

COMMONWEALTH, GEORGIA

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REPORT NUMBER 90

THE LAMAR INSTITUTE, INC.

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THE CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTH

The Christian Commonwealth Colony, or Commonwealth, was located along the

Macon Road east of Dozier Creek in Muscogee County, Georgia. It was an experimental commune established by a group of Christian Socialists during the 1890s.



Figure 1. A Young Girl Identified Only as "Phyllis" Practices Piano at Commonwealth (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

The plantation was the home site of John Beall Dozier who was a native of Warren County, Georgia. He was born in 1807 and died in 1873 in Muscogee County. John B. Dozier married Emily Huff and had the following eight children: Antoinette Dozier Pou, James L. Dozier, Virginia Dozier Little, Homer W. Dozier, John Edger Dozier, Lula Loundes Dozier, Albert S. Dozier and Daniel Preston Dozier (Easley 19*: 612). By the 1890s the Dozier plantation was a failing plantation. John B. Dozier's children inherited the land and later

sold the property in 1896 to members of the Christian Commonwealth colony.

The Christian Commonwealth occupied lands known as land lots 156 (101.25 acres), 157 (71 acres), 158 (101.25 acres), 163 (202.5 acres), 164 (202.5 acres), 165 (101.5 acres) and 189 (152 acres) of the 9th District, Muscogee County. Most of the land was formerly known as the Dozier Plantation. It was about 1 mile from a location on the railroad known as Garrett's Switch. Although a station stop was created by the Central of Georgia Railway officials

at Commonwealth, it never included a depot or warehouse (Peddy Collection 1896). The Christian Commonwealth settlement consisted of approximately 932 acres of exhausted cotton farmland, an old manor house, half a dozen log cabins, and a dilapidated barn. The land was purchased by November, 1896 from Mr. A. S. Dozier by John Chipman.

The commune made use of the the Dozier plantation and buildings, including the plantation house and slave quarters. Commonwealth had a station stop on the Central of Georgia Railroad, which was later known as Ordway. A post office was established at Commonwealth by late 1890s. Commonwealth is depicted on maps from the late 1890s, 1907, and as late as 1922, which was well after the settlement was dissolved (Gresham 1982). The remains of the Commonwealth settlement are likely contained in Compartment O-06 of the Fort Benning Military Reservation and on privately-owned land located north of the military reservation. The plantation house, which remains in use, and the slave quarter were located on private land.

The Central of Georgia Railroad ran through the land and the United States Post Office set up an office. The post office and the railroad stop were both named Commonwealth. Initially referred to by the locals as Agapolis, or City of Love, the Christian Commonwealth was organized by a small group of educated, Christian men and women who appeared to be in search of a more wholesome environment than the one they felt capitalism offered.

Commonwealth's principal founders included Ralph Albertson, a pastor from Springfield, Ohio, who had experience in a cooperative colony in Andrews, North Carolina; William Damon, a college

professor, who was head of the colony in North Carolina; George Howard Gibson, an editor who had established a small colony in Lincoln, Nebraska; and John Chipman, an Episcopalian minister from Florida. The Commonwealth colony was chartered and lands were purchased, by John Chipman who acted as their agent (Muscogee County Charter Record Book I: 227-229; Muscogee County Deed Books II: 343; KK: 455-457; LL: 554-556). Together they proposed to establish a community around the principle of self-sacrifice. In essence, the colonists practiced Christian socialism. Men were paid for their work with food for their families, housing, and education for their children.

A contemporary Columbus news reporter described the philosophy succinctly, "to a certain degree everything is in common. Every man is a worker; there are no drones...No member shall be allowed to depend on the others for his support, but every man shall contribute the surplus of his labor to the general or common fund...The larger the surplus the better off the colonists will be" (*Enquirer-Sun* 1896).

In general, the colonists were highly literate or highly skilled. Besides college professors and ministers, the members included school teachers, medical doctors, an electrical engineer, a mill-wright, printers, a blacksmith, a photographer and a wheel-wright. Apparently, most of the colonists, including some of the founders, met for the first time when they arrived at Commonwealth. The Constitution said: "Membership in this body shall be open to all, and never denied to any who come to us in the spirit of love, unselfishness and true fellowship." Sympathizers were asked to sign a Covenant (Albertson 1945).



Figure 2. The Residents of Commonwealth, Georgia (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

Colonists began arriving in late November 1896. By December 1896 the population of Commonwealth was 38 persons. That number had climbed to 85 by December 1898 (Peddy Collection 1896, 1898). With plans of self-sufficiency, the colonists experienced their greatest success during 1898, two years after the purchase of the land. During the year, the population of the society had grown to 100, in spite of more hopeful predictions stating that “Thousands of dollars will be spent by these colonists and the population of Commonwealth will soon mount into the hundreds” (Enquirer-Sun, December 20, 1896). During 1898, the 35 acre orchard consisted of 7,396 fruit trees, and the nursery contained over 53,000

seedlings (Bolster 1972: 62). The physical structures and equipment of Commonwealth had grown sizably by that year. By September, the colony had built a saw mill, several cottages, a barn, a blacksmith’s shop, and a carpenter’s shop. The community had also acquired a shingle machine, feed cutter, portable steam engine, two log trucks and teams, and a cane mill.

Calamity struck in August, 1899, when several members of the colony contracted typhoid fever from drinking lemonade that was made from contaminated water. Thereafter the colony began a steady downward slide.



Figure 3. Saw Mill at Commonwealth (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

In the spring of 1899, only two and a half years after its inception, the members found themselves embroiled in internal conflicts. Twelve of its members, led by A. E. Hall, C. L. Brewer, and S. W. Martin, accused the leaders of the colony of trying to force them out. Their complaints centered on the poor living conditions and the diet. They also contended that the colony would end in ruin if it continued under its current, poor management. In accordance, they applied to the Muscogee County courts for a receivership. The petition was specifically directed towards Ralph Albertson and W. C. Damon, two of the colony's founding members. The short trial resulted in a

victory for the original colonists but marked a moral defeat.

The year following the court trial was one of progressive decline, marked by food shortage and sickness brought on by a harsh winter. By the end of 1899, the local newspaper reported the exodus of several prominent members of Commonwealth (Peddy Collection 1899). According to Ralph Albertson, John Chipman agreed to pay for the land if the colony were set up in Georgia. Chipman, a strong believer in the Episcopal Church later left the Commonwealth because he had believed they were going to be the "real Church". John Chipman paid for about half of the debt

on the land, but announced he would pay no more when he left the colony. This information was later published in *The Social Gospel*, the Commonwealth's newsletter, and a subscriber requested that Albertson leave the matter to him. Later Albertson received a letter that informed him that the debt had not been paid off, but had been purchased by an organization called the "Right Relationship League" which had been founded and controlled by

this particular subscriber. The colonists were assured the mortgage was in friendly hands. When the members of the Commonwealth contested the receivership proceedings, the Right Relationship League wrote the colony and stated that they had not lived up to their ideals and now expected the colony to live up to its mortgage terms. The Christian Commonwealth voted to disband and the Right Relationship League received its money (Albertson 1945).



Figure 4. A Picnic at Commonwealth (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

One Columbus observer of the early Commonwealth stated:

It is not made up of calamity howlers and men

who have made a financial failure in life, but is composed of men, many of whom, who have left good paying positions, in order to show to the

world, that the practical religion, taught by Christ, is something to live by; and that in order to live the life which Christ intended for us to live, required that we live under a system, under which brotherly love would be the ruling influence (*Enquirer-Sun*, December 31, 1898).

In late 1900, legal notices announced the sale of Commonwealth's land and assets (Peddy Collection 1900). Pierson (1901:

226) announced the end of the Christian Commonwealth colony to a world audience:

A few weeks since, at sheriff's sale, the Christian Commonwealth Colony in Georgia, founded in February, 1898, near Columbus, ceased to be a socialist community, and the land and buildings will revert to private ownership. Most of the members of the community came originally from Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio. They were of more than usual intelligence, and they started with considerable capital. For a time the colony prospered, then dissensions, arose, and now the usual fate of such projects has come.



Figure 5. Log House at Commonwealth (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

The first volume of their magazine, *The Social Gospel*, was issued in February 1898. In that issue the editor mentioned a “new cottage near the old plantation house”, which was occupied by S. H. Comings; The Retreat, which was “an eight room building, the upper rooms of which are used by unmarried men, and the lower rooms by two families”; a cottage for George Howard Gibson and family, which was, “the first to go up on the horseshoe curve, in the center of which commodious and convenient public or common buildings will be later built”; and a “new four room schoolhouse,

the largest and best in Muscogee County outside of Columbus”. By April 1898, Commonwealth could boast of a “saw mill, a barn, a blacksmith shop, a dining room at the old plantation house, four dwelling houses, the printing house, and a school house”, a two-year-old peach orchard, a modest apiary, and “a dairy and poultry yard”. A room “known as the Bachelor’s Hall” was planned. In May 1898 an addition was made to the printing house (*The Social Gospel* February 1898, I(1):24; April 1898, I(3):22-25; May 1898, I(4):24).



Figure 6. Rose Cottage (George Gibson house) at Commonwealth (note board and batten construction) (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).



Figure 7. Another View of the Gibson House, or Rose Cottage (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

By June 1898, the Commonwealth colony reported:

At first we were all crowded together in the old plantation house. But since we have had our sawmill we have been enabled to build some houses. At present five of our families live in separate houses, the Cooks, Damons, Gibsons, Comings, McDermotts and Albertsons. The single men have “quarters” in two large upstairs rooms. The Pease, Croyle, Carman, Hall and

Staiff families occupy rooms in the old house. Some of the families do their own cooking and washing. Most of the people, however, eat at the general dining room. In addition to the work done by ladies two men are employed at the general kitchen. The work of the laundry occupies three men and four women two days in each week (*The Social Gospel*, June 1898, I(5):23).



Figure 8. The Elms at Commonwealth (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

Their magazine further noted: “Our sawmill has a 25-horse power boiler and engine and has a capacity of from six to ten thousand feet of lumber a day. Connected with it are an edger, a cut-off saw, a saw-gummer, a feed mill and a shingle machine. The shingle machine will cut 10,000 shingles a day” (*The Social Gospel*, June 1898, I(5):23, 25). The saw mill machinery had been shipped to Commonwealth, as early as December 1896 and was presumably in use soon thereafter (Peddy Collection 1896).

July 1898 witnessed the luxurious addition of porches on the Albertson, Damon, Comings, and Cook houses and the Damon house also received a summer kitchen addition, and a “new well has been dug and stoned up in the center of the new village site”. *The Social Gospel* magazine “has up

to date been produced in a little shanty 12 x 24. This month we have enlarged our building to 24 x 48”. By September the colony had planted 7,396 fruit trees and grape vines and had another 53,250 young plants in their nursery and the improvements included: eight houses, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, barn for eight horses and six cows and fodder, a saw-mill with power and large saw-mill building, a printing house with the equipment that prints *The Social Gospel*, shingle machine, feed mill, feed cutter, portable boiler and engine, two log trucks, wagons and harnesses, blacksmithing tools and equipment, carpenter’s tools, farming implements, cane mill and evaporator, poultry and incubator equipment, two mules, four horses, five cows, three pigs, and six young cattle (*The Social Gospel* July, 1898, I(6):26; I(8):26).



Figure 9. The Barracks at Commonwealth (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

One of the logging trucks, a large flatbed wagon pulled by two mules, was published in a photograph in the February 1899 issue of *The Social Gospel*. The wagons were able to haul an average of 15 logs to the saw-mill per day (*The Social Gospel* January 1899, 2(2):23). This truck, although non-motorized, was better than any other in the neighborhood and was in great demand on neighboring plantations. Two mule teams were used on alternate occasions to pull the truck.

By November, 1898, a “three room Mansion, of rough lumber”, which “were the style at Commonwealth” was being constructed for the Carman family, the Kelley house was enlarged, “with an addition behind and a porch in front”, to

accommodate Mr. and Mrs. Hinkley, and “The Growler”, which was a home for the “lonely and lorn” was rechristened. The colony planned to build, “a cotton-mill of small size, 24 x 30 feet”, and a weaving room next to the saw-mill (*The Social Gospel* November 1898, I(10):24-25). In December 1898, a photograph of the printing house was published. Two used looms with “special attachments on them for weaving towels” were purchased and “considerable clearing” was done “on the land of the village site” (*The Social Gospel*, December 1898, I(11):26).

The 24 by 48 foot printing house building was a single-story board and batten wood frame structure built of rough pine lumber. The building was apparently heated by a small stove (as evidenced by a small metal

chimney smokestack). The building also had four large two-on-two frame windows and two doors on the front, and one smaller two-on-two frame window on one end. The post office, which was formerly located at the plantation house, was moved to the printing building the following month. Steam heat was later added to the printing house (*The Social Gospel*, December 1898, I(11):26; January 1899 II(1):27; January 1900, 24:27).

The Gibson's house, known as Rose Cottage, was shingled on three sides in January 1899. The Carman's cottage, which was completed the previous month, was a large dwelling that was located "under the pines, near the school house, and their previous lodging, which was in the old plantation house, was converted for use as a sitting and reading room for the single men. The little creek behind furnishes water for family use". Clearing of timber allowed the colonists to "see each other's houses and see out quite a distance in several directions". Progress was also made that month in constructing the cotton and weaving mill. A photograph of a partial facade of the Commonwealth school building, which was published in the January issue, revealed that it was a tall board and batten structure at least 15 feet wide. Another view of the schoolhouse is shown below. The enterprising colonists advertised the production of "a white crash towel 19 x 38 inches with borders and fringes. They will be woven with unsized two-ply warp. We will mail these towels postpaid at 15 cents each". The following month *The Social Gospel* published a correction noting that these towels were to be "Turkish" towels

rather than "crash" towels (*The Social Gospel*, January 1899, II(1):26-27; II(2):23).

In February 1899, construction was underway, despite heavy rains, at cottages for the Staiff and Loisselle families. A well, more than 25 feet deep, was later built at the Staiff cottage (*The Social Gospel*, February 1899, II(2):23-24; July 1899, II(7):25). A "new wood- sawing machine" had been added and the saw-mill facility was described:

The central wood yard and shed is close by the laundry location, and so our boiler and engine will (later) run both institutions. The frame of the big wood shed is up, but at this writing not covered. When covered, men can split wood on rainy days. The wood is hauled here in tree lengths and from here will be distributed to the houses ready for the stoves (*The Social Gospel*, February 1899, II(2):23-24).

Workmen hauled the wood an average distance of about one mile to the mill. One of their log trucks was loaned "to a neighbor who hauls logs to our saw-mill to be cut on a share of one half" (*The Social Gospel*, February 1899, II(2):23-24).

By March 1899, the colony boasted three steam engines, "one to run our saw mill and cotton mill, one to run our laundry and wood saw and a book case factory, probably soon to be started here, and a third to run our new printing press when it comes". Work began



Figure 10. School House at Commonwealth (Courtesy, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia).

on a cottage for the Henry family and the east end of the Commonwealth property was extensively cleared and farmed. They noted that “Other clearing has greatly extended the view in almost all directions from our houses. The trains are now visible from our windows in their passage across the whole breadth of our plantation”. The population of the colony was 95 that month (*The Social Gospel*, March 1899, II(3):22, 25).

In April 1899, house fires at the McDermott house and the big house (Dozier plantation house) were extinguished and the houses were saved. Extensive renovations were made to the Dozier plantation house later that summer (*The Social Gospel*, April 1899, II(4):23). Ralph Albertson noted in a retrospective article that when he recovered

from his bout of typhoid fever (which he had contracted in April 1899), “only ten graves had been dug on the little hill by the Printing House” (Albertson 1945:142). This is the only reference to a cemetery associated with the Commonwealth colony. Its precise location and the location of the printing house is not known.

In June 1899, the colony dedicated “Willard Park”, which was located “alongside the railroad near the headwaters of the little rivulet which runs through the village (Dozier Creek), and is one of the most attractive groves on the place”. This description indicates that Willard Park was located north of Fort Benning Compartment O-06. The June issue of their magazine featured a photograph of the saw mill, which

was taken prior to the addition of the cotton mill. The saw mill featured a long single-story shed roof with a single gable in the front. One end of the cotton mill abutted the saw mill at the open gable. Production of their anticipated Turkish towels was not yet underway because of equipment problems (*The Social Gospel*, June 1899, II(6):27-28).

Construction of a large communal building intended as a dining hall and tailoring factory was progressing slowly in June 1899. This building measured 32 by 70 feet in extent. Progress at Commonwealth was dealt a severe blow that month when members of the colony were embroiled in a lawsuit that was to lead to the collapse of their colony. By August the large communal dining room, although incomplete, was being used by about 40 members of the colony to eat their meals. A new power plant was installed to run sawmill, shingle machine, grist mill, cotton mill, and "big machine lathe", and the old boiler and engine were moved southeast of the new restaurant to service the laundry and wood saw and to provide steam heat for cooking and heating in the new restaurant. In September a new well was dug to serve this steam engine. The cane mill also was moved and set up near the laundry and wood sawing engine in October (*The Social Gospel*, June 1899, II(6):28; August 1899, II(8):28; September 1899, II(9):26; October 1899, II(10):30).

Food, Home and Garden, a periodical that promoted vegetarianism and other social issues, provided this information on the Christian Commonwealth colony (Clubb 1899:6):

CHRISTIAN
COMMONWEALTH, GA.
Our esteemed friend Jacob
M. Troth, President of the
Virginia Peace Society, has,

by following what he believes to be the leading of the Holy Spirit, left Virginia and settled at Commonwealth, Ga., in a community in which he appears to have found congenial friends and employment. The friends he regards as the most devoted Christians it has ever been his privilege to work with. He writes: 'We are Vegetarians from necessity, as our food costs only three cents each per day. Meat is excluded almost altogether.' They publish the *Social Gospel* in the office of which Brother Troth finds his sphere of activity. He is doing effective work for that publication. Within its two years the Christian Commonwealth have built seven dwellings, a blacksmith shop, a large barn and stable, a school house, a large dining hall, a sawmill, a printing and publishing house; and a cotton mill is being rapidly constructed. The community already consists of 85 persons, whose Vegetarian rations cost only \$2.50 per day! The first of the Ten Commandments is embodied in their constitution. The *North Shore Suburban*, Chicago, publishes a full account of the Christian Commonwealth, illustrated with views and portraits. They appear to hold to the doctrine of the early Christian Church to 'hold all things in common,' love being the

golden cord that binds them together. G. H. Gibson, the president, writes: 'Most of those who come to us bring little or nothing. So to keep open doors for the poor and to make our means go as far as possible, we have lived for the most part on corn bread, cow peas, sweet potatoes and vegetables of our own raising.' We consider this very good living and is very much as we live, except that we have some Graham bread as well, and then again we do not get the cow peas, but would like to.

Although their grist mill was in full production by December 1899, serving not only the members of the colony but others in the neighborhood as well, their cotton mill had yet to produce a Turkish towel due to lack of funds for production. By 1898 the textile mill at Commonwealth was producing and selling towels. The mill operated five looms (Kent 1901). Even when funds were received, the cotton mill apparently never achieved full production and the towels that were produced were poor quality. Nevertheless, several hundred orders were placed for the towels by supporters of the colony (*The Social Gospel*, November 1899, II(11):26; December 1899, II(12):26-27; Albertson 1945:137).

An April 1900 report on the colony noted that their communal dining hall remained unfinished, a new kitchen was added to the McDermott's house, and a total of eight wells had been dug (which varied in depth from 10 to 40 feet). Typhoid fever, which had decimated the colony during the previous year and continued to plague them, was of intense concern. The report closed with these comments: "Mr. Bassett is fixing

up the old slave burying ground near the tank as a floral park. We are told that there are the unmarked graves of a hundred slaves at that place and it is befitting that it be made as beautiful as possible". The location of "tank", referenced above, is not described but is presumably near the main plantation complex, possibly a water tank for servicing the steam locomotives, and north of Fort Benning's Compartment O-06 (*The Social Gospel*, April 1900, 27:30).

By April 1900 the Christian Commonwealth press advertised an impressive list of more than 20 books, two monthly publications, three weekly publications, and one semi-monthly publication (which was apparently published in German), which was in addition to their regular monthly production of *The Social Gospel*. They also advertised their services as job printers for books, pamphlets, folders, programmes, circulars, bill heads, letter heads, note cards, topic cards, and business cards (*The Social Gospel*, April 1900, 27:35).

Despite the success of the printing business, publication of their magazine had to be moved to New York, which was where many of the members of the group were headed. In January 1900, only 51 people remained at the Commonwealth colony. By June of that year most of the members of the colony had left, leaving about 30 people (Kallman 1997:215; *The Social Gospel*, June 1900, 29:24). No issue of their magazine was produced in July and when production resumed, the magazine contained no details of life at the Commonwealth colony. The magazine continued to be published in New York until July 1901 (Fish 1973).

With the exodus of *The Social Gospel* magazine and its architects, the Commonwealth colony faded into obscurity. Their property was ordered into receivership and in December 1900 it was sold by their

receiver, W. A. Ross, at public auction at the Muscogee County courthouse. Improvements included: "One large seven room dwelling, nine new two-room dwellings, good stables, barns, cabins, and other farm appointments, also about 16,000 fruit trees, choice varieties, one-half just coming into bearing".

This sale did not include the machinery or other building contents (Peddy Collection 1900). The land was sold to William T. and William H. Harvey and they took possession on January 1, 1901 (Muscogee County Deed Book NN:278-280). The building contents and other goods were sold by separate auction by their receiver, also in December, 1900. These items included:

- 1 saw mill with 25 H.P. engine and boiler and outfit complete
- 1 lot (about 6,000 feet) of lumber
- 1 shingle machine
- 4 cotton looms
- beamer
- machine lathe
- steam heater
- fixtures
- pulley
- tools and outfit complete
- 1 grist mill
- lot of new belting
- 1 center crank, self contained 25 H. P. engine and boiler, with all attachments
- 1 lot of cables, block and tackle, pulleys, shafting, hangers
- 1 lot blacksmith tools and outfit
- 1 wood saw
- 1 washing machine
- 1 large hotel cooking range
- lot of cooking and heating stoves
- 1 top buggy
- 1 full set of bed-room furniture

- lot of chairs, lamps, desks, tables, shelving, household and kitchen furniture
- books
- 7 stands of bees
- 1 lot ladies straw hats
- 1 lot 3-inch piping
- 4 cows
- 1 two-horse wagon
- 1 log wagon
- 2 harrows
- 2 cotton screws
- lot of large and small plows, harness and general farming implements
- other household and farm appurtenance

The buildings at Commonwealth were salvaged some time after the receivership sale in late 1900 by James W. Jackson, Sr. who had purchased the Commonwealth property and salvaged all the building materials (Muscogee County Deed Book NN: 278-280; Albertson 1945:127). Many of the building materials were likely used on other houses in the neighborhood, including houses in Compartment K-06 on the Fort Benning Military Reservation. On February 14, 1901 the post office at Commonwealth was discontinued and moved to Upatoi. By October 1903, a local newspaper reporter noted that the firm of W. T. Harvey & Company of Columbus owned the former Commonwealth colony where they cultivated cotton and corn and operated a saw mill and public ginnery. Commonwealth remained a railroad station flag stop, although the stations at Wimberly and Garrett's, which were located one mile on either site, were discontinued (Peddy Collection 1900; Elliott et al. 1996). By the early 1900s the flag stop at Commonwealth was known as Ordway (Central of Georgia Railway Company 1918b).

By March 1900 the Commonwealth colony had established extensive fruit orchards on their plantation containing many thousand peach trees. They freely distributed seedlings to their neighbors, who were

mostly African-American share croppers. One neighbor is described in an anecdotal fashion:



Figure 11. Barns at Commonwealth (Courtesy: Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library).

An old colored gentleman whom I had never seen before, came to the post-office today and I broached the fruit tree subject to him and made the proposition that he plant some of our choice trees on Commonwealth terms which means without price and no strings tied on. He shook his grizzled old bushy shock as he replied:

‘Wal, sah! Dat am gentleous; sho is!’ And then after a moment of deep reflection, ‘No, sah! I cain’t afford to do it. I’sedid it befo’ an’ jes’ as soon as de trees hed fruits I hed to pay mo’ rent or move off.’ He is 76 years old and has lived on the same plantation all his life but moved about from cabin to cabin an untold number of times. This prohibitive tax on

industry prevails wherever there is rented land, and that is next to universal in the South. However, quite a number of our colored neighbors are 'reskin' it' and setting out trees. We try to persuade them that it is worth while since some one will get the fruit' (*The Social Gospel*, March 1900, 26:28).

Another elderly African American man, known as Uncle Asa, was living on the Dozier plantation when it was acquired by the Commonwealth colony. The editor of *The Social Gospel* noted: "Uncle Asa lives on a neighboring plantation [in 1899]. He was on this one when we came here and, by our coming, drove him off. He was born a slave here, and is now 86 years old...he cultivates thirty acres of cotton and ten acres of corn" (*The Social Gospel*, August 1899, II(8):26). Uncle Asa's identity was not determined by the present research. Not all of their neighbors were African-Americans, as noted in the March 1900 issue of *The Social Gospel*: "We have a good neighbor in Captain N. G. Oattis. His plantation adjoins ours. Couldn't have a better neighbor if our grandfolk had happened to live on this farm. He looks for good in his new neighbors, and, let us hope, finds a little" (*The Social Gospel*, March 1900, 26:21). The Oattis family owned Land Lot 194, which was located north and east of the Commonwealth colony.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF COMMONWEALTH

The activity at Commonwealth was not only a source of interest to the locals of west central Georgia but they attracted attention of intellectuals worldwide. This international interest focused on the

Commonwealth colony from its very start. The experiences, both successful and unsuccessful, at Commonwealth were heeded by those who fostered other communal settlements across the globe.

Gavit (1895: 413) described the relationship between the Right Relationship League in Chicago and the Christian Commonwealth in Georgia:

The Right Relationship League was born in Keyes's office in Medinah Temple, of a gathering of men whose names have place in the movement for social righteousness. We had heard the story of the brave attempt to incarnate the social gospel in the colony at Commonwealth, Georgia, from the lips of Albertson and Gibson, and some of us had been deeply stirred by the tale of faith and pluck in the face of heart-breaking difficulties, brought to us by these young apostles of the faith that moves economic mountains. The colony at Commonwealth was doomed to fail, of course, but the story of its tragedy is not for my recital now. Suffice to say that out of the message there delivered came a movement which, I believe, will one day be recognized as one of the mother-roots of the Co-operative Commonwealth. It was Graham Taylor himself who made the formal motion which brought the Right Relationship League into being. But back of the formal motion, and of the meeting

itself, was the initiative and the personality of Keyes as of no other.

The American Peace Society (1898: 253-254) published this short summary of the Christian Commonwealth colony:

A new experiment in Christian communism is being made, in Georgia. 'The Christian Commonwealth,' organized in January 1897, near Columbus, consists of about seventy persons who are- trying to carry out in a communistic way in their daily lives the teachings of Christ as to brotherhood. The colony possesses several hundred acres of land which are rapidly being brought under cultivation. Every person who joins the 'Commonwealth' gives to it all that he possesses. No person holds any private property except personal effects. The pledge of membership says: I accept as the law of my life Christ's law that I shall love my neighbor as myself. I will use, hold, or dispose of all my property, my labor and my income according to the dictates of love for the happiness of all who need. I will not withhold for any selfish ends aught that I have from the fullest service that love inspires.' Every member does his share in the necessary work, and receives from the community all that is necessary for his daily life. The community has its own

post-office, named Commonwealth. It has an orchard, nursery-garden, sawmill, blacksmith-shop and dairy. It also has a printing-press and issues monthly a paper entitled 'The Social Gospel,' edited by George Howard Gibson and Rev. Ralph Albertson. The system is one of perfect communism. All land and capital are owned by the community as a whole, and there is perfect equality within the community.

The U.S. government took notice of the various communes and Christian socialist settlements that dotted the country at the end of the 19th century. Reverend Alexander Kent (1901:612-616) provided this lengthy description of the Christian Commonwealth colony in this 1901 U.S. Department of Labor publication:

Though this community is now in the hands of a receiver, having voluntarily disbanded to protect its creditors, its history is one that should not be overlooked. It was organized in 196, in Muscogee County, Ga., by some 40 people, mostly from the Northern States. A college professor, a civil engineer, an editor, and the pastor of an institutional church were the leaders in the movement. Students of the social question, on its ethical side, at least, they reached substantially the same conclusions as to the remedy for social ills. Becoming acquainted with each other's

views through the press, they determined to get together somewhere and begin the work of applying their remedy. To them the spirit of the Nazarene seemed the one thing needed as the animating force of the better social order. To create a social organism that should not only contemplate and call for this spirit, but give it encouragement and embodied expression—this, according to their published statements, was the high purpose that brought them together. Not only did they assume that ‘love is the greatest thing in the world,’ they showed unusual faith in the gentler and more agreeable forms of its manifestation. They determined to open their doors free!}’ to all who would come, confident that a hearty welcome to their brotherhood and to all the privileges of their association would soon put a new purpose and spirit of life even into the tramp and the loafer. They wanted no narrow or limited brotherhood. Especially did they object to excluding the weaker and more needy. They resolved, therefore, not only to free themselves from creeds and forms, grips and passwords, but to blot out all the usual requirements in regard to age, health, and membership fees, and ‘open their hearts and arms to embrace all who would be loved.’ And they

did. People related only through a common nature and common needs, total strangers to each other, individually let go of the little they had and put it into a common fund, determining unreservedly to love and trust one another.

Such was their confidence in the wonder-working power of this spirit of brotherhood that they seem to have thought it capable even of putting new life into worn-out land. They bought an old plantation, at a price far beyond its value, on which they were able to make but a one-fourth payment. Here they began to gather in November and December, 1896. They had not sufficient means to lay in a three-months' supply of food, and many months must elapse before they could hope to get returns from their own planting. Yet they invited and received families from all parts of the country, most of whom came absolutely empty-handed and very few of whom added much to the financial strength of the colony. But for the help received from sympathetic souls on the outside the prime movers would have been starved out inside of three months. As it was, the income from all sources was miserably inadequate, making the first year one of exceeding privation and hardship. As the editor of *The Social Gospel*, the organ of

the community, expressed it, 'the colonists were kept sensible dependent on heaven-sent supplies.

The first year all engaged in manual labor—farming, gardening, grubbing, building, fencing, preparing fuel, logging, milling, carpentering, orchard and nursery work, etc. The effective organization of labor forces was a problem they did not find easy of solution. But finally a director of labor was given a general oversight and made responsible for the proper assignment of persons, while special boards of management were charged with the care, of their respective departments.

The society was not incorporated until November 14, 1899. The constitution adopted under its charter reads, in part, as follows: 'Article 2. Object: The Christian Commonwealth is a society whose purpose is to obey the teachings of Jesus Christ in all matters of life and labor and in the use of property. The society is incorporated to establish a community of people on a cooperative basis, with the purpose of demonstrating to the world the practicability and desirability of Christian cooperation as the best method of earning a livelihood, of developing nobility of character, and

promoting all the ends of a true Christian civilization.'

Speaking of this, the editor of *The Social Gospel* says: 'Adopting this constitution, entering the brotherhood body, and acknowledging the law of love to be right and wise and binding as regards every act and thought of life does not make individuals perfect, but it puts them into right relations. It does not necessarily regenerate the heart, but it gives freedom to those who are rightly inclined and it places constraint upon those who are self-centered or imperfect. Commonwealth is a most blessed place for those who have the brotherhood spirit, but it is the most unhappy place possible for those who will not receive it. It is not a heavenly or angelic society, but an earthly society on the heavenly plan. It is not a perfected brotherhood, but a school of love and right relations. It is not withdrawn from the world and selfish as a community. It feels itself inseparably related to all human need, and through its open doors the unloved world crowds in upon it. It considers itself an economic Christian missionary society.'

Writing in September, 1899, the same writer declares that 'the world is well-nigh faithless regarding the possibility of meeting the demands of this spiritual

brotherhood, and that it is watching Commonwealth curiously and with increasing interest. Will it not be brought to bankruptcy and to starvation or dispersion if it allows the poor to attach themselves freely to it? If it keeps open doors and in consequence attracts all sorts of imperfect people can it assimilate elements of growth and reject elements of discord and death? Can it overcome evil with good?' The answer then given was: 'The Christian Commonwealth lives and grows and is increasing in spiritual power and material equipment. Loaded down with the poor and with almost nothing in hand, by most self-denying economy and the hard labor of its people, the Commonwealth colony has made slow but steady economic growth. It has built a sawmill and a shingle machine, manufactured lumber, and erected enough rough houses to comfortably shelter its 95 people. It has built a cotton mill and begun to weave towels and other cotton goods. It is erecting a steam laundry and has the necessary machinery to put in it. It has erected a building 32 by 72 feet, with porch additions 24 by 32 feet and 10 by 38 feet, for a general kitchen, dining room, waiting and reading room, and library. It has built a two-room schoolhouse and has

one of the best schools to be found. Music, drawing, the languages, and other college branches are taught. It has planted a 35-acre orchard of peaches, pears, plums, prunes, apricots, cherries, and figs. It has 1,500 trees in nursery, budded last year into the choicest variety of peaches. It has set out 1,500 budded Japanese plum trees and has 3,000 more in its nursery. It has transferred 150 pecans from its nursery to its orchard and avenues this season. It has a young nursery of 50,000 stock and a small vineyard. In addition to this,' says the editor, 'the colony built a printing house 24 by 48 feet, where *The Social Gospel* was first printed, with second-hand type on a discarded job press. Now we have a \$2,225 cylinder press and better type, and are beginning to publish books and other brotherhood literature.'

Yet one year later the whole property was in the hands of a receiver and the colony disbanded. The creditors, however, were paid, we are informed, in full, which indicates that the colonists must have made something more than a living, and that lack of business management or want of harmony must have been a factor in the breaking up. We get a glimpse of one, and perhaps of both, in the following from *The Social Gospel* of May,

1899: 'The 17th of April,' says the writer, 'was a day of exodus.' After mentioning a number of persons specifically, the writer continues: "There have been several other departures during the month. One announced that he should make his living lecturing on phrenology, another that he was sorely tried by our excessive levity, and another discovered before he had been here twelve, hours that there was absolutely no harmony in the colony. Only those who have loved and labored in the realm and on the borders of crankdom can understand these things, and they did not and could not foresee them. Those who attempt an application of the law of love to economic problems will find themselves surrounded by every untutored crankism that is adrift, and they will be, as we are, criticised and censured very freely by all such. Neither the 'needy poor' nor the 'bloated plutocrat' will tax love so severely as the egotistical narrow-minded crank. Well, he needs love most, and must be loved all the same.'

We learn from *The Social Gospel* for June that this magazine had ceased to be a source of income to the community and had become a burden; that though for some time it had furnished the greater part of the income

enjoyed, subscriptions had fallen off and the community was unable to meet the bills. Those engaged in its publication determined to take it elsewhere, believing that they could make it a greater power for good than it had been in the colony. The carrying out of this resolution caused a considerable part of the exodus already mentioned. With the departure of these there came to the creditors a fear that this was the beginning of the end, and they determined to take steps to protect themselves before mismanagement should dissipate existing values. So the colony passed into the hands of a receiver, because, as one says in *The Social Gospel* for August, 'Productiveness of industries and pressure of debt are governed by laws that do not always come under those of brotherhood.'

It is pleasant to note, however, that the spirit of brotherhood did not share the fate of the colony so far as the prime movers are concerned. It is still alive, hopeful, and vigorous.

Two of the leaders in the Christian Commonwealth are publishing *The Social Gospel* at South Jamesport, N. Y., and others *Social Ideals*, at Elgin, Ill. Both publications are conducted on the cooperative plan, with the idea of making them bases

and centers of a larger cooperative life. It is to be hoped that they will be conducted in a way to avoid the serious consequences which grew out of the published statements issued by the Commonwealth. The wide-open doors and the beautiful picture of brotherhood life which the Commonwealth publications presented drew hundreds of people (the president of the Commonwealth said over 500) from distant portions of the country to such a life of privation and destitution as seldom falls even to the lot of the pioneer. There was no attempt to deceive or defraud. There was no selfish scheme by which the movers hoped to profit at the expense of others. The movement was led by men sincerely desirous of serving their kind and willing to make any sacrifice of personal ease and comfort to that end. But they lacked business sense, and had no knowledge, apparently, of the necessary cost involved in such an undertaking, and so their philanthropic, humanitarian purposes became productive of more misery to hundreds of their brothers and sisters than had been the selfishness and greed of their 'plutocratic oppressors.'

The feeling was that open doors would be likely to draw the generous and large-hearted, the men and women

who count it more blessed to give than to receive. But the actual experience was that more than 10 per cent of those who came, came only to receive, and had to be expelled. It was impossible to provide adequately even for the workers. Lack of ordinary comforts, and even of necessaries, bred increasing dissatisfaction, and before the Commonwealth was old enough to begin to get returns on the outlays for buildings and orchards it was thrown into the hands of a receiver.

There was nothing unusual or abnormal in the relation of the sexes. Though the leaders were deeply religious and profoundly in earnest, they were thoroughly unsectarian in spirit, and placed their emphasis almost wholly on the ethical side. But the strain which came upon the people through the poverty and privations they were called upon to endure in their effort to establish the cooperative life was more than most of them could endure.

The Outlook (1898:635-636) published this short summary of the Christian Commonwealth colony in Georgia:

A most interesting experiment in Christian communism was inaugurated near Columbus, Ga., in January, 1897. The colony is called 'The Christian Commonwealth,' and at present consists of about

seventy members, who are endeavoring to make Christ's teachings the basis of their daily lives. The practices of the outside world are exactly reversed in this Christian community. The bond which holds the association together is not self-interest, but brotherly love; instead of competing with one another, they co-operate; the strongest and ablest regard their gifts, not as a means of self-aggrandizement, but as an opportunity for service. Every new member is expected to give to the association all that he has, but poor men are received without admission fee of any kind. All that is necessary is assent to the following statement of faith: 'I accept as the law of my life Christ's law that I shall love my neighbor as myself. I will use, hold, or dispose of all my property, my labor, and my income according to the dictates of love for the happiness of all who need. I will not withhold for any selfish ends aught that I have from the fullest service that love inspires.' The system is one of complete communism. Private property is limited to personal effects; all land and capital are owned by the community collectively. There is absolute equality within the association. Every member is asked to do his share in the necessary work, and receives in return all that

is needful for his daily life. The colonists have several hundred acres of land, which are being rapidly brought under cultivation. There is an orchard, a nursery garden, a sawmill, a blacksmith shop, and a dairy. Commonwealth has its own post-office, and a printing-press from which is issued the monthly organ of the association, the 'Social Gospel,' edited by George Howard Gibson and the Rev. Ralph Albertson. Among the contributors to the paper and the active supporters of the colony may be mentioned George D. Herron, D.D., Professor of 'Applied Christianity' at Grinnell, Iowa, James P. Kelley, of Greenwich, Conn., and Ernest Howard Crosby, of New York.

A summary of the Christian Commonwealth colony, entitled "A Town Ruled by Love" originally appearing in the periodical, *Sunday World*, was republished in the journal *Mind* (*Sunday World* 1899:62):

There is no need for money at Commonwealth, Ga., for everything goes into the common fund and every man shares exactly alike. There are no rich people in Commonwealth, and no poor people. All work for one another, and the law and creed of the community is 'Love.' If a person wishes to build a house the lumber is furnished from the mill operated by the members of

the settlement. If vegetables are wanted the common garden supplies the need. The settlement is run on the co-operative plan. "Love thy neighbor as thyself," is a law that is strictly enforced. Two years ago Commonwealth was founded by a few experimentalists. Now it is a village of seventy-five families, working about one thousand acres, at one time a plantation. The old-fashioned home of the antebellum planter is now one of the town buildings. Besides this, there are several dwelling-houses, a printing-office, a large schoolhouse, a sawmill, and a general dining-hall. Commonwealth has its school, paper-mill, and clergyman. A magazine called *Social Gospel*, setting forth the teachings of the community, is published every month. Many talented men and brilliant women have gone to this little Georgia village to live the law of love. Even in the school, good work and good behavior are enforced, not by the rod but by love. In this community there is said to be no jealousy, no envy, no strife. This simple creed hangs upon the wall of every cottage: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. This is My

commandment: That ye love one another as I have loved you. He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.'—*Sunday World*.

Editor Henry Clay Blinn (1898:72) repeated this summary of the Christian Commonwealth in *The Manifesto*:

Christian Commonwealth that has been organized in the state of Georgia, is another effort made in the right direction, and whether it is of short or long duration, it has an educational influence in the line of Communism. We should wish the dear friends the best of success in this new enterprise and shall hope that they may be able to meet in full, the spirit of their Constitution, which has this note;—"The recognized unalterable organic law of the Christian Commonwealth shall be;—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself.' "

If this rule can be made a part of the life work of the little society then we might say of them in the words of Jesus;—"Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God," The Commonwealth has 1)31 acres of land. One orchard of 35 acres has peaches, plums, pears, apples, cherries and

other fruits. Other acres are used for farming and gardening.

Preachers, professors and poets have worked side by side. They have sermons on Sunday and talks and Bible studies and prayer meetings. The dear friends are learning even so soon, that a Society of men and women, must have a system of discipline, or there will be but little practical righteousness. They say,—“We have also learned that some need Christian correction and moral restraint, the individual conscience needing to be stirred up and educated by the more enlightened and by expressions of the general conscience.”

This first step in advance, toward the Brotherhood of man is a lesson that may prove profitable, not only to the class directly interested in the movement, but also to others who have a silent interest in a corresponding ‘Social Gospel,’ for the much needed advancement of the human family.

The periodical *Public Opinion* (1899:110) provided this summary of the Christian Commonwealth colony:

One of the most peculiar of the settlements which have been established in the United States has begun life at Commonwealth, Muscogee county, Ga. Commonwealth

is as brand new as the colony. In fact, the colonists founded Commonwealth. Its originators were men of strong religious convictions, who intend to live out, in the actual life, the principles of Christ. The scheme is Arcadian in its nature. The law of the colony is the law of love. Everybody works in the colony. The results are held in common. As a consequence the colony is beginning to attract attention as an exponent of practical socialism. It was founded two years ago. In these two years the colonists, hardy and plucky pioneers from the northwest, have transformed what was once a barren piece of land into a fertile and prosperous farm. The ground is being tilled by scientific methods. Thousands of fruit trees have been set out. Diversified industries are springing up. The colony has its school, its meeting house, its workshops and printing office, and is contemplating the establishment of a normal school, of a large publishing house and a cotton cloth factory.

The colonists are more than ordinary men. Some of them are well known in this country. The colony has in its ranks college professors, who, leaving the schoolroom, are testing their pet theories by actual experience. The colonists have nine hundred and thirty-one acres of land.

The farm was purchased by a committee which came south from Nebraska. Their principal vocations are farming, fruit raising, nursery work and the building up of a publishing business. It is expected that cloth manufacturing will begin soon.

The movement to start such a colony grew out of agitation made in the *Wealth Makers*, of Lincoln, Neb., to which George Howard Gibson, now the editor of the *Social Gospel*, contributed articles; of agitation in the *Kingdom*, by John Chipman, and by the Rev. Ralph Albertson, who quickly joined in the proposed plan. Mr. Albertson, before entering the movement, was pastor of a Congregational church in the city of Springfield, O. He is an eloquent preacher, an attractive writer and a man of very versatile talents. There are now eighty-nine persons in the colony. Eighty are members, the rest being visitors or applicants for membership whose applications have not yet been acted upon. Professor Damon, the present president of the Christian commonwealth, was for nineteen years professor of Greek, Latin and history at the Methodist college at Napa, Cal.

Some of the families live about in cottages, doing all

their own work. Some cook in a common kitchen and eat together, either from choice or because house room is scarce. Harmless amusements are believed in and encouraged. Culture is believed in most heartily. The view is taken that culture, like amusement, must be incidental and helpful to service. The following covenant is entered into by the applicant for a home at the Christian commonwealth: 'I accept as the law of my life Christ's law that I shall love my neighbor as myself. I will use, hold, or dispose of all my property, my labor, and my income according to the dictates of love for the happiness of all who need. I will not withhold for any selfish ends aught that I have from the fullest service that love inspires.'

Among the more notable international supporters of the Christian Commonwealth colony was Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy and the respect for Tolstoy by the colonists was mutual. Marks (2003) noted that the largest Tolstoyan community in the country at the Christian Commonwealth colony in Georgia. George Gibson celebrated Tolstoy's 70th birthday in one issue of the *Social Gospel*. Gibson sent the periodical to Tolstoy, along with correspondence. Count Tolstoy wrote in reply from Moscow, Russia to George Gibson in 1898,

1898 г. Марта 11. Москва.

My dear friend,

I duly received your letter and magazine, both of which afforded me great pleasure. The first number is very good and I liked all the articles in it. It is quite true, as you say it in your article "The Social Need" (1), and Herron (2) in his, that a Christian life is quite impossible in the present unchristian organization of society. The contradictions between his surroundings and his convictions are very painful for a man who is sincere in his christian faith, and therefore the organization of communities seems to such a man the only means of delivering himself from these contradictions. But this is an illusion. Every community is a small island in the mist of an ocean of unchristian conditions of life, so that the Christian relations exist only between members of the colony but outside that must remain unchristian, otherwise the colony would not exist for a moment. And therefore to live in community cannot save a Christian from the contradiction between his conscience and his life. I do not mean to say that I do not approve of communities such as your common-wealth, or that I do not think them to be a good thing. On the contrary, I approve of them with all my heart and am very interested in your commonwealth and wish it the greatest success. I think

that every man who can free himself from the conditions of wordly life without breaking the ties of love -- love the main principle in the name of which he seeks new forms of life -- I think such a man not only must, but naturally join people who have the same beliefs and who try to live up to them. If I were free I would immediately even at my age join such a colony. I only wished to say that the mere forming of communities is not a solution for the Christian problem, but is only one of the means of its solution. The revolution that is going on for the attainment of the Christian ideal is so enormous, our life is so different from what it ought to be, that for the perfect success of this revolution, for the concordance of conscience and life, is needed the work of all men -- men living in communities as well as men of the world living in the most different conditions. This ideal is not so quickly and so simply attained, as we think and wish it. This ideal will be attained only when every man in the whole world will say: Why should I sell my services and buy yours? If mine are greater than yours I owe them to you, because if there is in the whole world one man who does not think and act by this principle, and who, will take and keep by violence, what he can take

from others, no man can live a true Christian life, as well in a community as outside it. We cannot be saved separately, we must be saved all together. And this can be attained only through the modification of the conception of life in the faith of all men; and to this end we must work all together -- men living in the world as well as men living in communities.

We must all of us remember that we are messengers from the great King -- the God of Love with the message of unity and love between all living beings. And therefore we must not for a minute forget our mission and do all what we think useful and agreeable for ourselves only so long as it is not in opposition to our mission which is to be accomplished not only by words, but by example and especially by the infection of love.

Please give my respect and love to the colonists and ask them not to be offended by me giving them advice, which may be unnecessary. I advice them to remember that all material questions of: money, implements, nourishment, even the very existence of the colony itself, -- all those things are of little importance in comparison of the sole important object of our life: to preserve love amongst all men, which we come in contact with. If with

the object of keeping the food of the colony or of protecting the thrift of it you must quarrel with a friend or with a stranger, must excite ill-feelings in somebody, it is better to give up everything, than to act against love. And let our friends not dread that the strict following of the princip will destroy the practical work. Even the practical work will flourish -- not as we expect it, but in its own way, only by strict following the law of love and will perish by acting in opposition to it.

Your friend and brother

Leo Tolstoy (Tolstoy 1954:70).

Joseph Edwards, a statistician for the Department of Labor, gave this brief summary of the Christian Commonwealth:

The Christian Commonwealth, in Georgia, is a Communist colony founded in Jan., '97. There are about 70 members, of whom the most prominent are Rev. Ralph Albertson and George Howard Gibson. The colonists have their own orchard, nursery garden, saw mill, blacksmith shop, dairy, and printing press. It is proposed to form another Christian colony at Rockwell, Fla.

Hinds (1908) noted that the Christian Commonwealth colony included 90 people at

its peak. Hinds also noted that the colony was financially supported by the Right Relationship League, which was a socialist group in Chicago (Edwards 1899:117).

Fogarty (2003:167-169) noted that soon after the Christian Corporation was chartered in April 1895, Gibson, who had started the Christian Corporation, sold his paper, the *Wealth Makers*, and led a group to Georgia to found the Christian Commonwealth Colony". A debate that appeared in a small socialist magazine, the *Kingdom*, in 1895 and early 1896 captured the interest of Ralph Albertson, who was then living at the Willard Cooperative Colony in Andrews, North Carolina", and that John Chipman had urged in this debate for, "those who 'love Christ' to 'come together and put all we have, little or much, into a common fund, buy a tract of cheap land and go to live there and work all good works in Christs name'". As a result of this printed dialogue, Gibson's Christian Corporation and the Willard Co-operative Colony were merged to create the Christina Commonwealth Community. Ralph Albertson visited several potential sites for the colony and in November 1896, John Chipman made a down payment on the 931 acre Dozier plantation. Fogarty noted that the Willard group arrived in Muscogee County first and was joined by two waves of colonists from Nebraska in December 1896 and August 1897.

George Gibson arrived with 25 families of his followers, who made the trip east in prairie schooners. Morris and Kross (2004:60-1) list the colonists at the Christian Commonwealth Colony to include 64 adult members, which included 33 unmarried men and women. They noted that about 17 of these members joined the Southern Co-

operative Association at Apalachicola, Florida after the Georgia colony was dissolved. Brundage (1996:16) noted that approximately 25 percent of the Christian Commonwealth colony was comprised of Southerners.

Oved (1987:275-283) presented perhaps the first modern treatment of the history of the Christian Commonwealth in a summary of early Utopias in America. Other modern historical studies that discuss the Commonwealth colony include Fogarty (2003), Kallman (1997), and Questel (1982).

COMMONWEALTH IN RUINS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY

What were the tangible features associated with the Commonwealth colony that may have left archaeological traces? Many answers to this question are found in the issues of *The Social Gospel*, which was published at Commonwealth from February, 1898 to June, 1900, and included a section in each issue, entitled, "Commonwealth Colony Notes", that provided news of the colony. Before the colonists arrived the property contained, "the old barn, the old house [the Dozier plantation house, which was estimated to be built in 1839], three tenant houses and plenty of timber". A photograph of the Dozier plantation house, which was taken from southwest of the house on the south side of the old Macon Road (now Chattsworth Road), was published in May, 1899. It was described as a nine-room, one-story mansion with high ceilings and open fire places. The photograph shows a grove of elm trees in the front yard, flanked by a picket fence that fronted the street. That same month the new printing press and steam washing machine were operational (*The Social Gospel*, September, 1898, I(8):26; April, 1899, II(4):23; II(5):27-28; August, 1899 II(8):28).

Ralph Albertson, a founder of the colony, wrote years later: "The buildings consisted of an old manor house and half a dozen log cabins, all of which had been inhabited by negroes, and a very dilapidated barn. There were no fences, no fruit, no improvements" (Albertson 1945:127). In addition to the existing buildings that were adopted for their purposes, the members of the colony built about 15 buildings. These buildings were made from lumber produced at their sawmill

and the only major building items that were purchased were doors and window sashes. The houses were made from rough lumber and only three of them had kitchens (Albertson 1945:137-138).

As noted earlier, the Christian Commonwealth colony was built near the main house of the former Dozier plantation. Historical records indicate that a row of former slave cabins were used as housing by members of the Commonwealth colony. The Dozier plantation house, and the slave quarter that was associated with it, was located north of Fort Benning Military Reservation. This house, which remains standing, and its immediate surroundings have not been examined archaeologically.

The Dozier house was a focal point of the Commonwealth and used by the colony as a meeting hall. Many of the meals in the colony were shared communally and consequently some of the houses may not have been used for cooking. The practice of communal food preparation might also explain the sparseness of brick across the site, since large chimneys would not have been required. Many of the meals in the colony were shared communally and consequently some of the houses may not have been used for cooking meals. This may account for the lack of domestic debris. No archaeological study of the Dozier house was conducted.

Recent archaeological survey by researchers with Southern Research, who identified one site (designated Site 9Me766) associated with the Commonwealth Colony and a few others that are possibly associated with it. The main site was on an upland ridge above Dozier Creek and immediately south of Chattsworth Road. This survey work is fully detailed in a research report that was filed with the Fort Benning Military Reservation

by Southern Research Historic Preservation Consultants, Inc.

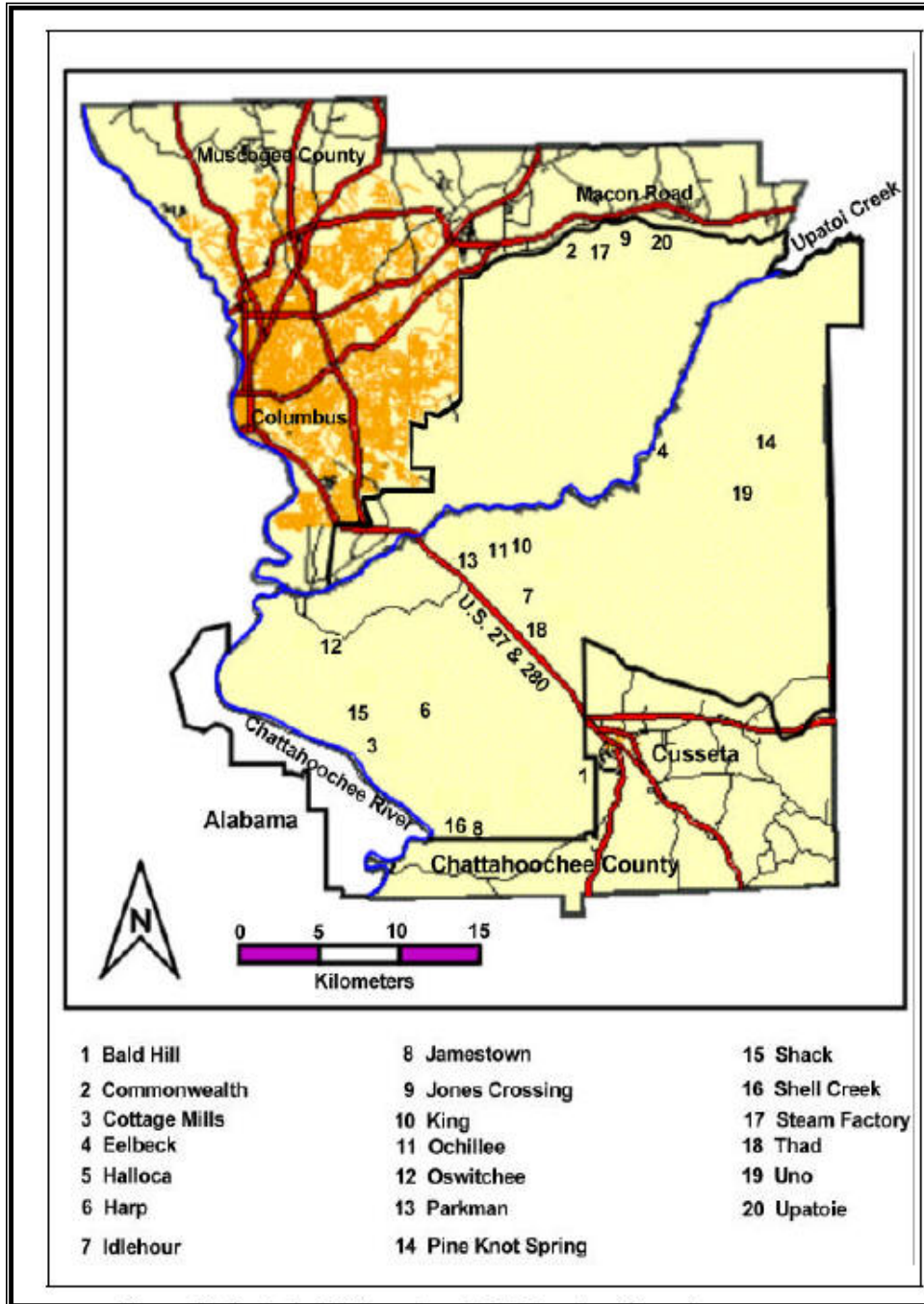


Figure 12. Location of Early Historic Settlements in the Study Vicinity (Source: Elliott et al. 1999).



Figure 13. Extensively Renovated Dozier Plantation Home, Owned by Sam and Dusty Wellborn, ca. 1999.

The lion's share of the Commonwealth settlement was discovered at Site 9Me766, which was discovered and described by Elliott and his colleagues:

Site 9Me766 consisted of a large historic site on an upland ridge above Dozier Creek and immediately south of Chattsworth Road. It contained archaeological remains associated with the Commonwealth settlement, a short-lived Christian social experiment dating to the

1890s...This site, which is located in the southwestern quadrant of Land Lot 163, 9th District, contained architectural ruins and material culture associated with the Commonwealth. While no midden areas or subsurface features were identified by the survey, there is a strong possibility that both exist within the site boundary.

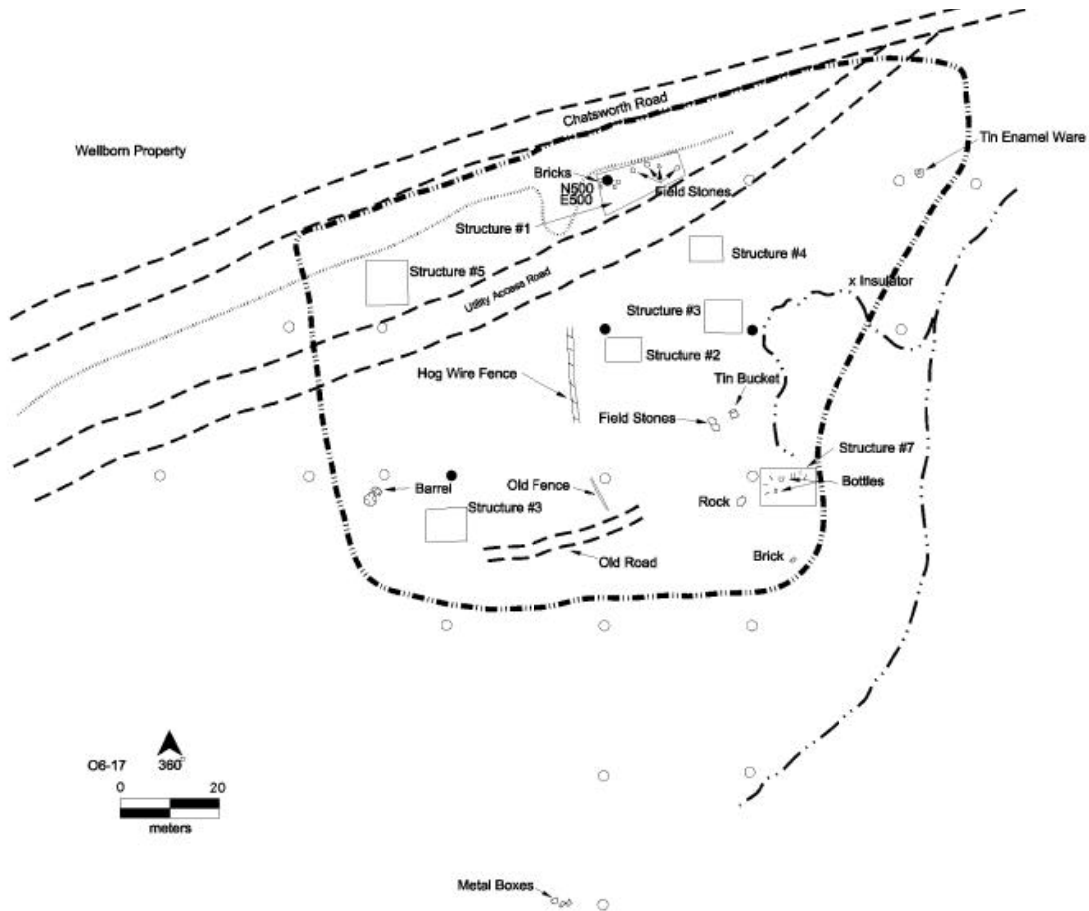


Figure 14. Plan of Archaeological Site of Commonwealth, 9Me766 (Source: Elliott et al. 1999).

Soils on the site are shallow and severely eroded. Artifacts were found at a maximum depth of 30 cm below surface. A typical soil profile revealed: very dark gray (5YR 3/4) sandy loam from 0-7 cm, brownish yellow (10 YR 6/6) sandy loam from 7-20 cm and yellow (10 YR 7/6) sandy clay from 20-30 cm. Artifacts recovered during surface collection include: clear glass, cut and wire nails and an aqua-colored glass utility line insulator.

At least seven structures were identified from surface evidence. This evidence was primarily in the form of foundation stone patterns and earthen house platforms. Houses and other buildings within the village of Commonwealth were salvaged following abandonment of the settlement, as documented in Muscogee County Superior Court records (Elliott et al. 1996).

Archaeologists identified at least seven structures from surface evidence at 9Me766. This evidence was primarily in the form of

foundation stones and earthen house platforms. Structures 1 and 2 were small house ruins marked by scatters of brick and rock foundation stones. Structure 5 was the best preserved house ruin on the site. It consisted of numerous foundation stones, bricks, tin and a depressed rectangular outline. The foundation stone pattern, which is largely intact, suggests a rectangular building with a small addition or portico on the northeastern side. This dwelling was somewhat larger than Structures 1 and 2.

Structure 6 is a large ruin that appears non-domestic in character. This ruin was marked by a partial rectangular pattern of large foundation stones. Weathered cow bones were observed on the surface a few meters southwest of this ruin and may be affiliated with the structure.

The function of Structures 3, 4 and 7 was not determined. Structure 3 consisted of four large foundation stones, brick, and metal car parts. A cement basin, possibly a bird bath, is located several meters southeast of the ruin. Structure 4 consisted of three large foundation stones adjacent to an artificially mounded ridge. Structure 7 included a small oval depression flanked by a single large foundation stone.

Another site lies within the property that was the Commonwealth and its location may correspond to a contemporary account of the small cemetery at Commonwealth. Ralph Albertson, leader of the colony, noted in a retrospective article that, shortly after April, 1899, 'only ten graves had been dug on the little hill by the Printing House' (Albertson 1945:142). This is the only reference to a cemetery associated with the Commonwealth colony. Its precise location and the location of the printing house is not known. Survey investigations were unable to determine if this site contains human burials. Several bricks and an upright stone were

present. The survey investigation yielded no historic artifacts, other than brick and rock that were observed on the surface. The surface of this site in the vicinity of the rock and brick was disturbed by modern logging activity, which hindered the surveyors ability to determine if this site contained a cemetery.

A third site consisted of a series of charcoal kilns on a ridge top above the Dozier Creek drainage. Artifacts included ironstone, transfer printed whiteware, and polychrome hand painted whiteware sherds; clear, aqua, and olive green glass bottle sherds. While these artifacts indicate an early to mid-nineteenth century occupation that predates the Commonwealth colony, the kilns may represent a later component. In the years before coal was readily available in Georgia, wood charcoal fulfilled the needs of blacksmiths, distillers, moonshiners, and other rural industries that required special fuels whose temperatures could be carefully regulated.

Early accounts of the method of manufacturing wood charcoal in Georgia can be summarized as follows: newly cut pine wood was piled into a heap, set on fire and then completely covered with earth to smolder. Once the fire was out the wood charcoal was excavated from the mound ready for use.

The charcoal kilns were low circular or oval earthen mounds (generally 4-5 m on their maximum dimension and approximately 30 to 60 cm high) with a slightly depressed core. The central area was filled with a consolidated deposit of wood charcoal and lesser amounts of burned soil. These kiln features were found at 10 other archaeological sites in this part of the Fort Benning Military Reservation. They are extremely uncommon elsewhere in this region of Georgia. The scattered patterning

of the kilns across the upland landscape and their small size would indicate that the kilns were distributed to access the wood resources rather than hauling the wood long distances to a central collection point. The kiln examples in the study area may represent a unique expression of a later naval stores tradition and may be related to the production of turpentine, pitch, or wood charcoal.

The transportation of wood products to market was a considerable expense during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. To produce lumber, timber had to be hauled to a sawmill as large, long logs. A large upland sawmill operation was established at the Commonwealth colony on the old Dozier plantation by 1897 and this mill was used by members of the colony and their neighbors and lasted fewer than five years. The Commonwealth colony also built two log trucks, which were massive mule-draw wagons for hauling big logs to the mill. The log trucks served not only the members of the colony but their neighbors as well. Earlier versions of these log trucks may have served the region during the plantation era, but these have not been documented. The Commonwealth colony was a unique historical development in the Fort Benning region making any domestic and industrial sites associated with them significant.

One point that is important to consider is what was not found archaeologically during the intensive survey. Despite the fact that most of the 950 acres owned by the Commonwealth colony has been intensively surveyed only three houses were identified and their evidence is scant at best. Where were the other residents housed and would not one expect more abundant debris from 100 people living on a spot for 3-4 years? The dearth of archaeological remains should not be totally unexpected, however, since the colony was a short term duration

occupation whose participants deemphasized material things. Also, from historical research we know that timber and other building materials from houses at Commonwealth was salvaged and used for house construction on property several miles east of the study area after the colony failed.

Despite the paucity of the archaeological record, the remaining resources possess the potential to contrast Commonwealth life-ways with more typical late 19th/early 20th century farmsteads and tenant houses in the region, of which there are thousands of examples. The Commonwealth sites also present an opportunity for the correlation of archaeological data with contemporary photographic and descriptive records, which is a rare opportunity for most of rural Georgia.

Most importantly, however, the Christian Commonwealth is a rare site type. It was a planned religious utopian commune fueled by northern intellectuals peopled by mid-westerners and others, and established in the agrarian South. It provides an opportunity to examine a narrow slice of late nineteenth century life. Its remains are a tangible example of *The Social Gospel* politico-religious movement of the late 19th and early 20th century. Prominent supporters of *The Social Gospel* movement included Leo Tolstoy and Luther Burbank. Future studies of the Commonwealth sites promise to add a twist to our traditional concepts of northern carpetbaggers in the post-bellum South.

Despite the fact that most of the 950 acres owned by the Commonwealth colony has been intensively surveyed, the archaeological evidence is scant at best. Where were the residents housed and would not one expect more abundant debris from 100 people living on a spot for 3-4 years? The remaining resources possess the potential to contrast Commonwealth life-

ways with more typical late 19th/early 20th century farmsteads and tenant houses in the region, of which there are thousands of examples. Important archaeological resources associated with the Commonwealth colony were identified on the Fort Benning Military Reservation by

Elliott and his colleagues. Other important cultural resources undoubtedly exist on adjacent privately-owned land but these resources have not been inventoried.

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