family were being secretly judged. When you consider that the star salesman who did the introducing happily assumed that everyone was worthy of membership, interested in homesteading and a democratic way of life, this did not seem likely.

It was Clark Strohmer's stated belief that many would-be homesteaders were actually people who were advocates of the welfare state. This was not a point of view acceptable to him as an ultra conservative, rugged individualist. Faith Strohmer, long time member of the Membership Committee, said that she looked for the "kind of people you would like to live with." Faith ruled out Jewish people, black people, and people with foreign names. Mimi Britten later recalled that the Membership Committee was even accused of anti-Semitism. The Membership Committee was always controversial, no matter on which side of the fence your politics belonged.

As the split developed and the more "business oriented" Betterment League arose, the Membership Committee became a battleground. Members who were encouraged to join the founding group were actively opposed by the business group.

In 1954, the Membership Committee was the subject of intense scrutiny. It was suggested that names of all proposed memberships be posted on the Village bulletin board, with enough time allowed for Villagers to voice an objection to the proposed members if they so desired.

A report on the Membership Committee was read. In 1947, of 26 families taken into the AHF, 10 withdrew, leaving a balance of 16 new member families.

In 1948, 39 families were accepted, 15 withdrew, leaving 24 new members.

In 1949, 34 families were accepted, 11 withdrew, leaving 23 new families.

In 1950, 20 families were accepted, 4 withdrew, and 16 remained.

In 1952, 27 families were accepted, 4 withdrew, and 23 remained.

This indicates that the ratio of withdrawals dropped from 40% to 10%

When the Membership Committee finished its statistical report, it introduced an application for membership by Dr. Stella Boyd. Dr. Boyd's credentials were impeccable; she was favored by members of both factions, yet her application was denied. No one can remember why her application became controversial. (In a 1972 interview, Mimi Britten suggested that Dr. Boyd was a strong personality and that certain members of the Village did not want yet another strong, independent, professional woman in the Village.)

The Boyd episode was not closed with the first rejection of her request for membership. Dr. Boyd was the physician to Michael Corrigan's son, and the Corrigan family felt personally injured by the Membership Committee's action. Dr. Boyd withdrew her application and letters of apology were sent. It was even suggested that a delegation should make the trip to Indiana to tender apologies, but Dr. Boyd no longer wanted to become involved in Village life.

The Membership Committee stated that its reason for turning down Dr. Boyd was a newly passed requirement that all prospective members should stand before the Board in person. The same requirement was invoked in the turn-down of the application of Leonard Quinn, former AHF member now living out of the state.

Helen Smith, Clark Strohmer, Mimi and Rollo Britten all spoke too about their disapproval of the "secret" and "underhanded" manner that families who were being considered for membership were informally introduced to the Membership Committee. They felt that the screening should take place formally.

Ralph Borsodi suggested that the moves against membership applications were being made as an aggressive act directed at Dr. Nutting. He stated that the turn-downs were a part of the "Get Elizabeth" campaign.

The result of this controversy was that prospective members did meet the Membership Committee informally as well as formally. Membership is a two-way street; members must decide if they want to join the Village and the AHF reserved the right to decide if prospective members would be cooperative members in a tight community.

The Village opposition group was unanimous in its criticism of the Membership Committee. It wanted fiscal responsibility, racial purity and a middle-class consciousness. The older Village group wanted homesteading, democracy, brotherhood and equality.

Ralph Borsodi followed the growing split in the Village. The problems of the proxies, the membership, the refund on membership and the voting practices were all problems that could have been solved with mediation and discussion.

It was evident that one side, the Betterment League, did not want to solve the problems. It wanted to control the Village and do away with the American Homesteading Foundation. It decided that the method to use in a take over was to eliminate the two remaining founding mothers, Elizabeth Nutting and Virginia Wood. Because of her father's illness, Margaret Hutchinson had to return to Ohio.

The second part of the plan to take over the Village and turn it into an exclusive suburban community, was to drain the treasury of the AHF. The founder's group fought back. Ralph Borsodi analyzed the split at the 1954 Annual Meeting.

THE MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE A COPY OF THE FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

July 26th, 1954

Dear Fellow Member of the A.H.F.

By now you should have received announcement of the formation of the MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE.

One of the aims of the League is to inform A.H.F. members on controversial issues and to make recommendations on these issues with the reasons therefore.

It is hoped you will find the League helpful and, meanwhile you may be interested in the following questions and answers.

Very truly yours,

MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE
R.R. 1, Melbourne, Florida

Operating Committee:
Charles L. Beaman Box 800
Michael A. Corrigan Box 854
A. Harold Peters Box 786
Helen A. Smith Box 770
Clark J. Strohmer Box 802

* * * * *

Pertinent questions with regard to the
MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE

1. What are the purposes of the MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE?

ANSWER

- a. To develop the concerns and interests of its members in respect to Village affairs.
- b. To ensure that every proposal will receive careful, deliberate consideration.
- c. To take such action as will tend to safeguard the rights and promote the interests of our Community.
- d. To keep members informed of current events and to keep their interest alive.

2. Will the establishment of the MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE promote harmony in the Village?

ANSWER

It should be a stimulating move in the right direction in as much as the only interest of its members is in the betterment and improvement of Melbourne Village.

3. Why are Town Meetings not sufficient?

ANSWER

The MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE will co-operate with the Town Meeting. It is believed that in the smaller League meetings there will be a better opportunity for many to express themselves than in the Town Meetings where it is only the articulate few who are heard.

4. Is the MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE a lobby?

ANSWER

It is organized to work for the good of the Village as a whole - not to promote special interests of a few. As a result of discussion the League may make recommendations but each member will act or vote in every instance according to his conscience.

5. Will the MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE support measures designed to implement the ideals on which the Village was founded?

ANSWER

The MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE will endeavor by every available, honorable means to conserve and implement such of the original aims and purposes as have been found by the experience of the members of the A.H.F. to be sound and practicable.

6. Does the League suggest that Village affairs at the present time are being conducted inefficiently, that expediency rules? Are the motives of those in power being questioned?

ANSWER

The concern of the League is solely in having the future display improvement. Hence the name - MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE.

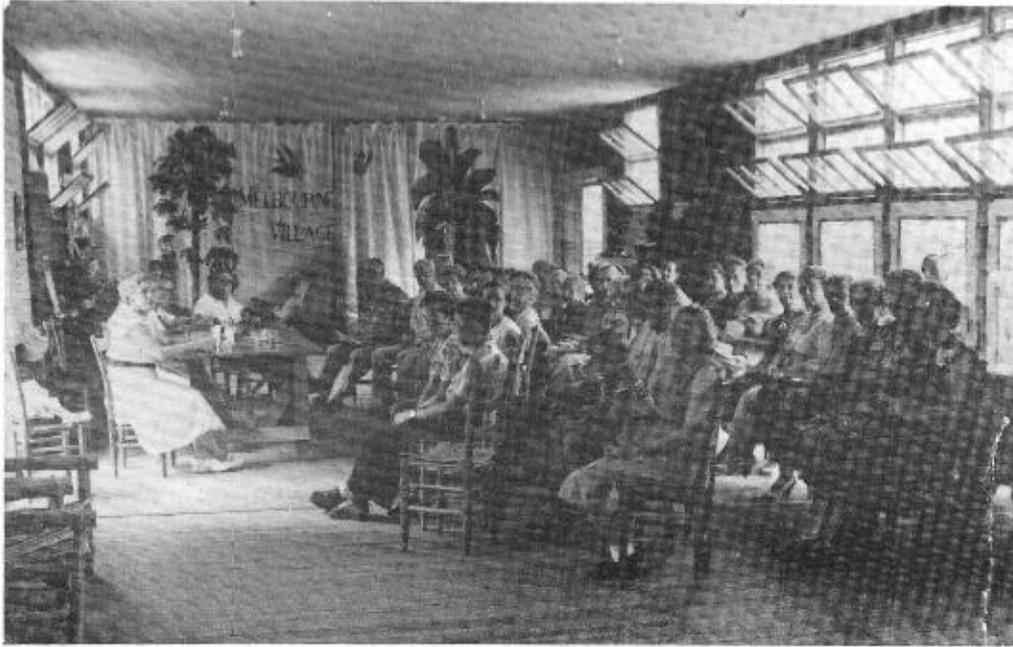
7. What does the League expect to accomplish?

ANSWER

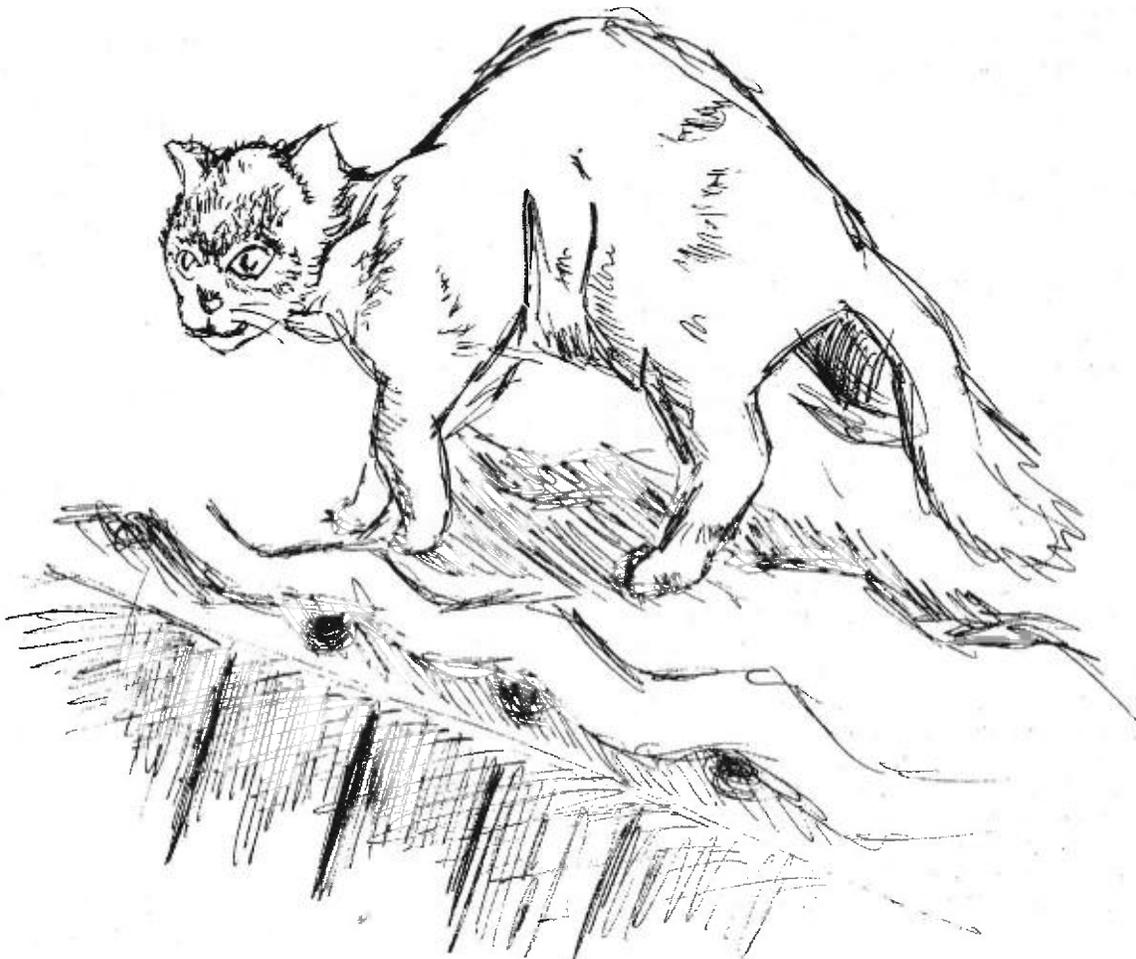
It hopes to bring about:

- a. The consistent observance of orderly and democratic procedures in the conduct of Village affairs.
- b. The elimination of hastily conceived new regulations, or changes in the old regulations, prompted solely by considerations of expediency, short-sighted or otherwise.
- c. Continuous improvement in the operation of our Village to the advantage of all members of the A.H.F.- those who live here and those who are looking forward to living here.

The MELBOURNE VILLAGE BETTERMENT LEAGUE is on record as opposed to indulging in personalities. It will endorse aims and methods it views constructive without regard to the sponsors, provided these aims seem likely to serve the interests of the members of the A. H. F. as a whole, not those of a small group.



Foundation in Session



CHAPTER IX

BORSODI'S ANALYSIS OF THE CONTROVERSY

(Adapted from Ralph Borsodi's July 1954 Speech to AHF Members)

When Claire and I returned from a trip abroad we found intimate friends of ours divided and separated by the differences to which I am going to call your attention. We were astonished and distressed by the bitterness with which one group of our friends was assailing the other. The first problem was to find out what those friends who were being attacked had done to provoke such animosity. It was not easy to find out. We talked to friends on each side; we wrote letters to members who were away from the Village. Even before we were able to form a clear picture of what had happened, we tried to bring about a reconciliation

I hardly know how to label the two groups. Sometimes I think of one of the groups as the administrators, the "Board Block." I found Clark Strohmer more willing to consider the conciliation than any member of his block.

The other block, the one we decided eventually to join, we ought to call the "Wood Block."

All that the Board Block asked me to do personally was to remain neutral; everything, it insisted, was under control. On its side were seven of the nine members of the Board. It contended there had been no trouble in the Village until Virginia stirred it up. If things were permitted to go on without interference, the Board expected Elizabeth Nutting to eventually leave the Village and Virginia Wood to be completely ostracized for the trouble she was causing.

Most of the members have joined the Foundation (AHF) because we wanted to take part in building a more wholesome, neighborly, cooperative, democratic, education-centered community than the average community in America today. Melbourne Village must be finished in accordance with its original idea or it will become no different than the average suburban community which most of us do not like. It must also become what it was intended to become because it has a great responsibility. We may not be aware of the fact, but it is nevertheless true, that all over the country there are families and communities and universities which are watching what is going on in Melbourne Village. What

we do here today will either encourage people from all over the country to build similar communities or will discourage them. We will either inspire people to make themselves independent or make them feel that there is nothing left to do except leave it to big government and big business to decide how we shall live.

THE EVIDENCE BORSODI GATHERED

So much for an introduction. I come now to the record. I propose to spread before you the evidence which I painfully gathered. I am going to make certain recommendations about what I hope the Annual Meeting will do to correct the mistakes and injustices which facts establish are true.

Let me begin with the facts in the case of Leo Quinn. This goes way back to 1952 when one or two members of the Board Block determined to "get" Elizabeth Nutting. It began long before Clark Strohmer was elected to the Board, and before he became President; it has mainly to do with the Membership Committee. Elizabeth submitted Leonard's re-application to the Membership Committee. Leonard was a former member, trustee and secretary. He and his wife had built a home here but left because of her health and her desire to go back to Tennessee. That he had been a hard working Trustee and an excellent Secretary most of us felt to be the truth. Elizabeth pushed his re-application and that proved fatal.

I come now in another item in the program of "getting" Elizabeth Nutting. Early in 1953, Dr. Stella Boyd applied for membership in Melbourne Village. Her application came as a result of extensive correspondence by Elizabeth. It is not necessary to go into details of the matter; it is sufficient to call attention to the fact that the Membership Committee and the Board of Trustees both again turned down a desirable member in the same manner as it had the application of Leonard Quinn for one reason: to put Elizabeth in her place and to show her that she had nothing to do with running the Foundation.

I made considerable efforts to determine if there was anything in the background of Dr. Boyd which justified the refusal to accept her application. I wrote to the

Editor of the "Evansville Daily Courier," to the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, and to the Secretary of the Vandenburg County Medical Society. I have here not only these letters, but others about her. They make it crystal clear that she was, in the words of the by-laws, "qualified because she was socially and financially responsible, and believed wholeheartedly in the principles of Melbourne Village." Let me read just a line from the letter from the Medical Society: "Dr. Boyd enjoys the finest reputation here in Evansville from the standpoint of professional ability and character." Yet, in spite of her qualifications, the Board not only refused to accept her as a member but also based its refusal on the same basis as the Len Quinn case - the illegal addition of the qualification that she must appear in person before the Membership Committee.

So the Board turned down a prospective member who enjoys one of the finest reputations in Evansville. In addition to losing Dr. Boyd's \$500 membership fee, the AHF had to pay \$330 to buy back the lot she had purchased from Lee Bauer, for a total loss of \$830 to the Foundation. The interests of the Village had been sacrificed to the business of disciplining Elizabeth.

THE UPKEEP ALLOWANCE

I come now to another item on the program of "getting" Elizabeth. A year ago, at the last Annual Meeting, a resolution was introduced by Mr. McKnight to save AHF \$50 a month by abolishing the upkeep allowance for Elizabeth's use of a station wagon, donated by Virginia, to show prospects around the Village in her job as Membership Director. Since McKnight lives in the Village only a few months each winter, he is unfamiliar with the details of Foundation business. He was told about the station wagon and the upkeep allowance but not that the so-called "upkeep allowance" was never an allowance at all but really a part of Elizabeth's modest salary. It was called an allowance for income tax purposes only, therefore, nothing would be saved by abolishing it. Whether those who whispered to Mr. McKnight about this matter knew the facts, I do not know. He has refused to reveal who they were and they are hiding behind his protection. What they plainly did know was that a successful businessman like Mr. McKnight would favor abolishing what looked like an extravagance when everybody was being told that the Foundation was facing a financial crisis. Those who misinformed him about Elizabeth's salary made not the slightest effort to correct the misinformation. They continued to hide behind Mr. McKnight's denial that the resolutions were written by them and signed by him. They have not hesitated to use his denial for the purpose of impugning the good faith of Virginia Wood.

Nothing was done about the resolution, but its effect was to create the impression of waste and extravagance and later gave rise to the nastiest controversy in the whole series of nasty controversies.

At the meeting of the Board of Trustees on May 7th, immediately after the Annual Meeting, the Board asked Clark Strohmer to consider reducing expenses, giving

particular attention, and I quote from the Minutes, "to the possible curtailment of staff." At a special meeting ten days later, he recommended that as of June 1, 1953, the position of Village Superintendent be abolished.

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

There are two things to which I wish to call attention. The first is that this was a culminating event in spreading the tale that the Village faced a financial crisis which the new administration had inherited from the founders. If this were the case, it was a bad reflection upon the old idealistic management and a good reflection upon the new administration for solving it.

I made a careful investigation of the facts of this alleged emergency, and there was no word of truth in it. In June, 1953, the Foundation had \$6,795.75 in cash. Current bills were not at all unusual. There was only one large commitment of \$3,000, but that wasn't due for nearly a year. Those to whom the money was to be paid had already stated that if it wasn't convenient for the Foundation to pay it at that time, they would be glad to extend the contract. Nevertheless, the story of financial emergency was seditiously spread throughout the Village.

The second thing to which I wish to call to your attention is a matter of manners. Bert Kay, then our Village Superintendent, was asked to resign without notice. Why should a supposedly model community resort to such tactics? Bert Kay very properly insisted that he should receive customary notice for what the Minutes referred to as "curtailment of staff."

Now, what was the basis of this so-called financial crisis? The matter really goes back to 1950 when Norman Lund was still the business manager of the Foundation. He urged the Foundation to buy land to be laid out in larger plots for members who wanted to farm and keep livestock. He sold us all on the desirability of the 40 acres which came to be known as the "Borsodi 40."

The Board didn't have the money with which to buy the acreage. Claire and I had a special interest in the matter. We wanted a little additional land on the north because our house was close to the boundary line of the Village.

Mr. Lund appealed to us for help, and we (Claire and I) agreed to advance the money at the same 5% rate which the Foundation had paid on a previous land purchase. The terms on which we advanced the money did not even obligate the Village to repay it; it merely gave the option to do so. Claire and I could have been stuck with 40 acres of land at the back end of the Village. This contract became the basis for innuendos spread all over the Village about a "Borsodi Mortgage." The fact that there wasn't a Borsodi mortgage didn't prevent the Board Block from telling every newcomer that the mortgage would become due in March of this year. Because we were in Asia, it was easy to twist the facts.

This left newcomers who did not know us fearful that we might cut up the land into 25-ft. lots and use the Village private roads for access to them.

Nearly a year before the contract expired, Mike Corrigan, the Treasurer of the Foundation, had written to us about the matter, and we had replied from Paris that if the Foundation could not raise the money, we would be glad to extend the contract. This was concealed from the whole Village.

Clearly, if the truth had been told, it would have been obvious that there was no financial emergency, no justification for driving membership director Elizabeth Nutting into resigning, and, finally, no financial crisis inherited by the new business group from the old.

THE LAST STRAW

Late in June, Elizabeth was finally driven to resign. I have mentioned two of the repeated humiliations to which she was subjected in order to drive her into resignation. Let me tell you about the incident which proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. Early in June, Elizabeth made the effort to clear the way for Dr. Cox and his wife to become members. The Cox's wanted to build a minimum house, only partially finished inside, because they were planning extensive travel and wanted to live in the Village only part of the year in the beginning. Elizabeth took up the matter with Clark Strohmer, Chairman of the Board, and Commissioner Bill Fisher who happened to be in the office at that time. She approved his suggestion and said she would write to Dr. Cox advising him. However, Clark said, "No, just bring Cox's letter to me, and I will take care of the whole matter." Here you have the Membership Director of the Foundation, who has been carrying on its correspondence with prospects for seven years, being told that she wasn't even permitted to write letters.

I have made a careful analysis of what the resignation of Elizabeth and the substitution of volunteer selling by her critics has cost the Foundation. The Len Quinn affair cost the Foundation \$750; the Dr. Boyd affair cost an additional \$830.

When Claire and I returned from abroad and learned about how sales in the Village had fallen off, we were told by Mike Corrigan that the Board Block did not care if a single sale were made for a whole year if it took that long to clean up the "mess" that it had inherited. The Foundation, he continued, is now being run by men and women who are proud of having been businessmen and women. The dreamers and the visionaries now have nothing to say about how the Board shall run the Village. The files are in excellent shape, the books are better kept than ever before, but the enthusiasm which brought us all together and which sold 144 memberships, has diminished.

THE BUSINESS MESS

Maybe there was a mess in the office to be cleaned up. I'm willing to take Mike's word for it. I spent 25 years of my life as a consulting economist to some of the biggest businesses in America. There isn't one successful businessman I ever met who wouldn't have called in a psychiatrist if anyone working for him had suggested that he shut down his sales department for a year while the filing and bookkeeping were brought up to date. I'm for good filing and for bookkeeping but I cannot avoid the feeling that this whole business isn't businesslike at all.

While all this was going on, Virginia Wood was back with her family in Dayton. She left a few days after the Annual Meeting and did not return until the middle of July. This fact is important because up until this time, the unfriendly behavior of the Board Block had been restricted to Elizabeth. When Virginia returned, she discovered that she was not alone in her feelings about the manner in which Elizabeth had been treated and in which the Board Block had dealt with the Foundation. She joined hands with the group that was protesting the abolition of refunds. What happened then was illuminating. Emboldened by its success in getting rid of Elizabeth, one of the founders, the Block decided it could destroy Virginia's influence and so get rid of her also. When Claire and I refused to remain neutral, we, too, became targets.

Virginia was secretary to the AHF corporation, but the Board next locked the files. The secretary, who was by law responsible for the papers of the corporation, was denied access to them without permission of the president. Nearly all the duties of the secretary were taken from her.

All her protests to the Board about the high handed methods of dealing with the Village were labeled "trouble making." Her opposition to the abolition of refunds was bitterly resented by the Board. What the Block was trying to do became clear. When Virginia announced that the time had come for her to give up her position as trustee, and that she would not run again at the expiration of her present term, one of the members of the Block boasted gleefully to visiting members that they had finally gotten rid of "both of those women."

THE CHARGES AGAINST VIRGINIA

At the meeting of the Board on August 20th, the drive against Virginia reached its climax. Helen Smith read a lengthy statement to the Board. It was ostensibly a request that Clark Strohmer withdraw his resignation as President, but it was in reality an indictment of Virginia. It accused her of creating false impressions for the purpose of the Board. The four specific accusations against her had been carefully prepared. After the reading, since it requested Clark to withdraw his resignation, all the members of the Board, except Virginia and Clark, signed it.

The first accusation has to do with a letter from which Virginia read parts at a meeting at the home of Eleanor Ross when Clark was present. Speaking of the reading of that letter, the accusation against her states: "The impression created by these excerpts was completely false and erroneous," rather strong language from someone who could have seen the letter from which Virginia read. I have the original letter here; I happen to know the member who wrote it quite intimately. I have carried on a lengthy correspondence with him in an effort to get him to let me use his name. There are professional reasons which prevent him from doing so. But as a result of reading the letter, and as a result of my own correspondence with him, I can tell you in the most unequivocal language, there is not the slightest reason for accusing Virginia of anything false or erroneous in connection with it.

The second accusation reads as follows: "Among these false impressions (from the letter) was that valuable prospective members were not accepted." The Boyd case was used as an example and the Quinn case as a precedent for that.

The truth about the matter is that the Membership Committee DID turn down desirable members to humiliate Elizabeth and the Board supported the Committee. Virginia did not create any false impressions about the matter. All she did was try to stop these arbitrary decisions.

The third accusation my investigation showed to be equally groundless. It reads as follows: "Another false impression created was that the membership director was forbidden to tell a member about his rights." In fact, Elizabeth was forbidden by the Chairman of the Membership Committee to notify Lee Bauer that he could sell his lot to Dr. Boyd if he first notified the Board that he had had an offer from her and AHF did not buy it back from him instead.

Julia Lee Fisher was then the Chairman of the Membership Committee. She herself told Virginia about the matter and explained her actions by saying, "Of course I said that, but you can't imagine how provoked I was at the time."

The fourth accusation had to do with the McKnight resolution to abolish the allowance for Elizabeth's use of the AHF station wagon. It reads as follows: "A third false impression was conveyed by reading what seemed to be an excerpt from a letter, said to be written by a member, stating that the McKnight resolution presented at the Annual Meeting had not been written by Mr. McKnight." The impression given was that one or more Villagers had instigated the resolution and had persuaded Mr. McKnight to allow his name to be used.

BORSODI'S SUGGESTIONS

No such charges should be made about a member of the Board without giving him or her notice that charges are to be made and a chance to be heard. Yet the fact

remains that Virginia was faced with these charges. They were presented to the Board and immediately accepted without her even being asked to make a reply. Recriminations are futile but I have called your attention to these matters because I believe we can do something about them.

I have four suggestions to make that I believe we should all consider together. I hope that you will appoint a committee of members-at-large to investigate and bring back a prompt report to all members.

1. That Elizabeth Nutting be authorized to extend to Dr. Boyd, in the name of the Foundation, the regrets of the Annual Meeting for the manner in which her application was handled and also to extend to her on its behalf a cordial invitation to re-submit her application. Virginia, after trying again, unsuccessfully, to get her application by correspondence, feels that it would be desirable to make a personal call upon her. Expenses for doing so should be defrayed by the Foundation.

2. That all references in the Minutes of the Foundation directed at Virginia Wood, even though she is not named in them, be crossed out from the Minutes. The minutes should record the regrets of the Annual Meeting that such an indictment had been made without notice to her and without giving her an opportunity for a hearing before they were accepted by the Board.

3. That in order to avoid, as far as possible, any repetition of the abuse of power by the Membership Committee and by the Board of Trustees, the by-laws of the Foundation be amended at this meeting so that the powers of the Board, the officers and committees be clarified.

4. That the Annual Meeting adopt a motion that no member or no committee may appoint or nominate himself, itself, or any member of such a committee to any position or office in the Foundation.

This has been a long statement, yet I have presented to you only a small part of the evidence which justifies the recommendations that I have just submitted to you. There is one additional matter which I must discuss in closing.

Some of you, I know, have been made very suspicious of all actions involved, but I would like to make it crystal clear that there is only one thing I could get out of winning your support for this recommendation. When I started, I said that I believed in the Village and thought that it was at a crossroads. If we take the wrong road, Melbourne Village will eventually become merely a suburb of the City of Melbourne. What would happen if we take the road I believe we should take?

I am not a candidate for office. Virginia or Elizabeth have authorized me to say that they would not under any circumstances accept the job of Membership Director. I believe the Foundation under their

leadership did a magnificent job. Their accomplishment is one of which they well can be proud. They started Melbourne Village on its way. The rest is up to us.

The reaction to Borsodi's speech was stunning. His extensive knowledge of the actions of the "Business Block" as revealed in his speech meant that there were many informers in the group. The pressure was so intense that a few members broke down and cried. One of the chief scalywags in the "Business Block" was delighted with the havoc. Years later he chuckled as he retold the story.

The results of this denouncement were sweeping. Borsodi decided to leave the area and move on to new

fields. The "founding mothers" withdrew; however, through their many friendships, they retained both prestige and power in the Village.

As time passed, many members of the "Business Block" mellowed and became staunch defenders of the ideals of the American Homesteading Foundation.

Neither the American Homesteading Foundation nor the Town of Melbourne Village has ever requested that a park, a street, or even a tree be named for Ralph Borsodi.



CHAPTER X

CONVULSIVE GROWTH

FROM "THE VILLAGER" NEWSLETTER - 1956

Melbourne Village has had its busiest year in history. You no doubt know that Florida is increasing its population at a fantastic rate; the Village shares this influx of people. Many of our new members learn about us from friends who are already members. Interest in Melbourne Village increases in proportion to our existing membership. Our area is the launching site for the Satellites...since the announcement that that little basketball would be sent hurtling toward the outer atmosphere from Cape Canaveral, about twenty miles north of here, Brevard County has been in convulsive growth.

The hundreds of new workers from the Cape and Patrick Air Force Base are desperate for housing; there is pressure for more adequate home financing and mortgage money is scarce. More classrooms are needed, more roads and bridges are needed. Everybody is busy, and everybody is prosperous. In Melbourne, at least a half dozen churches are building, and there is a drive for a new hospital. A fine new auditorium has just been completed at the new high school.

There has been a great change westward from Melbourne toward Melbourne Village. Down every side road are new houses; new businesses are springing up along Kissimmee Highway. The latest talk has to do with Melbourne expansion. The Melbourne City Commission has voted for annexation west and south. Most rural residents are rural because they want to be and they object violently to taking on the burden of city taxes. It is too soon to say what the Village will do, perhaps incorporate itself, or become a part of a West Melbourne town. Most of us would like to go on as we have, but it is obvious that we cannot.

INCORPORATION - FROM A FLYER ACCOMPANYING NEWSLETTER BY WILLIAM FISHER

About the middle of the summer of 1956, there began to be a discussion of the possibility that Melbourne Village might be absorbed into a larger area, whether Melbourne or West Melbourne. Subsequently the City of Melbourne, with a population of less than 10,000, let it be known that it was not its intention to include Melbourne Village in the proposed annexation, but it did intend to attempt annexation of an area west to Campbell Road, just east of the Village.

This threatened absorption of the West Melbourne area brought about the formation of the West Melbourne Committee for the express purpose of preventing Melbourne from carrying out the proposed annexation. The West Melbourne Committee decided that the best way to prevent absorption by Melbourne was to incorporate its own area. Incorporation would mean that Melbourne could not take in the West Melbourne area without the consent of the latter. The group also secured the services of a professional public relations man. His services were so effective that the vote on annexation in West Melbourne failed to pass, and therefore Melbourne was unable to annex the West Melbourne area.

While the city claimed it did not intend to annex Melbourne Village, the proposed West Melbourne incorporation did include the Village. At one point, the Villagers were not sure whether they would be absorbed by Melbourne or West Melbourne. The Melbourne Village Advisory and Planning Committee had many discussions as to the proper procedure to insure the continued independence of the Village. It was decided to call a meeting of freeholders living within the boundaries of the Village. At this freeholders meeting, the following committee was elected and instructed to proceed with the incorporation of the Village into a municipality: Messrs. Britten, Howell, Fuller, Goode, Manweiler, Strohmmer, Fisher, and Wood.

The chairman of the the Committee was instructed to contact Mr. Walter Hayward of Indialantic to ask him to speak to a Melbourne Village freeholders' meeting on incorporation. Mr. Hayward had been very active in the incorporation of Indialantic and is considered an authority on the procedure. The committee also realized that it was necessary to have legal advice and employed Mr. William H. Gleason of Indialantic who handled the incorporation of other Florida cities and so was familiar with the steps necessary to get the proper legislation through Tallahassee. Mr. Gleason was employed with the understanding that he was to be paid a retainer fee of \$250, that he was to become the attorney for the new municipality, and that the actual expenses of incorporation would be borne by the incorporators.

There were many discussions about the feasibility of incorporating enough territory outside the Village to include 150 registered voters and thus proceed with incorporation at once. By the time discussions had



Board Meeting 1951—Front Row; Rev. William Reece, Helen Newcomb, Ferdinand Fick. Back Row; George Tynan, Professor Horton, Bert Kay.

reached this stage, it became apparent that the better way to approach incorporation would be through the next legislature.

On November 6, 1956, a freeholder's meeting voted unanimously to approve the recommendation of the committee that Melbourne Village be incorporated under a Special Act in the 1957 Legislature. This same freeholder's meeting instructed the Committee to find ways and means of financing the incorporation and to study the recommended boundaries of the proposed municipality. Later the board of trustees agreed to underwrite the expense of the incorporation.

At a meeting of the freeholders on December 14, 1956, it was voted to include in our proposed municipality the present boundaries of Melbourne Village, plus a strip on the west side of Dayton Boulevard, 302 feet in depth running from the south boundary of our Bottomley 40 to the Kissimmee Highway. Mr. Gleason was instructed to draw up the charter for the proposed municipality based on a commission - mayor form of government.

On Friday, February 8, 1957, this charter, a 65 page document, was presented to a meeting of the freeholders and the highlights of the charter were explained by Mr. Gleason. This discussion resulted in the passing of two motions. One limited the tenure of office of each commissioner to two consecutive terms. The other approved the appointment of an interim commission to serve from the date of incorporation until the first election in October, 1957. The interim commissioners will be Britten, Manweiler, Strohmmer, Fisher, Mrs. Wood, and Mrs. Haines.

An important meeting of the freeholders is scheduled for Friday, March 1, 1957, at which time we hope to have present Douglas Denford from Sanford and State Representative Richard Muldrew of Melbourne, the two men who will be responsible for getting the act of incorporation through the legislature.

MELBOURNE VILLAGE BECOMES INCORPORATED CLARK STROHMER (WRITTEN FOR "THE VILLAGER")

The new town of Melbourne Village consists geographically of the six sections of the town originally platted as the American Homesteading Foundation, plus a narrow strip of land on the west side of Dayton Boulevard, extending to the Kissimmee Highway northward to the sixth section.

The approval of our petition and charter by the State Legislature provided for a set of appointed commissioners to serve as temporary commissioners. These were the persons serving on the freeholders' committee.

The October election determined the seven to become commissioners as provided in the charter.

Immediately following the elections, one of these commissioners was selected as Mayor Commissioner. Regular meetings are held each month following the regular town meeting held by the American Homesteading Foundation. This schedule permits the Town Commission to refer subjects or suggestions to it while the matter is still fresh.

Presently the commissioners are considering various aspects of zoning and revenues. From these studies, it is anticipated that recommendations for the preparation and presentation of the ordinances pertaining to these matters will be made soon. With the enactment of town laws, policies will become established and the necessary enforcement provisions carried forward. In all probability there will result the election of certain persons with such positions as tax assessor, tax collector, treasurer, zoning board members, building inspectors, and law enforcement officers. It is the hope of the commission that whatever it enacts benefits the citizens of the town as a whole and that these acts will not be burdensome but will contribute to a most healthy state of community living.

THE 1958 REPORT FROM CLARK STROHMER

A new office building was built and occupied May 1. With membership approval, a section of our roads has been blacktopped, namely the east half of South Drive, Hammock Road to Live Oak, Live Oak to Acacia. Some progress has been made in developing a system of walks in the Village. (Some villagers who preferred marl and shell roads objected.) Two foot bridges have been built by the Village and one by an individual. The policy of mowing the parks as a fire preventive and for beautification has been continued.

The Town Meeting has increased the price of lots by \$300 each, with a special increase of lots over an acre in the Northeast 40.

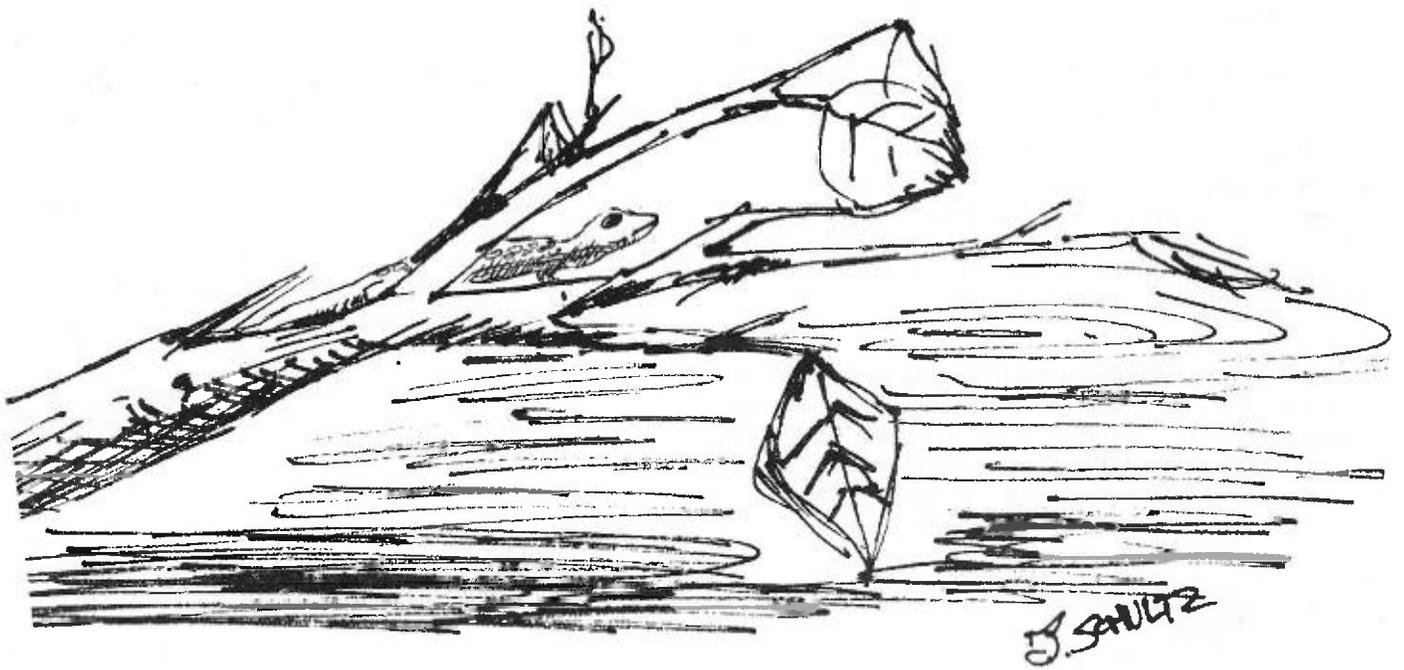
Throughout the year, the construction of homes has increased steadily. There are now about 160 homes built or under construction. About 20 lots remain unsold. Fewer memberships have come in than was expected in last year's budget, and there was a corresponding curtailment of some activities. Plans are being worked out for the 12th annual meeting.

The Village has had its customary celebrations and functions...July 4th, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and New Year's. The July 4th celebration was usually the day at the pool and the nearby picnic area. Thanksgiving Day was a Village celebration held at the Village Hall. The women cooked turkeys at home and Charles Haines came by and sliced the turkeys. The children always had a Halloween party, although they also enjoyed their "Trick or Treat." The Women's Guild has continued to be very active. The nursery school continues to function.

The Village has been incorporated through action of the state legislature. This change presents an opportunity for enforcement which we have not had in the past. It should be made clear that the incorporation does not directly affect the American Homesteading Foundation, which continues to own property and sell memberships and lots. However, certain functions, particularly the Building and Grounds Committee, will

be taken over by the town of Melbourne Village.

The year 1958 marked the attempt by the Village hydroponic garden to market carnations by air to New York City. Several 'villagers' invested in a herd of chinchillas, a project which took a lot of time and brought no profit.





Ralph Borsodi addresses members of the American Homesteading Foundation at the Annual Meeting Banquet, March 1950. (photo by Sterling Hawks)



Villagers gather for a Fish Fry. The old Village Hall is in the background.

CHAPTER XI

THE NEW VILLAGE HALL

When the question developed in 1963 of how to spend the money from membership fees in the AHF, priority was given to building a Village Hall.

The founding mothers, Elizabeth Nutting and Virginia Wood, did not favor draining the AHF treasury. Virginia felt that the large sum of money in the bank had been one of the reasons behind the split. As long as the AHF had control of the money, it also had political clout. The second group viewed the money like envious children; its goal was to spend the money, drain the treasury, and reduce the effectiveness of the AHF.

Elizabeth Nutting felt that the original hall had certain advantages. The location was excellent, and outdoor recreation facilities such as the swimming pool, the children's pool, and picnic tables were already in place. Borsodi advocated festivals, parties, dances, plays and musicals. The hall was the center of these activities, as well as providing space for lectures, demonstrations and movies. The will of the new group was exercised, and a new hall was built. Rhoderick Taylor was the architect. The following speech was made at the 1963 dedication by Virginia Wood. In it she voices an important change in the thinking of the founders...

"We were motivated by the desire to make available to ourselves and others the opportunity to live a certain kind of good life." This is a change from the original statement, "The purposes of the said community are to establish homesteading groups to provide therewith opportunities for those to study the principles and practices and further possibilities of modern homesteading." In her dedication speech on December 8, 1963, Virginia Wood recalled: "Fellow members, no one has time to listen to all the tales I would like to tell. Fortunately for you, I do not have time to tell them. So I will pick, at random, a few snapshots out of my memory."

PICTURE NO.1

"Time: 1946, Dayton, Ohio. A small group of friends are sitting in front of a fireplace. We have known each other for more than ten years. We are all country-minded. We all believe that it is easier and cheaper for a group to acquire and develop land for

homes in the country than it is for families to do this separately, and above all we believe that life has some very interesting possibilities in a planned community. So we were well prepared to give heed to a project Elizabeth Nutting was suggesting. Dr. Norman Lennington, of Chicago, suggested that she lead a group of colonists to Florida and there set up a non-profit, democratically-planned community. He knew the land. It sounded interesting, and we overcame our skepticism long enough to take a look at it. Pret and Ashley Miles and I decided to go on a scouting tour with Elizabeth."

PICTURE NO.2

We are in Florida; we are driving west on Kissimmee Highway, with Dr. Lennington and Locke Davidson. We have passed Minton's Corners and go on and on, to the edge of St. Johns Valley, to a spot at the south of the Police Foundation. The trees are few and scattered; the ground seems very low. We do not know much about Florida, but this does not seem enough. We go back to the hotel disappointed.

PICTURE NO. 3

Going west again. Dr. Lennington had located higher land, and its owner, Elton Hall, is with us. This time we go north of Kissimmee Highway, through a gate, to a two-rut road for a half mile, north to a narrow primitive bridge; no roads but large and beautiful palms and pines, a large open space, and a jungle-like area. We have found our way into the Hammock, known now as the Deer Head hammock. We look at each other and whisper, "This is it!"

PICTURE NO. 4

The next day Pret and Ashley Miles are resting, so Liz and I decide to picnic on our property. But Mr. Hall sees us as we are about to go out, and he says, "I hope that you do not plan to go out to the property by yourselves, as it might not be safe. The road is pretty rough; the bridge is very narrow and has no railing; the cows are rather wild; and you might get lost." We weren't afraid, but to please him we ate our lunch on the ocean shore instead.

Some months later in Dayton again. Frank Breen, owner of the lot between the Ficks and the Flynns on Savannah Drive, is talking to us about his interest in Melbourne. He approves of the property but he says we must try to get the 40 acres lying east of Dayton Boulevard. Mr. Hall has reluctantly agreed to sell it for \$4,000. We tell him that almost all of our money, collected from sales to date, has been spent on the first 80 acres. Mr. Breen tells us he will try to borrow the money from a friend of his in Bloomington, Illinois, who has a reputation for helping people.

PICTURE NO. 5

Miss Vera Snow did lend our corporation the money, secured only by the raw land. In gratitude for her generosity, I proposed naming that part of the Village, "Snow Acres." Like some other of my suggestions, that one was voted down as most inappropriate to Florida.

We budgeted a quick repayment of the loan by setting aside 33 1/3 of all income for that purpose, and so owned 40 acres free and clear inside of 18 months. Frank Breen has been one of our very helpful non-resident members. Another one is Louise Odiorne. It was she who laid out our 360 acres, making the most of our natural features, which is the reason this community has so many aspects of a park.

PICTURE NO. 6

October, 1947. Alice Carr came to the Village to make plans for her house; we were very proud when she joined us. We loved her for herself, but her name gave us prestige among those who knew her for her career. She was the guest of Hutch and Elizabeth, and the possessor of two 16 x 16 government cabins on the lots at Hammock and South Drive. The cabins had no windows, no electricity, and no well. Alice taught us how to carpet with pine needles, how to make a fire place for the cooking with sand, in fact, how to pioneer. Her skills were a real help during the period in which we collected the necessities for a decent living.

Katie Smith, now Reece, came from Boston to live in a similar cabin on lot 20, and the Newcombs were living in my unfinished house, while they built theirs on West Pine Road. Pioneers all! We knew that some few pioneers would undergo the discomfort in order that someone would be here to greet the prospects, or there would never be a Melbourne Village.

PICTURE NO. 7

April 1948. Alice Carr moved into her house, still incomplete. One night she hears the newspaper draperies rattle and she turns the flashlight towards the noise. There, in the glassless, frameless opening, with dark night behind him, is a huge bull's head. The bull and Alice stare at each other and the bull slowly withdraws.

Which one was the most frightened, the bull or Alice?

PICTURE NO. 8

Norman Lund, made manager of the Village at Frank Breen's suggestion, is directing the grading of the south drive in the Hammock Road. We are sorrowing over the sight of a bulldozer pushing over trees, and we ask him to leave the huge pine in the island in front of Margaret Hutchinson's house on Hammock Road. He tells us he is going to leave it, not because he thinks trees ought to be left in the middle of the road, but because it would cost too much to remove it.

PICTURE NO. 9

Pitch fork raised over my head, I am chasing a herd of 20 cows over the meadow, and Mr. Lund is trying to stop me. He is greatly disturbed, partly because the cows may turn on me, but mostly because he doesn't want the owner of the land to be irritated to the point of refusing to deal with us on the eighty acres across the East Canal.

PICTURE NO. 10

Spring of '49. Melbourne Village has some large areas of palmettoes, making it difficult to show lots to prospects and discouraging to any one who wanted to garden or build. A bushwacker was clearing these spots, tearing out shrubs and even six inch pines - a homemade machine, a forerunner of those working here for the power and light company. The worst cattle fire came in the early spring (they burned the grass so the cattle could eat the tender green shoots that came up after the fire) and this day, one was roaring down on us from the northeast. In desperation, the bushwacker was brought to the scene and braving the blaze, it lay low a fire break strip. It was nip and tuck, and the bushwacker was scorched. Would the fire jump the strip? It did not! The Village was saved. It may be hard to believe now, but some of our most warming social events were gathering with buckets and rakes and shovels to fight those fires. How mad some of us were when the men announced women would stay out of the front lines."

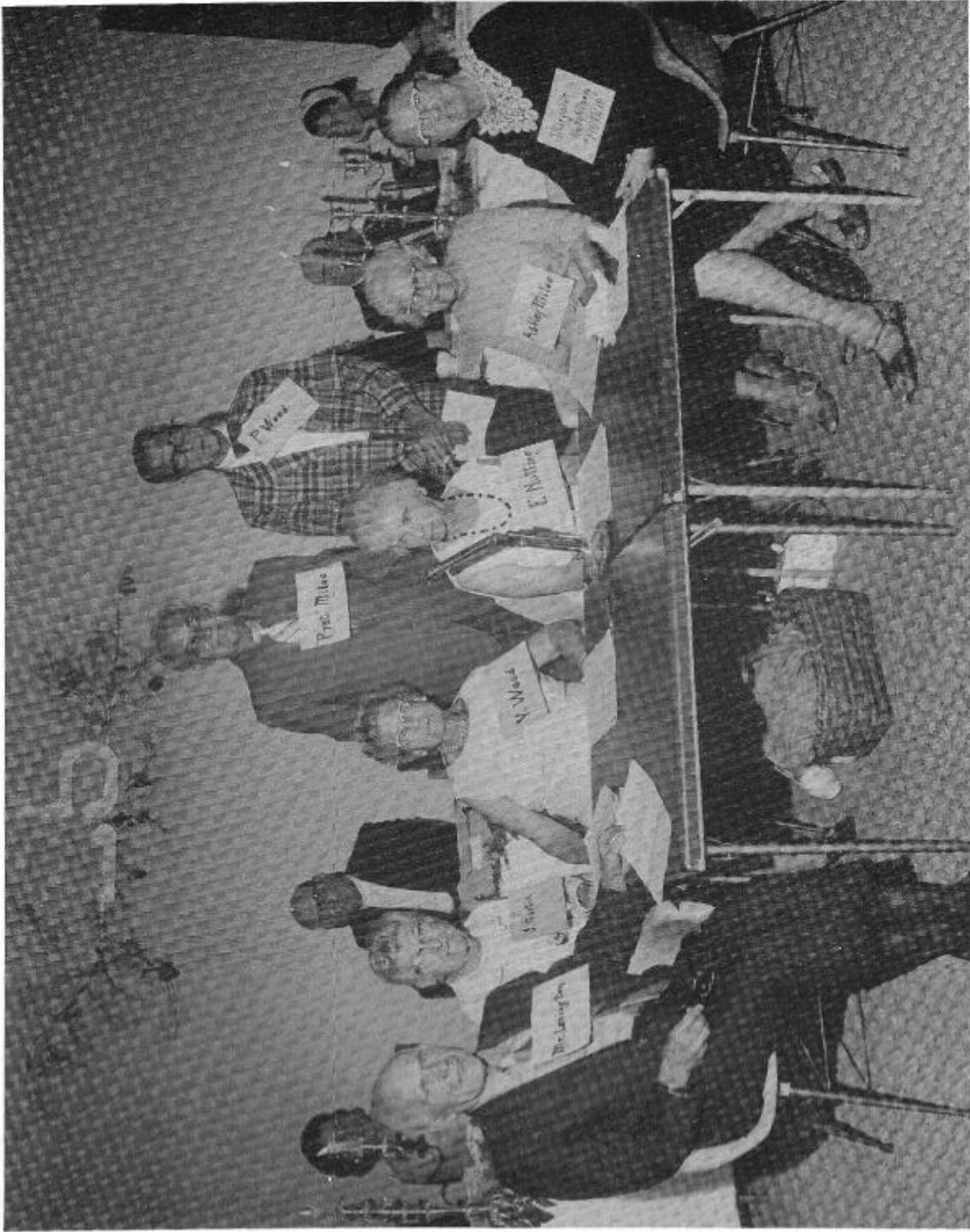
These are just early pictures of our early days. You may wonder how, with such beginnings, we arrived at our present state of civilization. Little by little we grew or rather decision by decision we grew, because our present conditions have been created by the will of the majority. If there is anything we like, or don't like, about Melbourne Village we must hold the majority responsible for it. I believe we have reached this measure of success because we have been governed by very democratic by-laws, from the time they were adopted at our first annual meeting. Gertrude Martin, Pret and Ashley Miles, and the so-called "Founding Mothers," Margaret Hutchinson, Elizabeth Nutting, and myself, were the chief authors of those by-laws, but

many of the members helped to write them as they joined the group, and put their shoulders to the wheel.

And why did we go to all this trouble? It was because we were motivated by the desire to make available to ourselves and others the opportunity to live a certain kind of good life, for this we need a large parcel of land

with many trees and an open space; a form of government in which we could all participate; private homes and land, public buildings, parks and roads. And one by one these have all been fulfilled until now we are gathered here to dedicate this building in which we can continue to search for the good, the beautiful, and the true.





At the 25th Anniversary of the AHF (1971), the villagers re-enacted the events leading to their discovery of the site for Melbourne village. Forrest Fuller is playing the part of Mr. Lennington, William Newcomb is playing the part of Pret Miles, and Helen Smith is playing the part of Margaret Huthinson.

CHAPTER XII

A REVIEW OF VILLAGE LIFE

In recognition of the fact that there were two factions in Melbourne Village, one led by Virginia Wood and the other by Helen Smith, Helen was asked to give her own version of the chronological highlights of the history of the American Homesteading Foundation. The style is lean and sparse, as unadorned as Helen Smith. The short sentences are almost pugnacious.

The organizational meeting of the AHF was held in Dayton, Ohio, July 25, 1946. Among those present were: Virginia Wood, Elizabeth Nutting, Margaret Hutchinson, Gertrude Martin, Louise Odiorne, and Shirley Miles.

The first annual meeting was held in Dayton; the first land north of the main canal between east and west canal was purchased. Louise Odiorne had begun the layout of the village. Forty acres east of Dayton Boulevard were bought.

Dayton Boulevard was made a public road, Virginia's house was finished and the Newcombs were living in it. 32 lots were selected.

Temporary houses were moved from the Banana River Naval Air Station to the Village.

Cottages were built near the Kissimmee Highway for the benefit of the prospective members. Banana River Naval Air Base was reactivated as Patrick Air Force Base. Sixty chairs were purchased at \$2.95 each. The swimming pool was built. Kitchen equipment was installed in the community hall. Mr. Jesseph resigned as President and Mr. Tippie was elected.

The east 80 acres were bought from Mr. Platt.

THIRD ANNUAL MEETING

New names included Beaman, Chartier, Blackwelder, Fish, Kay, Stutzman, Manthey. Large sums of money have been spent to bushwack

palmettoes. (A grinder was purchased to convert brush to composting material.) An estimated one hundred fifty thousand dollars has been invested in homes.

Arrangements are made to buy land west of Dayton Boulevard. The Credit Union was established. It was decided that no "For Sale" signs would be allowed on the homes or lots.

Held in improved village hall. Thirty-five finished homes ... 4 under construction ... 100 memberships reported.

Katie Smith married Bill Reece.

FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING - June 23-25, 1950 .

The Board of Trustees decides that owners who rent be responsible for their tenants conforming to the rules of the AHF.

FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING - 1950-51 - The artificial lake was completed.

Cap Fick acted as temporary Village Manager.

Northeast 40 acres bought (around Cajeput Circle).

SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING - May 11, 1952.

The curtains were handpainted by Marian (Mimi) Britten.

147 memberships reported - 75 homes built.

Crane Creek Drainage Bonds paid off.

Bert Kay, Village Manager.

During the next year, they purchased the Bottomley 40, the land west of Dayton Boulevard.

SEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING - 1953.

Made an assessment of \$3 a month.

In 1953 a Road and Ditch District was established in order to get a new bridge on Dayton Blvd.

Cap Fick elected President.

ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING - 1957.

The present office building was completed. 213 members.

First black top road was laid.

The Town of Melbourne Village was incorporated. The AHF loaned the Town of Melbourne Village \$1350 for two years.

TWELTH ANNUAL MEETING - March 1, 2, 1958.

228 full memberships reported

Clark Strohmer elected President.

1959 - Forest Fuller, President.

1960 - Alvin Walker, Jr., President.

1962 - Approval of the Village, by referendum, to build a new Community Hall.

1963 - Completion and dedication of a new Community Hall.

Membership 260.



Clark Stohmer and Faith Strohmer at the Twenty-fifth anniversary. Clark Strohmer was a leader of the "Betterment League" and served a term as Mayor of the Town of Melbourne Village.

CHAPTER XIII

ERNA NIXON

"There is wisdom in preserving some of the wilderness beauty for future generations," was the philosophy of naturalist and preservationist Erna Nixon. It was Erna Nixon's determined faith and gentle, firm approach that saved the hammock in Melbourne Village.

In 1946 the first settlers of Melbourne Village accepted solemn stewardship for the two hammocks in Melbourne Village. They dubbed the small hammock 'Deer Head Hammock' and the larger one "The Hammock of Pines and Palms." To the nature lovers from the temperate regions of Ohio, the hammock lands were exotic woodland, a riotous growth of plants and trees; with a little judicious pruning the area could become a woodland park. They transformed "Deer Head Hammock" (named for the twisted bole of a tree) into a ceremonial center. A natural clearing was enhanced, poisonous weeds cut, and the natural cathedral was created. A memorial altar was built. Weddings have been held in "Deer Head Hammock" as well as christenings and memorial services. The Easter sunrise service is held in the hammock. The ashes of several Villagers have been tossed to the fitful winds that sometimes rustle the hammock trees.

The Villagers never had time to alter the larger hammock. It was clear that they did not understand the nature of a Florida hammock. A hammock is a climax forest, a blend of hardwoods, pines and palms, with the hardwoods in the center. The name comes from the native Arawak Indian language, meaning "island," and refers to the community of plants and hardwoods that float in a sea of pines. The Indians used the hammock as a sheltered area of habitation during the chilly winter months, but they treated the earth with care.

The Melbourne Village hammock was probably much larger at one time. The forest miraculously survived the extensive logging operations in that area; somehow, the heartland of the hammock remained untouched.

The Villagers placed a row of homes along the edge of the woodlands, just as they would back in Ohio. Unfortunately, the early residents used the woods as a dump.

A few Villagers understood the value of the hammock land. Gerald Einem, Melbourne High School teacher, studied the unique features of the hammock, and he brought other naturalists to view it. It was the quiet determination of Erna Nixon to save the hammock by getting out and doing just that. Erna lived a part of each year in Melbourne Village and returned to Chicago during the school term to teach. Her husband, Frederick Nixon, remained in the Village in the Nixon's cottage called "Afterglow." The Nixons, who were members of the Society of Friends, commonly called 'Quakers,' had led an active and useful life teaching, educating and serving, notably in the 'Friends' mission in Jamaica.

When the Nixons retired, Erna little realized that some of her most exciting and rewarding days lay ahead. Erna was intrigued by the Hammock of Pines and Palms because the vegetation reminded her of Jamaica. She noticed the trash heaps and quietly removed the trash; then she gently reminded neighbors that they were using a beautiful woodland as a dump. She noted that "plant lovers" had been digging up native plants for their own gardens. Erna tracked down the plants and quietly explained that the removal of these plants would upset the ecology of the hammock. She persuaded the Village to take action that discouraged further raids on the 'hammock. It has been a curious Village problem that strangers will come into the Village and dig up plants from walkways, woodlands and gardens.

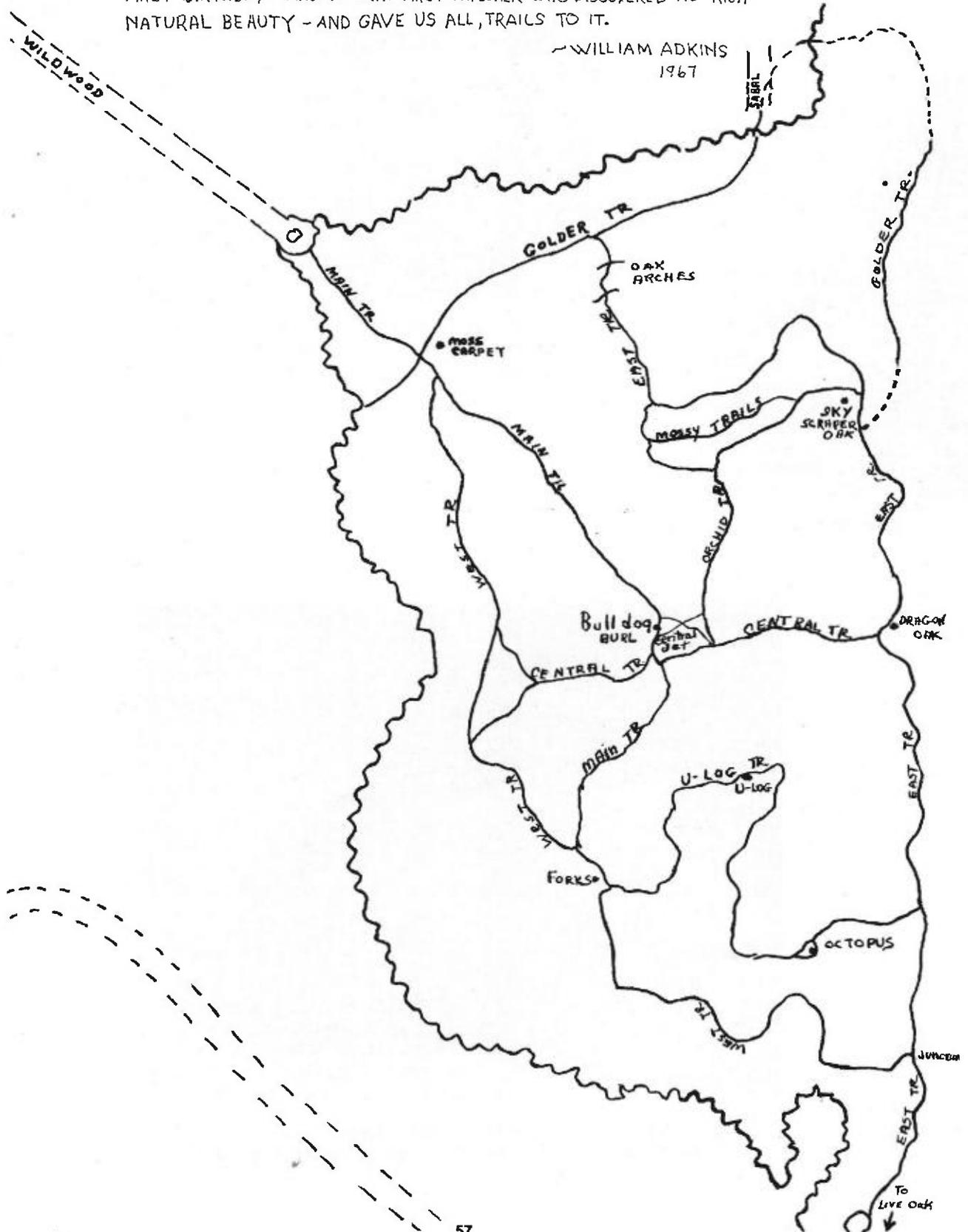
Each time Erna Nixon returned from Chicago, she took up the task of cleaning the Village paths. She would don her well-worn straw hat from Jamaica and then, with a hoe in one hand and a bottle of mosquito repellent in the other, she would walk to the hammock to clear the paths. Frederick, who had a life-long physical disability, would sometimes accompany her, but often pain prevented him from walking that far.

Erna Nixon was a meticulous observer. She discovered that the rare psilotum, considered the first land plant to emerge from the waters, existed in the hammock. Many naturalists believed that the plant was extinct. If there has ever been a relationship between a plant and a person, please note Erna Nixon and the psilotum. She did not exhibit the plant, only qualified naturalists were permitted to know her secret. Later Erna discovered this endangered plant was growing in

THE PHYTOGEOGRAPHIC TRAILS NETWORK OF ERNA NIXON HAMMOCK MELBOURNE VILLAGE, FLORIDA

DEDICATED TO THE YOUNG EXPLORERS OF THIS SEMI-TROPICAL FOREST ON ITS
FIRST BIRTHDAY - AND TO THAT FIRST EXPLORER WHO DISCOVERED ITS RICH
NATURAL BEAUTY - AND GAVE US ALL TRAILS TO IT.

WILLIAM ADKINS
1967





Erna Nixon



Erna and Frederick Nixon at the opening of the Erna Nixon Hammock. The date was also the Nixon's 50th wedding anniversary.



Gerald Einem--cutting the ribbon at the opening of the Erna Nixon Hammock. Einem worked with Erna Nixon identifying plants and laying trails in the hammock.

her own garden. The fragile psilotum was warily clinging to a patch of moist earth under the shelter of a rock.

The hammock began to gain in fame. Naturalists from all over the nation tapped at Erna's door and asked for a tour. She trained junior naturalists to guide tours when she was not at home.

As this book goes to press, changes have already occurred in the Erna Nixon Hammock. The natural recharge area of former grove lands and swamp lands has been altered by extensive construction, a shopping mall, parking lot, business area, light industry, and subsidiary malls which combine to lower the natural water table.

Although parts of the hammock are protected, the protection also inhibits natural fires that are a part of the cycle of a hammock.

The Melbourne Village portion of the hammock is preserved by the American Homesteading Foundation through the Erna Nixon Library, an organization set up to preserve Erna's library and the hammock. One of the major donors to the library fund is Mrs. Grover Stout, (Alice Stout), sister of Helen Smith. Helen loved the hammock and worked for its preservation.

The eastern segment of the hammock has been preserved separately through the efforts of many groups, but special mention should be made of the contributions of the Junior League of South Brevard. With the League's assistance, Brevard County has developed this eastern segment, called "Erna Nixon Hammock Park," with elevated boardwalks above the fragile plants, trails with descriptive signs and printed information about the wild life, and County Park Rangers to care for the park and assist visitors.

The spirit of Erna Nixon walks in both sections, a spirit that brought out the best in all who knew her.

PRESERVING THE HAMMOCK

The AHF had vowed to be the steward of the hammock. It then became the curious duty of the AHF to undo the work of preserving parklands. The County Tax Assessor, Clark Maxwell, was startled to receive a visitor from Melbourne Village, Clark Strohmer, who came with the request that the Village parklands be taxed to keep them under Village control and not open to public discretion. Clark Maxwell told them that parklands had never been taxed. Privately, Mr. Maxwell said he was not going to be embroiled in Village politics. Strohmer persisted; it took several years, but the state finally ruled that the parklands were not dedicated to public use. The Villagers had visions of hippies hiding in the woodlands, motorcycle gangs roaring down the

trails and picnickers tossing paper bags at the psilotum. Unfortunately, this was already happening.

While the effort to preserve the land moved with the speed of molasses through state channels, the Improvement League was bent on improving. They asked that fire lanes be cut in the hammock. Erna Nixon quietly accompanied the firemen to the hammock, showed them where the lanes would be cut and how the proposal would destroy the hammock. She suggested alternative methods. The Village was satisfied and the hammock was saved again.

In 1964, the concept of the hammock as a living laboratory was presented. The community of plants that live in its shelter makes the best possible use of solar power, and it is necessary to discover how this type of climax forest utilizes the energy.

People began to refer to the hammock as "Erna Nixon's Hammock," and the name Pines and Palms became lost.

In 1964, Melbourne Village dedicated the land as Erna Nixon Hammock. Clark Strohmer, as the president of the AHF Board of Trustees, conducted the ceremonies. Erna and Frederick Nixon were glowing that day; it was their 50th wedding anniversary celebration.

The tax issue was not dead. The State of Florida finally decided that Brevard County should bill the AHF for the hammock parkland since it was not open to the public. The Villagers were glad to pay the bill for the land was listed as swamp land and the taxes were minimal.

The movement to preserve the entire Erna Nixon Hammock proceeded, with many setbacks, and today the hammock land itself has been preserved, but, in truth, ecological changes will take place due to peripheral commercial development.

In 1924, Thomas Barbour, Florida naturalist, predicted that if the development proceeded at the rate it was going in 1924, Florida would become a sand heap. The speed of exploitation has accelerated beyond Barbour's wildest fears, and his dire warnings are echoed in present problems.

Erna Nixon tried with faith, hard work, and example to preserve a scrap of Florida.

Do we have time to turn back the clock?

CHAPTER XIV

LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD

The Village was often accused of trying to be exclusive because many American Homesteading Foundation activities were closed to the public. They included bridge games, a choral society, a children's summer program, men's club, book reviews, lectures, and plays. Once an elaborate public address system was set up for recorded concerts in the Deer Head Hammock, but the music attracted too many mosquitoes. The Village continued its educational activities. It tried to remain an education-centered community. The University of Melbourne kept its charter for many years and continued a program in the cinder block library building that became the first building of Florida Institute of Technology.

Melbourne Village became an official Audubon Society Bird Sanctuary. For years, a wooden sign of a bright red cardinal marked the entrance to Melbourne Village. Indeed, it was the only way visitors could find the Village. The "exclusive" set wanted a more dramatic entranceway, but they never achieved a pillard archway or sentry box. A few retired military families joined the Village. They initiated a daily flag-raising ceremony. While it did not have the spit and polish of former days of glory, it did bring a nostalgic tear to the old guard.

The retired military men had their recall to Village duty during the days of the Cuban missile crisis. Escape routes were planned. I am not sure where they were escaping to, because just as many were planning to escape to Melbourne Village. Routes, using drains and ditches, were planned for the children at school. Private block houses were built and filled with provisions for shooting intruders, if necessary.

A plan to convert the swimming pool to an emergency hospital was proposed. In other words, if the missiles did not totally incinerate the Village, and of course, some believed that they were aimed at the Village, then total confusion would have reigned in spite of Colonel Hamilton's CD plans.

During the years that the Betterment League considered itself in control, the size of the Village was permanently fixed. Any efforts of nearby housing strips

to join the Village were rebuffed, and the stub ends of the Village roads were sealed off. Suggestions that the remaining hammock land be added to Melbourne Village were dismissed. The Front Twenty was argued over. Business moved near the Village so the Village lost control of part of its environment.

The story of the early years of Melbourne Village ends with the dedication of the New Village Hall in 1963. At this time, the Mayor Commissioner type of government was in force and the American Homesteading Foundation was also a power. Georgist or Decentralist theories were little more than a memory. Homesteading was honored in theory but rarely in practice.

Dr. Elizabeth Nutting was awarded an azalea by Betterment League Members for her efforts to control litter.

Ralph Borsodi left the Village. He predicted that there would be an upsurge in interest in Far Eastern Religions and he visited India to study the religions. He was right. There is an upsurge in interest in esoteric religions.

He predicted that devastating inflation was coming and he was right.

He predicted that money as we know it would become useless, and that work chits would replace it. Could he be right?

The Borsodi single-family homestead, where all activity can be carried out in the home, is becoming a future possibility with computers.

As Borsodi explored different types of country living, the subsistence homestead and the productive homestead where the family supplemented the income with home crafts, and gardening, he began to perceive that country life was not much better than city life. He set out on a long journey to find out what was wrong with the world. Later, he decided that to try and solve grave social problems with an exclusively economic approach was wrong.

The Betterment League ended quietly. Members of the group served on the Board of Trustees and as Town Commissioners. Of all the people interviewed and taped, Betterment League members were the most reluctant to speak. Only Helen Smith spoke freely and so her tape was used extensively. Helen Smith never felt that she opposed the establishment. She believed she was the establishment! She was an ardent feminist, long before the term became current. She backed women in engineering, women in professions and women at work. She opposed the "dirty tricks" but used the results of the tricks to her advantage. She believed that Ralph Borsodi exploited women, took their ideas without giving credit, and exploited the "volunteer" ethic. Much of her animosity was directed towards him.

Many of the men who should have been included in interviews refused to talk about the Betterment League. Conversations with Coddington, Peters, Strohmmer, revealed that they did not wish to be led by a "certain clique" and that they did not want to be told what to do. They wanted to be the ones who told others. No one in the Betterment League ever believed that he or she was

creating a community that would save civilization by example. None ever thought that homesteading was the key to salvation.

Did Melbourne Village survive as a homesteading intentional community? The answer is obvious. The homesteading experiment was dead by the time the Town of Melbourne Village was incorporated as was Ralph Borsodi's original plan which designed a homestead as a backstop for the exurban dweller. But as the plans for Melbourne Village developed, too many other streams of thought entered into the planning. The idealism of transcendental philosophy, the quirky Georgist economic theories, the vague back-to-the-land movement all contributed to the experiment by the American Homesteading Foundation, sponsors of Melbourne Village. The founders were always open to a new social experiment, such as a School of Living, a mini-university, a lychee grove in every lot, a compost pile by every home, plant walls, miniature quail, and acacias on every lot on Acacia Avenue.



Vera Smisek and Gertrude Martin. Vera was Gertrude's sister. Gertrude Martin attended the founding meeting in Dayton, Ohio, and was active in all facets of village life.

CHAPTER XV

THE 1962 ANNUAL MEETING SKIT—GIGI'S ESPRESSO PALACE

Ralph Borsodi believed that man did not live by sober-sided lectures alone. He advocated singing, dancing and festivals. He hoped for skits and parodies and laughter. The following skit was presented by an impromptu group of "Village Players" at the 1962 annual meeting. Authors were Rollo Britten and Georgiana Kjerulff.

The skit does have a point. It was easier to make comments in a skit than as a speech.

The AHF wanted to remain a rural enclave, but Brevard County was expanding rapidly. Shopping centers were being built, new highways were being cut, and the role of "charity" was being usurped by government agencies.

Many things predicted in this skit came true. Fortunately, the Highway I-95 by-passed the Village.

Virginia Wood and Dr. Elizabeth Nutting were derisively called "sisters of charity."

You might note that at the period the skit was written almost everyone had a compost heap to nourish gardens.

Arthur Coddling was a former Mayor. Clark Strohmer was also a former Mayor.

Because many of the cultural events sponsored by the AHF for the Villagers are now presented by the residents of the county, Villagers now go out of the Village and the Village has lost its cultural exclusivity.

The skit has been included because it gives a good picture of the community at a turning point.

GIGI'S ESPRESSO PALACE

SCENE IS PER TITLE. BACKSTAGE IS FILLED WITH PAINTINGS - TABLE WITH COFFEE URN.

CAST:(IN APPROPRIATE COSTUMES)

GIGI: GEORGIANA KJERULFF

BEATNIK MUSICIANS:

TED DOWNING (WITH GUITAR)

BILL REECE (WITH BONGO)

ROLLO BRITIAN (WITH RECORDER) (OLD MUSICAL INSTRUMENT, PRECURSER OF FLUTE)

FOREMAN: MEL MANTHEY

ANNOUNCER AND LINES: ELLEN UMPHREY

ON STAGE AS CURTAIN OPENS: GIGI AND THE BEATNIKS

GIGI (TO AUDIENCE) "WELCOME TO GIGI'S JOINT - IT'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME. WE OFFER COFFEE, A FEW HIGH THOUGHTS (THE BEATNIKS WINK AT EACH OTHER) AND A BRAND NEW SERVICE TO MELBOURNE VILLAGE." (LOUD KNOCK AT THE DOOR. ROLLO GOES OUT.) NOW DEAR FRIENDS IF WE CAN JUST DIM THE LIGHTS (LIGHTS ARE DIMMED) SO THAT YOU CAN GET INTO THE PROPER MOOD (ROLLO RE-ENTERS), WE WILL HAVE A LITTLE ENTERTAINMENT WHILE YOU SIP YOUR COFFEE."

ROLLO: (STEPS OVER AND TAPS GIGI ON THE SHOULDER). "PARDON ME."

(WHISPER)

GIGI: "WHO'S OUT THERE? TWO SWEET FOUNDING MOTHERS: OH...BUT I THOUGHT THEY WERE ON SOME SORT OF JUNKET AROUND THE WORLD OR SOMETHING." (MORE WHISPERING) "OH, THEY'RE BACK... THEY HEARD THE WORD 'SERVICE' AND THEY WANT TO HELP. THAT IS ALL I NEED, I HAVE A NICE THING GOING HERE: EVERYONE SWINGING IN THE FRONT ROOM, AND ALL THE BUSINESS IN THE BACK ROOM. SEND 'EM AWAY."

ROLLO: "THEY WON'T GO. THEY WANT TO HELP. SHALL WE GIVE THEM SOME HONORARY TITLES-- LIKE 'CHIEF BREAD AND BUTTER-UPPER' OR 'PAST MISTRESS OF THE PEPPER POT'?"

GIGI: (SHAKES HER HEAD)... "I KNOW. TELL 'EM THIS IS A STAGE DOOR CANTEEN FOR ASTRONAUTS, AND PUT 'EM TO WORK WASHING DISHES."

ROLLO: (EXIT, DELIGHTED).

TED: (HE HAS BEEN THUMBING HIS GUITAR) "I DON'T LIKE IT, BOSS. YOU KNOW THOSE TWO. THEY'LL BE GIVING THE COFFEE AWAY."

GIGI: "YOU'D BETTER WATCH OUT. THAT LITTLE ONE WILL BE USING YOUR GUITAR AS A PLANTER FOR PETUNIAS. SHE'S ALWAYS STICKING FLOWERS SOMEPLACE."

"SUNSHINE, LIGHT, AND FLOWERS -- WE DON'T NEED 'EM IN THIS JOINT IN OUR LITTLE DEN OF PROPINQUITY."

BILL: "INIQUITY?"

TED: "PROPINQUITY?"

GIGI: "JUST LET THINGS DEVELOP IN OUR DARK ROOM, AND WE'LL EMERGE WITH A LAND BOOM."

BILL: "DARK ROOM?"

TED: "LAND BOOM?" (ROLLO RE-ENTERS)

TED: "LAND BOOM?" (ROLLO RE-ENTERS)

GIGI: (BILL POUNDS BONGO BETWEEN EACH WORD) "WE'LL HAVE JET PORTS, HIGHWAYS, SUPER-MARKETS, FILLING STATIONS, SHOPPING CENTERS, FREEWAYS, HELICOPTERS, CITY WATER, FREE GAS."

BILL: "I DON'T WANT ANY PART OF IT."

ROLLO: "WE DIDN'T ASK YOU, YOU'RE ALWAYS WAY OUT."

TED: "IF WHAT I HEAR IS TRUE, WE'LL REALLY BE FAR OUT. HAVE YOU HEARD THAT WE'VE SOLD THE FRONT TWENTY?"

ROLLO: "DON'T TELL ME! WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO PUT THERE NOW? A SWIMMING LAKE? A YACHT BASIN?"

TED: "I'M NOT KIDDING. GUESS AGAIN."

ROLLO: "ICE FOLLIES (EAGERLY). A JAI ALAI FRONTON?"

TED: "YOU'RE STILL KIDDING."

ROLLO: "I GIVE UP."

TED: "A LAUNCHING PAD FOR THE ULTIMATE SPACE CRAFT. THIS ONE BY-PASSES ALL THE PLANETS AND ALL THE STARS AND GOES TO THAT GREAT SPACE PORT UP YONDER." (THE THREE BEATNIKS POINT UPWARDS WITH A SPIRAL MOVEMENT.)

GIGI: "WELL, THEY'VE BEEN SAYING FOR YEARS THAT WE VILLAGERS ARE OUT OF THIS WORLD, BUT NOW IS THE TIME TO CHANGE ALL THAT--CREATE A NEW IMAGE FOR MELBOURNE VILLAGE."

BILL: (STEPS TOWARD GIGI). "WE'VE GONE THROUGH QUITE A FEW PHASES, HAVEN'T WE?"

GIGI: "STATUS --- THAT'S US. MELBOURNE VILLAGE FOR INSTANT STATUS."

ROLLO: (TO AUDIENCE. BEATNIKS PUT ARMS AROUND EACH OTHER'S SHOULDERS). "ARE YOU TIRED OF FEELING INFERIOR? DO YOU YEARN TO FEEL SUPERIOR?"

TED: "IF THEY WON'T LET YOU IN AT THE YACHT CLUB, IF THEY LABELLED YOU A GOLF DUB."

BILL: "DON'T GIVE UP HOPE. YOU'RE NOT A DOPE, CLIMB NO MORE: YOU'VE REACHED THE PEAK, MELBOURNE VILLAGE IS WHAT YOU SEEK."

ROLLO: "WE BRING YOU MUSIC."

TED: "WE BRING YOU CLASS."

BILL: "WE BRING YOU ART."

ROLLO: "WE'RE ROMANTIC."

TED: "WE'RE FRANTIC!"

BILL: "TO BE PEDANTIC."

GIGI: "YES IF IT'S CULTURE, YOU'LL FIND IT RIGHT HERE AT GIGI'S, IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN, METROPOLITAN, MELBOURNE VILLAGE, THE STATUS CENTER OF THE MOON BOOM."

"BEFORE WE PRESENT OUR FEATURE OF THE EVENING (ALL THE BEATNIKS GET READY TO PERFORM), MAY I CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO OUR MENU. WE HAVE COFFEE, IRISH COFFEE, ESPRESSO COFFEE, INSTANT COFFEE, AND ORGANIC COFFEE."

BILL: (ASIDE TO GIGI) "PSST---WHAT'S ORGANIC COFFEE?"

GIGI: "I DON'T KNOW BUT IT'S A BIG SELLER HERE. AND NOW WE GIVE YOU MUSIC TO BE ALONE WITH -- DIRECT FROM A SMASH TOUR OF EUROPE. THAT EMINENT MOZART AUTHORITY, ROLLO BRITTEN."

(TED AND BILL ARE DISGUSTED).

ROLLO: (BOWS AND PUTS RECORDER TO HIS LIPS; THEN LOWERS IT TO GIGI). "ARE YOU ORGANICALLY FED?"

GIGI: WHAAAT?"

ROLLO: "DO YOU BAKE YOUR WHOLE WHEAT BREAD?"

GIGI: WHAAAT?"

BILL: (ALSO TO GIGI) "DO YOU RISE AND TAKE A WALK: DO YOU HOMESTEAD OR JUST TALK?"

GIGI: "WHAAAT?"

TED: "ARE YOU ONE OF THE ELITE? OR JUST A SUBURBANEET?"

BILL: (LOUD) "HEAVEN FORBID!"

GIGI: "NOW BOYS --- DON'T GET TED STARTED."

TED: "WHAT'S WRONG WITH EXPRESSING YOUR OPINION?"

GIGI: "ROLLO, QUICK, PLAY."

ROLLO: (DELIBERATELY) "SURE, THAT'S JUST WHY I BROUGHT THIS THING ALONG (PUTS RECORDER TO LIPS, PLAYS A NOTE, THEN LOWERS IT). "BUT FIRST, MY SPONSOR INSISTS (GIGI GETS IMPATIENT) THAT I MUST TELL YOU THAT I HAVE PLAYED BEFORE THE CROWNED HEAD, I MEAN THE HONORABLE, THE LORD MAYOR OF MELBOURNE VILLAGE." (SWINGS TOWARD TED AND BILL). "I ASKED HIM HOW HE LIKED IT."

BILL: "YOU ASKED HIM HOW HE LIKED IT?"

ROLLO: "UH-HUH."

TED: "YOU ASKED HIM HOW HE LIKED IT?"

ROLLO: "UH-HUH. HE SAID IT WAS BEE-OO-TIFUL. HE SAID IT WAS THE MOST. HE SAID, 'ARE YOU CODDING?'"

(PUTS RECORDER TO LIPS)

TED: "YOU OUGHT TO LEARN TO PLAY ONE OF THESE THINGS. IT WOULD KEEP YOU OUT OF POLITICS."

TED: (SEVERLY). "I OBJECT TO MY ACTIVITIES BEING REFERRED TO AS 'POLITICS'."

ROLLO: "NO OFFENSE, NO OFFENSE

FOR HERE IS REECE

WHO IS FOR PEACE

IF THERE IS SOME RESISTANCE,

WE'LL CALL IT CO-EXISTENCE."

TED AND BILL TOGETHER: "IF THERE IS SOME RESISTANCE, WE'LL CALL IT CO-EXISTENCE."

BILL: "GEE, THAT'S CLEVER (ROLLO POKES HIM WITH RECORDER). WHY DON'T YOU PLAY THAT THING AND GET IT OVER WITH? TED AND I ARE IN A HURRY TO GET OUT OF HERE."

ROLLO: "WHY?"

TED: "WE'RE GOING TO PLAY SHUFFLEBOARD DOWN IN MELBOURNE."

ROLLO: "HUMP--PF."

GIGI: "BEFORE YOU GO, I WISH ONE OF YOU WOULD GO INTO THE BACK ROOM AND SEE WHAT IS GOING ON. I HAVEN'T HEARD A WORD FROM THOSE TWO SWEET FOUNDING MOTHERS, AND I DON'T THINK THEY'RE WASHING DISHES."

BILL: "I'LL GO---NO. DOWNING, YOU GO. YOU HAVE A WAY WITH THE LADIES."

TED: "OH, MAN!"

ROLLO: (AS TED GOES OUT). "BEWARE THE WOMEN'S GUILD."

GIGI: "BUT NOW, LET'S GET ON WITH THE MUSIC."

ROLLO: (AGAIN RECORDER TO LIPS, AGAIN IT IS LOWERED. TO GIGI:) "DO YOU HAVE A COMPOST BOX?"

GIGI: "WHAAAT?"

BILL: "I JUST DUG TO THE BOTTOM OF MY COMPOST BOX, AND WHAT DO YOU THINK I FOUND?"

GIGI: "I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU FOUND. LET'S HAVE---"

BILL: "IT SAID: LISTEN TO MY DITTY TO MAKE OUR CITY PRETTY--WE'LL HAVE A BITTY COMMITTEE."

ROLLO: "THAT'S REGIMENTATION!"

GIGI: "BUT NOW MOZART!"

ROLLO: (REPEATS RECORDER MOTIONS.) "HAS THE MUSIC GUILD APPROVED THIS PROGRAM?"

GIGI: "THEY'LL APPROVE OF ANYTHING. THEY NEED MONEY FOR A PIANO."

ROLLO: (PLAYS OPENING NOTES OF STAR-SPANGER)---

BILL: (GRABS ROLLO'S ARM). "DOESN'T SOUND LIKE MOZART TO ME! WHERE'S TED? HE'LL GET UP A PETITION FOR SOME HOT MUSIC."

TED: (ENTERS EXCITED) "THEY FOUND OUT ABOUT THAT CRAP GAME IN THE BACK ROOM."

GIGI: "I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN. YOU CAN'T PUT ANYTHING OVER THOSE TWO. WELL, WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT DID THEY DO?"

TED: "WHY, THEY JOINED THE GAME. AND THAT LITTLE ONE--SHE TOOK THE BOYS TO THE CLEANERS."

GIGI: "OH NO!---NOW I'VE HEARD EVERYTHING--- COME ON, ROLLO," (DISCOURAGED) "YOU'D BETTER PLAY THAT THING." (TED AND BILL CROWD AROUND ROLLO).

ROLLO: "DON'T FENCE ME IN. WE DON'T LIKE FENCES. I WANT TO TELL YOU THIS IS A FINE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT. IF YOU TWO SQUARES WOULD ONLY LET ME PLAY IT."

BILL: "WE'LL BE AS QUIET AS MOUTSES."

GIGI: (ASIDE). "MICE."

TED AND BILL: "MICES." (VERY LOUD)

ROLLO: (SAME RECORDER MOTIONS). "JUST A MINUTE. I GOTTA THINK." (ROLLS WITH LAUGHTER).

TED: "DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE MELBOURNE VILLAGE GIRL WHO --"(BILL SNICKERS). "WHY ARE YOU SNICKERING, BILL?"

BILL: (INNOCENTLY) "WHO ME?"

ROLLO: "THE MELBOURNE VILLAGE GIRL WHO SAID, 'GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME STROHMER!'"

TED: "THAT'S DATED."

ROLLO: (SAME RECORDER MOTIONS).

GIGI: "THANK YOU VERY MUCH, ROLLO THAT WAS A FINE PROGRAM."

ROLLO: "BUT, GIGI DARLING, I HAVEN'T STARTED TO PLAY YET!"

GIGI: "WE'LL HAVE THE REST AT A RECESSED MEETING OF THE AHF." (GREAT CLATTER) (MEL MANTHEY ENTERS, HELMET ON HEAD).

MEL: "COME ON NOW. YOU PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO LEAVE. WE GOT TO CLEAR OUT THIS JOINT." (TURNS TO AUDIENCE). "I MEANT YOU, TOO. INTER-STATE 95 IS COMING RIGHT THROUGH HERE --- AND THE BULL DOZERS ARE HERE."



Rollo Britten, Ted Downing, Rev. William Reece, Gigi Kjerluff

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Georgiana Greene Kjerulff was born in New York City and reared in Cranford, New Jersey. She attended New Jersey College for Women, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J., and graduated from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La.

Her work experience includes reporting and advertising copy writing for weekly and daily newspapers in New Jersey, and copy writing and fashion reporting for a newspaper syndicate and advertising agency in New York City. During World War II she joined the WAVES and served with Writers and Directors as a Training Film script clerk and script writer and later as a magazine editor.

After World War II, she entered the University of California, Berkely, Graduate School as an American History major. She married Lauritz Kjerulff and combined a career of homemaker while raising five children with a career as author and editor while writing for the "Melbourne Daily Times." She is the author of *Tales of Old Brevard* (Kellersberger Fund) as well as author or editor of several books for the Palo Alto Historical Society and the City of Palo Alto, California. She has been the recipient of a number of awards, commendations and honors in public relations.

Ms. Kjerulff is also active in local politics currently serving as Commissioner for both the Town of Melbourne Village and the Brevard County Historical Commission.

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In 1959 she and her family moved to Melbourne Village. Except for a period in the 1970's when they moved to California, they have returned to live in their home in the Village.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jon Schultz is a 1987 graduate of Melbourne High School. His ambition is to earn a degree in art and become a freelance artist. Pencil drawing and ink drawing are his favorite media.

Jon made the sketches in this book from personal observations of the Village.