The Milton Co-Operative Colony

From Utopia to Ghost Town, 1913–1916

*By Norma Jane Bumgarner**

The settlement of Oklahoma by whites and blacks occurred late in the country's move westward, and thus the opportunity for a good life on its rural frontier was short-lived at best. Many who came to the territories in search of farm land found themselves in competition with land speculators and bankers in the rural areas and aggressive commercial interests in the towns.[1]

Early in the twentieth century, the town of Milton, fifteen miles northwest of Poteau in LeFlore County, looked much like its neigh-

bors along the Fort Smith and Western Railroad, its unpaved streets near the tracks lined with wooden storefronts, a hotel, and train station.[2] But in 1913 the Milton Co-Operative Colony contracted to buy the townsite and thus set the tiny community on a radically different course.

The area around Milton, part of the Choctaw Nation, had been developed by Henry Clay Frick, a leading entrepreneur in refined coal (coke) and one of the founders of the U. S. Steel Corporation. Near the turn of the century, he and his associates extended their monopoly in the production and marketing of coke to include coal deposits near Chant (now McCurtain), five miles west of Milton, and they got backing from civic leaders in Fort Smith for the new Fort Smith and Western Railroad Company. Railroad construction from Fort Smith through Coal Creek, Panama, Bokoshe, Milton, Chant, and on to Guthrie began in 1900 and was open for business in 1903.[3]

In the newly re-named town of McCurtain, Frick's associates set up the San Bois Coal Company and started coke production; for better or worse, McCurtain became a company town. The Milton townsite, in contrast, belonged to a private individual, John D. Benedict, and so remained open for developments that would have been impossible under the proprietary eye of San Bois Coal.

Before 1900, devotees of commercial and social Darwinism in the two territories that were to become Oklahoma faced significant opposition from the People's Party, or Populists, heirs to the egalitarian tradition of the American Revolution as handed down through the democracy of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln. That tradition opposed luxury, special privilege, and gross inequalities in wealth while valuing human rights over those of property.[4]

At the turn of the century the populist movement in Oklahoma lost steam and was partially absorbed by progressive movements in both major parties. Some Populists, however, were unwilling to participate in what was being called "fusion" and dropped out of politics. Others, like populist editors G. C. Halbrooks and Mont Howard, who founded Oklahoma's first socialist local in 1895, became followers of Eugene V. Debs's Social Democratic party.[5] As a result, Oklahoma's Democrats and Republicans found themselves struggling with many of the same ideas, advanced by people capitalism had left behind. Although in the first decade of the new century reform Democrats fought back by raiding the Socialists' platform, opposition to the agricultural market system continued to grow.[6]

Radicals focused blame for the terrible conditions among Oklahoma's poor on "the gentry constituting the eminently respectable citizens of the cities and county seat towns; the directors and officers of the chambers of commerce; the deacons and pillars of the aristocratic churches . . . , the bankers, the credit store managers, the landlords, and the corporation lawyers."[7]

Socialists campaigned for publicly owned cooperatives, state credit for farmers, and the forced breakup of large land holdings. By 1910 there were more Socialists in Oklahoma than in any other state, including New York, which had nearly six times the population.[8]

Oscar Ameringer, a Socialist newspaper publisher, worked as an organizer for the Socialist Party in Oklahoma right after statehood. In his autobiography he described the appalling conditions in which he found many Oklahomans who did not succeed in obtaining land or positions in the new state. Those outside the circles of wealth and influence, he wrote, especially those trapped in the brutal sharecropping system, felt unwelcome in churches filled with the prosperous, whom they saw as "smug, well dressed overly well fed hypocrites." Their government was run by people Ameringer called "wind-jamming, hot-air-spouting politicians geysering Jeffersonian platitudes about equal rights."[9]

Marginalized farmers and laborers gathered to comfort one another, to listen to socialist rhetoric and read socialist newspapers, to pass around an angry pamphlet condemning "the interlocked parasites in the electric light towns"[10] or to recite poems by Covington Hall, a favorite among socialists:

> Strange thoughts are roaming thru my head;
> I'm feeling sore and seeing red;
> I'm wond'ring why bread-raisers must
> Feed their young'uns on a crust,
> While Congresses deny our rights
> To shower graft on parasites.
>
> I've stood, O Lord, 'bout all I can;
> And tho I am a patient man,
> I mean to have what we'uns raise
> No matter what Big Business says;
> I mean to be a man 'mong men.
> Please tip 'em off, O Lord. Amen.[11]

Some believers in social equality gave up on trying to convert the whole of society into one in which workers would own their own jobs and share the profits of their labor equally. They turned instead to

the smaller worlds of cooperative communities. The colony at Milton was one such experiment.

The Town and the Colony

Hazel Greene, who came to Milton about 1891 at the age of ten, remembered it as an old Choctaw Nation community called Needmore. "We thought Milton would be the main town in the country," she said, "but it failed to be for some reason."[12] By 1913 the town's population had reached 125. Fort Smith, Arkansas, was the nearest city, and the nearest bank was in Bokoshe to the east.[13] At least until the end of 1913, when the paper dropped the "News from Milton" column, the *Bokoshe Enterprise* seems to have served as Milton's source and outlet for local news.

The land around Milton was a combination of woodland, open-range pasture, and cotton fields. With very few roads in the area, transportation in and out was on foot, horseback, or rail. The town boasted three general stores: Crager and Warlick General Merchandise, H. M. Dosher and Son, and another operated by Mrs. G. W. Young. J. L. Lewis ran a combination drug store, grocery, and post office. There also were a cotton gin and a gristmill.[14]

Mary Langthorp, ca. 1915 (Courtesy the author).

The promotional booklet for the Milton colony credits Dr. S. T. Peet, a Muskogee philanthropist, with purchasing the property on which the colony was built.[15] Peet, a Pennsylvania-born dentist who moved to Oklahoma from Missouri in 1907 at the age of fifty-nine, was known in Muskogee as an active reformer and member of the Socialist Party. In poor health and unable to practice dentistry, he used his time in Oklahoma to promote socialist causes.[16]

On October 22, 1913, the Milton Co-Operative Colony contracted with John D. Benedict of Muskogee to purchase for $12,000 the unsold lots in the Milton townsite and 100 acres southwest of town. Payment was to be from the sale of lots and from royalties on coal mined by the colony. Listed in the contract as trustees for the colony were C. P. Helton, Cash M. Stevens, M. M. Black, Hugh Doak, and Charles Weise.[17]

Benedict had purchased most of the land shortly after statehood and later signed mortgages with Guaranty State Bank of Muskogee and MidContinent Life Insurance Company. The liens remained on the property throughout the colony's existence.

Among the eager new converts to socialism who arrived in Milton in 1913 was twelve-year-old Mary Langthorp, who became a keen observer with an excellent memory.[18] She and her family arrived early in the summer, leaving behind a homestead near Mena, Arkansas, then a center of socialist activity. The colonists came expecting great prosperity, Mary said, but most families found themselves setting up housekeeping in tents. The Langthorps were fortunate to start out in a farm house just outside town where they could wait under a solid roof for a colony house. Slowly the colony added houses built of lumber from the sawmill—not very good houses, Mary said, but better than tents. The colony also built a headquarters building and commissary.[19]

About 150 people came to Milton, many of them from outside Oklahoma, and as diverse a group as imaginable in religion and education. Mary remembered sophisticated New Yorkers at Milton, as well as a family from New Mexico. Another came from Arkansas in an ox-drawn covered wagon that she referred to as a curiosity, even in 1913. Some, like Mary's English father, were European immigrants. In religion, colonists ranged from "fundamentalists who believed the Bible from cover to cover" to "radical atheists and agnostics."[20]

The colony was organized with a communal economy. The men worked in the mines and sawmill owned and operated by the colony. Workers were paid in scrip, a currency redeemable for foodstuffs and other necessities only at the colony commissary.[21] Sometimes the commissary made bulk purchases, such as a whole hog, in which case the colonists could supplement their ordinarily meager diets (mostly beans and either cornbread or light bread) with a little fresh meat. On one occasion, the commissary obtained a whole carload of flour, and the colonists enjoyed a period of unaccustomed plenty.[22]

For entertainment, the nearest theater was in Bokoshe, but few had the price of admission, so colonists amused themselves with gossip, with fishing in the nearby streams, and by staging kangaroo courts. Speeches and singing at socialist rallies also were popular. On one occasion, Freda Ameringer, the daughter of United Mine Workers official Dan Hogan and the wife and partner of Socialist Party editor Oscar Ameringer, spoke at Milton. Mary described the speaker as a sedate young lady whose presentation on unionism

was not as exciting as those delivered by some of the rabble-rousers. But one of the colony women, Maud Beasley, livened up the occasion by outfitting the children with red flags and marching them around the gathering.[23]

For a while, there must have been a heady feeling of success in the colony. Socialism in Oklahoma reached its high tide in the election of 1914, the year Oscar Ameringer was almost elected mayor of Oklahoma City.[24] In January, 1914, however, Dr. Peet died. Mary Langthorp wrote that, had he lived, the colony might have suffered less confusion in the years that followed. Through most of its existence, the community seemed rudderless, lurching along without direction or vision.[25]

The colony had several "directors," but the colony manager, whom the colonists knew as Comrade Waller, ran everything. Mary described H. C. Waller as an ex-cook with an unsightly tumor on his neck which did not respond to any locally available treatment. She believed he got the job as manager only because he was physically unable to work in the mine.[26]

The colonists lived in family units and made no attempt at communal living. Mary believed that trying to live all together would have been disastrous, with the colonists' conflicting religious beliefs added to the ordinary frictions and jealousies within a group that size. The only bond they shared was a belief in socialism and their economic dependence on the mine and sawmill. There was no one to set down rules for the community, so the heterogeneous group had to depend on individual consciences to govern everyday behavior.[27]

Naturally, the townspeople were alarmed when this collection of strangers took over their town. They looked at the newcomers, Mary said, the way chickens do when strange fowl are put into the poultry yard. For their part, the colonists regarded those who did not belong to the colony as natural enemies.[28]

The colonists openly scoffed at capitalism and the assumptions of the marketplace society. Radicals in eastern Oklahoma, the former Indian Territory, insistently pointed out evils like the collusion between corporations and settler organizations which had played such a role in wresting Indian lands from tribal sovereignty.[29] They denounced graft and land grabbing by railroads and mining companies, as well as by lawyers and "squaw men," and refused to excuse such practices as unfortunate, but unavoidable, concomitants of progress. They challenged their fellow citizens' devotion to the Christian message of brotherhood and cooperation, asserting that

the commitment to individual competition replaced brotherly love with a cradle-to-grave struggle.[30]

In the manner of true believers, the colonists did not approach Milton's mainstream pioneers, either Choctaw or white, with tactful persuasion. "The colonists didn't try to get along," Mary said. "It was the colony people's fault mostly."[31] Most of the newcomers kept to themselves and referred to the townspeople as "the outsiders." Mary did not remember hearing the colonists referred to as "Reds," but she did hear them called "damned Socialists."[32]

People naturally become defensive when confronted with values hostile to their own. Conflict was inevitable. Relations between the colonists and Milton's original residents could not have been helped by rhetoric like the following by Covington Hall:

> We shall send the message to them, on a whisper down the night,
> And shall cheer as warrior women drive your helots to the fight;
> We shall use your guile against you, all the cunning you have taught,
> All the wisdom of the serpent to attain the ending sought.
>
> We shall come as comes the cyclone, in the stillness we shall form—
> From the calm your terror fashioned we shall hurl on you the storm;
> We shall strike when least expected, when you deem Toil's rout complete,
> And crush you and your gunmen 'neath our brogan-shodden feet.[33]

Ben Sharp, a miner who moved to Milton in 1917 after the colony had closed, learned about the colonists from his neighbors. "The people of the socialist colony at Milton had a rough time," he later wrote to Jerry Sinise, editor of *Southwest Heritage* magazine, which had just published Mary's article about the Milton colony. "[Mary] said the natives did not like them. Hell[,] Jerry[,] they hated them."[34]

The first confrontation occurred at the school, the main community center and an inescapable point of contact. Trouble flared when the teacher asked the students to help her after school by carrying in coal and sweeping the schoolhouse floor. That was not an unusual requirement at a time when teachers had total responsibility for their classrooms. But the colony children refused and were promptly expelled.

Considerable bitterness ensued. Comrade Waller insisted there was no reason to expel the students; they were just afraid of getting coal dust on their clothes. After all, many of the girls only had one dress. The teacher was not swayed, however, and the dispute dragged on until near the beginning of the next term. Then the teacher resigned, and the school board hired a janitor. The colon-

ists had won their case, but the students lost most of a term's schooling.[35]

Another incident pitted the miners against the open-range practices of livestock owners. Members of the colony were clearing a road near the mine by blasting out tree stumps with dynamite when a bull belonging to a local resident named Bargeban got too close and was killed. Bargeban demanded twenty-five dollars for the bull, and Waller, arguing on behalf of the colony, insisted that it was not worth nearly that much. "Why there weren't nothing to it but horns and testicles," he said. Mary Langthorp always gave a censored version of the owner's reply, "All I wanted with him was to procreate and fight!" (She could never bring herself to repeat the farmer's offensive word.) The colony did ultimately have to pay for the bull, but Mary did not say how much.[36]

The community also questioned the colonists' morality, because socialists were supposed to believe in free love. "I don't think free love was practiced very much," Mary wrote, "not that the will was not there. . . . [People] kept such a close watch on each other that the opportunity was lacking."[37]

It was fortunate for all concerned that there were a few real miners among the dreamers and visionaries who joined the colony, because otherwise the mines might well have been blown to bits. LeFlore County mines had a reputation for being "gassy"; only a year before the colony was founded, the nearby San Bois Mine Number Two at McCurtain experienced a gas explosion that killed 111 miners.[38]

The colony operated two mines. One of them was small, but the other was a slope mine large enough for the colonists to have reasonable expectations for profit. In spite of all the problems and conflicts related to its operation, the mine itself appears to have been properly maintained. Years later, Ben Sharp, a miner who inspected the mine after the colony was gone, said it was in fine shape when it shut down.[39]

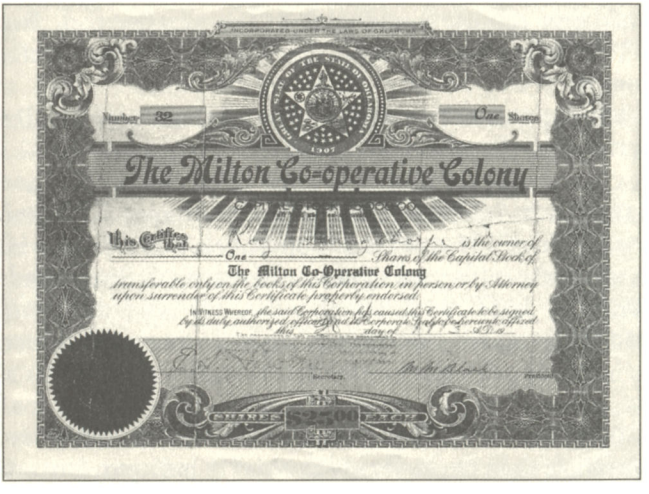
As 1914 progressed, the colony began to move in directions its founders had not anticipated. In April, Henry H. Reynolds, a man with no apparent interest in socialism, became trustee for the colony.[40] In territory days, Reynolds had served as a deputy United States marshal, then three terms as chief of police in Guthrie. From 1906 to 1916 he operated a real estate business there.[41]

In Milton, Reynolds took control of the town's unsold lots.[42] With the help of E. S. Lowther, secretary of Milton's Board of Trustees for Mines, he photographed Milton and the "Prosperous Milton Colon-

ists" for a booklet he produced to attract new residents.[43] The booklet advertised for "pioneers" eager to avail themselves of the "treasures of Indian Empire within reach of the white man."[44]

The booklet linked the colony with the Milton Oil, Gas and Development Company and listed sixteen interested individuals.[45] Although the names of some of them appear in LeFlore County records, it remains unclear exactly what role the company played. For example, the colony contracted to purchase all mining equipment through George McGregor, J. E. Woodworth, and Henry S. Johnston.[46] McGregor and Johnston were named in the booklet as part of the company, but Woodworth was not. Johnston and V. B. Curl, also named in the booklet, purchased land in and around Milton between 1913 and 1917. Only Reynolds, however, made frequent trips to Milton and so served as the most visible representative of the business interests.[47]

The second change in 1914 came with the arrival of another element, much at odds not only with the business community but also with mainstream socialists. The Working Class Union (WCU), founded in Arkansas in 1914, was organized in Oklahoma by Henry "Rube" Munson of Seneca, Missouri. Munson was a gifted speaker with a natural ability to talk to the uneducated in language they could understand, and he met with considerable success in his



Stock certificate for the Milton Co-Operative Colony (Courtesy Kerr Foundation Museum, Poteau).

organizing efforts. "He might have been able to hide the fact from most of his followers," Mary wrote, but "he really was a 'rube,' too—almost totally illiterate."[48]

Mary described Munson as a man of considerable ego with a flair for the dramatic that enabled him to draw large crowds. "As his many children grew, he added them to his traveling entourage. The children's sweet voices moved the crowds with songs [such as]: 'The dude so derides it, But the poor fellow hides it—The patch on the working man's pants' or 'Work and pray and live on hay; You'll get pie in the sky when you die.'"[49]

When Milton's townspeople learned that Munson was coming, they tried to prevent him from making his speech at the school. They argued that his talk was scheduled for a Sunday, and that a radical political speech would be inappropriate on Sunday. The colony organizers placated uneasy citizens by promising that Munson would speak about the Bible. The organizers did not, however, prepare their fellow citizens for how Munson would use scripture to attack their beliefs and way of life.[50]

Speaking from the Bible, and offering his own unconventional interpretation, seems to have been Munson's usual practice, and perhaps was not, as Mary believed, a special ploy to get around opposition at Milton. At the 1917 trial of WCU members known as the "Jones Family" for draft evasion and inciting an insurrection, several people testified that Munson used the Bible as the text for his speeches.[51] One man described him as "just like a preacher."[52] Rube Munson's Milton talk drew a crowd, and the fundamentalists present, both socialist and capitalist, got an earful of Munson's iconoclastic views.

Munson's speech was public, but WCU meetings were held in secret. The password for admittance to the Milton local was "beans." Testimony at the "Jones Family" trial in central Oklahoma adds further details. "They called no roll and took no minutes," one defendant testified.[53] "The password was 'beans' and words of recognition and greeting were, 'on the road' and answered by 'with you,' or some sentence with these words in it."[54] The swearing-in of new members was called the "obligation" and was sometimes administered with one hand on a revolver and the other on the Bible.

In March, 1916, E. S. Lowther wrote to Governor Robert L. Williams about the Milton group, a "bunch of I.W.W. sympathizers who claimed to be Socialists and have organized themselves into the 'Working Class Union.' This group was reported to be 'part of the same bunch that is operating around Sallisaw.'"[55] The WCU at-

tracted people who were impatient with the ballot box approach to reform advocated by the mainstream Socialists. Anxiety about the colony's declining fortunes provided fertile soil for the seeds Munson sowed.

The Conflict Turns Explosive

The businessmen associated with Reynolds were responsible for marketing the colony's coal and distributing the profits, but the colonists did not trust them. For their part, the investors must have been dismayed when the miners started going on strike. The operation was severely crippled, probably ultimately bankrupted, by being shut down so much of the time. When there was a strike at the mine, the strikers did not paint signs and walk picket lines. Instead, they just shut down. Some would go into town or walk to other towns. Once Mary Langthorp's father, brother, and others walked all the way to Sallisaw.[56]

Because of the colonists' ineptness in dealing with systems of law and government, or because of what they perceived as malice and corruption, disagreements between the colony and the investors went unresolved. Disputes repeatedly ended up in court. At one point the colonists hired a lawyer; but before the case was settled, they were convinced the man had betrayed them and joined their opponents' cause. The colonists tried to get the state auditor to review the mine's financial records, but the only official they could get was the railroad commissioner, who had no authority over anything except railroad charges. The colonists felt deceived and cheated at every turn.[57]

The colony's financial situation worsened through 1915–1916, and the commissary failed. After that, colonists had to make all their purchases from local merchants. Poverty made their already poor diets worse. It became apparent that the promise of harmonious lives under the blessings of socialism would not be fulfilled. The colonists quarreled not only with the "outsiders," but among themselves.[58]

Trouble developed between a faction supporting Waller and another that included Cash Stevens, one of the original directors. Stevens and his group noted that, although the colony was supposed to be a classless society, the manager lived in comparative luxury. Colonists who catered to Waller also lived better than the rest. One example was a portly nurse who was forever carrying a teakettle of hot water to Waller's house, where she claimed to be "doctoring" Comrade Waller. Nobody ever knew what they did with

The Milton Co-Operative Colony operated a sawmill as well as coal mines to support its members (Taken from Join the Pioneers at Milton, Oklahoma, *courtesy the author).*

all that hot water, but while the commissary was still open, she got the best food.[59] In addition, Waller kept putting the sawmill out of operation, but whether it was from ill will or mere incompetence, no one ever knew. He would hammer on the saw blade until it became misaligned and would stick in the cut. Someone would fix it, then Waller would start in on it again.[60]

The quarrel between the factions for and against Waller's leadership grew more heated as the colony floundered. On one occasion Mrs. Helton, the wife of one of the original directors, became so incensed with Cash Stevens's efforts to oust Waller that she got a whip and went looking for him. Apparently she did not find him.[61] For his part, Stevens made some effort to keep the arguments within civilized bounds. When a group of disgruntled colonists started egging each other on, threatening to lynch the manager, Stevens put a stop to the wild talk by pretending to go along. "Get a rope," he told them. He had gauged his comrades' level of resolve correctly, because nobody moved.[62] Such conflicts compounded other troubles that were outside human control, disasters such as severe burns from accidents in the mines or illness and even death from

the ever-present malaria.[63] The colonists found themselves inching toward desperation.

At a closed meeting of the WCU local early in the spring of 1916, a young colonist, Gerome "Rome" Wheat made an impassioned speech. Mary Langthorp was present at the meeting held at the school, along with Hayden and Marvin Beasley, Slim Marshall, Henry Finks, and several others, including two miners, good friends named Moore and Winegarden.[64] Wheat demanded to know from those gathered what they were doing about their troubles. He challenged them to "strike a blow against capitalism." When nobody answered to his satisfaction, he lashed out at them, "You're nothing but a bunch of spineless invertebrates!" Repeatedly he called his fellow WCU members "spineless invertebrates," but he could not get the response he wanted from them. Dissatisfied, he stormed out into the darkness.[65]

Later that night Wheat, Henry Finks, and Hayden Beasley took dynamite from the small mine. They carried it into town and set it off under the hopper of the gristmill belonging to the man they apparently saw as the most powerful representative of capitalism in Milton, a state legislator named T. G. McMahon. Mary Langthorp, who was sleeping just a few doors away in quarters her family rented at the back of T. L. Hedgecock's empty store, described the blast as so powerful "it knocked us clean out of bed." It blew the mill's steel hopper through the metal roof and left it lying in the dirt outside.[66]

The morning after the explosion, Rome Wheat joined the crowd gawking at the destruction. He feigned amazement and swore he had not heard a thing. He was the only person in town who claimed to have slept through the blast. Soon the perpetrators left town and waited for things to cool off. Finks and Beasley stayed for a while in Joplin with Mary's brother, who had already left Milton for a better paying job in the southwest Missouri lead mines. Thus Mary, although she never had any doubt who dynamited the mill, later learned the details of the incident from her brother.[67]

McMahon wrote to Governor Williams thanking him for his offer of a reward for the capture of those responsible for bombing his mill and engine, claiming a "total loss of [$]700." He expressed hope the affair would result in the destruction of "this bunch of anarchist[s] who denounced our State Government with all her moral and Religious Institutions."[68]

Later that same year, McMahon again wrote the governor about the incident:

By 1919, little evidence of the colony's promise remained in Milton (Courtesy the author).

On yesterday one Dr. Winegarden, a Socialist and W.C.U. came to my home and volunteered to . . . make an affidavit as to the parties that blew up my Engine and gin mill. He says parties are still at Milton; all except one, the one who furnished the Dynamite. . . . You remember on the adjournment of the Legislature, I reached home . . . and on Thursday night following the W.C.U. held a meeting at the school house where they planned to blow up my mill and engine. He says they agreed to do that, that night; then he went home and in about 1 ½ or 2 hours the mill was blown up. He says he has heard them talk about the matter since, on two occasions, and tell how they trimbled [*sic*] when they set off the last shot. . . . Winegarden says he will stay with me if I will put up the $200.00 reward we offered. . . . I feel sure you will help me with what I ask, if you could only realize the situation in this section. If I get a clue to the starting point, I think we will be able to uncover one of the dirtiest bunches of anarchist[s] that has ever invaded a country.

It is deplorable to know that we have organizations in our midst that pose as the Working Class Union, who will meet in some secret place, at an hour when all is slumber, and perfect their plans to take your life or destroy your property.[69]

The perpetrators of the explosion at the mill eventually turned themselves in, were convicted, and went to prison. In 1969 Ben Sharp wrote about the threesome:

I came to Milton [in] 1917 and the WCU . . . had broken up at that time. However[,] Henry Finks, Gerome Wheat and Hayden Beasley was sent to the pen at McAlester for blowing up a grist mill owned by State

rep McMahon. Beasley and Finks later became good friends of mine[;] only Finks is still living (in Calif[ornia]).[70]

Because of the shutdowns, people had already begun to leave the colony, although Mary Langthorp said some stayed until they nearly starved to death. As the war in Europe caused increased demand for American raw materials, more and more people left Milton to earn good wages in the lead mines and oil fields.[71]

In 1916 H. H. Reynolds left both Guthrie and the real estate business. When he summarized his life years later for the "Indian-Pioneer History" project, he made no reference to his ill-fated involvement with the Milton colony and did not explain the changes in his life at the time the colony collapsed. In 1922 he moved to Perry, Noble County, where he sold real estate and insurance. He also served as mayor of Perry from 1927 to 1931.[72]

The only landmarks that remain of the town today, on Oklahoma Highway 31 west of Panama, are the Milton Cemetery and the ruins of a later school built on the same site as the school where Rome Wheat made his "spineless invertebrates" speech. In 1913 the business district lay along the tracks directly south of the cemetery. The Doshers, who owned one of the stores, lived near the cemetery on the west. J. W. "Dude" LeFlore, a deputy sheriff, lived just east of the cemetery on the hillside across the road that is still there today.[73]

In April, 1917, Guaranty State Bank and MidContinent Life Insurance Company recovered judgments against the colony, and in December the land was sold to the bank for $3,000 at a sheriff's auction.[74] Milton returned to its quiet beginnings but never recovered enough to fulfill the promise Hazel Greene's family had seen there in the 1890s.

ENDNOTES

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[1] Norman L. Crockett, "The Opening of Oklahoma: A Businessman's Frontier," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 56 (Spring, 1978): 85–95.

[2] John Wesley Morris, *Ghost Towns of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 130.

[3] Charles E. Winters, "The Fort Smith & Western Railroad: 1900–1923," in *Railroads in Oklahoma*, ed. Donovan L. Hofsommer (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977), 31.

[4] Worth Robert Miller, *Oklahoma Populism: A History of the People's Party in the Oklahoma Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), xi, 11.

[5] Ibid., 177.

[6] James R. Scales and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma Politics: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 63.

[7] "Hunger in the Land of Plenty," *International Socialist Review*, 17 (1916), 283, quoted in Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 67.

[8] Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 64.

[9] Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken: The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), 232.

[10] Patrick Nagle, *The Interlocked Parasites*, Bulletin No. 1 (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Socialist Party, 1914). Cited in Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 67.

[11] Covington Hall (Covami), "Sodbuster's Prayer," *Battle Hymns of Toil* (Oklahoma City: General Welfare Reporter, n.d.), 95.

[12] Interview with Hazel B. Greene, Fort Towson, Oklahoma, September 3, 1937, "Indian-Pioneer History," ed. Grant Foreman, 113 vols., unpublished manuscript, 38: 301, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City (hereafter cited as "I-PH").

[13] *Polk's Oklahoma State Gazetteer And Business Directory* (Detroit: R. L. Polk and Company, 1913–1914), 587.

[14] Morris, *Ghost Towns*, 130.

[15] *Join the Pioneers at Milton, Oklahoma* (Guthrie, Oklahoma: Co-Operative Publishing Company, n.d.), 4, in author's possession. Peet's name, however, does not appear on deeds and contracts for land in or around Milton.

[16] *Muskogee* (Oklahoma) *Times Democrat*, January 5, 1914.

[17] LeFlore County photorecords, Book 53: 447, Office of the LeFlore County Clerk, Poteau, Oklahoma.

[18] Mary Langthorp's article about her experiences in Milton, "Everything Was Common Except Common Sense," appeared in *Southwest Heritage*, a magazine published in Amarillo, Texas, until about 1970, and was excerpted in several central Oklahoma newspapers. She also spoke frequently with the author about her time at Milton.

[19] Mary Langthorp, "Everything Was Common Except Common Sense," *Southwest Heritage*, 4 (December, 1969): 5–6.

[20] Ibid., 2. See also Garin Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in The Oklahoma Countryside, 1910–1924* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), passim. Burbank wrote about the contrast between the Christian fundamentalists, who filled the ranks of the Socialist Party in Oklahoma during this period, and the more worldly leadership. Of the latter, those who were not atheists at least did not approach socialism from a religious perspective. Mary wrote that at the Milton colony all the extremes were represented.

[21] Langthorp, "Everything Was Common," 2.

[22] Langthorp, personal communication.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken*, 280.

[25] Langthorp, "Everything Was Common," 2.

[26] Ibid., 3.

[27] Ibid., 6, 2.

[28] Ibid., 6.

[29] H. Craig Miner, *The Corporation and the Indian: Tribal Sovereignty and Industrial Civilization in Indian Territory, 1865–1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 97–100.

[30] Danney Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of a New Kind of State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 113.

[31] Langthorp, personal communication.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Covington Hall, "Us the Hoboes and Dreamers," *Battle Hymns of Toil*, 80–81.

[34] Ben Sharp to Jerry Sinise, Editor, *Southwest Heritage*, March 3, 1970, copy in Mary Langthorp Papers, in author's possession (hereafter cited as Langthorp Papers).

[35] Langthorp, "Everything Was Common," 3.

[36] Ibid., 4.

[37] Ibid., 5.

[38] Winters, "Fort Smith & Western Railroad," 34.

[39] Ben Sharp to Mary Langthorp, February 24, 1970, Langthorp Papers.

[40] LeFlore County photorecords, Book 57: 356–357, LeFlore County Clerk's Office.

[41] Interview with H. H. Reynolds, July 19, 1937, "I-PH," 52: 301.

[42] LeFlore County photorecords, Book 57: 356–357, LeFlore County Clerk's Office. John D. Benedict deeded the land the colony had previously contracted to buy to H. H. Reynolds as trustee. The price was $10,000, and the sale was subject to Benedict's mortgages to MidContinent Life and Guaranty State Bank. Reynolds, in turn, deeded to The Milton Co-Operative Colony, Inc., the acreage west of Milton and eight lots in town, presumably the land on which the headquarters and commissary stood. LeFlore County photorecords, Book 62: 262, LeFlore County Clerk's Office. The selling price was $3,000, to be paid within two years at 10 percent interest through a ten-cents-per-ton royalty on coal. All parties also agreed to "use their good will and best efforts to induce all persons of good moral character to purchase lots in the town of Milton." Reynolds was authorized to sell one share of stock in the colony with each lot he sold.

[43] Langthorp, personal communication.

[44] *Join the Pioneers*, cover.

[45] Ibid., 16. The Oklahomans named as having an interest in Milton Oil, Gas and Development Company were John Golobie, editor, *Oklahoma State Register*, Guthrie; H. H. Reynolds, real estate dealer, Guthrie; R. J. Conneway, president, Logan County Bank, Guthrie; Dr. C. D. Gulley, Guthrie; George McGregor, merchant, Guthrie; J. T. Brickner, contractor and builder, Guthrie; V. B. Curl, cashier, Logan County Bank, Guthrie; M. F. Redmond, passenger conductor, Fort Smith and Western Railroad, Fort Smith; H. M. Adams, attorney and real estate, Guthrie; Henry S. Johnston, attorney and ex-state senator, Perry; T. J. Skelton, passenger conductor, Fort Smith and Western Railroad, Fort Smith; I. N. Smithson, bookkeeper, Guthrie; W. E. Crouse, passenger conductor, Fort Smith and Western Railroad, Guthrie; and J. M. Dolph, publisher, *Oklahoma State Register*, Guthrie.

[46] LeFlore County photorecords, Book 64: 123, LeFlore County Clerk's Office. In November the colony entered into a contract to purchase "all machinery and equipment, tools and other appliances" for five years from George McGregor, J. E. Woodworth (Guthrie), and Henry S. Johnston (Perry). Once they and the colonists agreed on a price, the men were to purchase and ship needed equipment FOB to Milton. After it was installed and in operation, the colony agreed to pay five cents per ton of coal mined toward the cost of the equipment and five cents per ton for "profit and compensation and interest on investment" until the agreed upon price had been paid.

[47] Langthorp, personal communication.

[48] Mary Langthorp, "Rube Munson's Union of Farmers," unpublished manuscript, Langthorp Papers. Over several years following the close of the Milton colony, Mary

got to know Munson personally; her generalizations about his character were based on this later acquaintance.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Michael Morton, "No Time to Quibble: The Jones Conspiracy Trial of 1917," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 59 (Spring, 1982): 224–236.

[52] Notes and transcripts from the "Jones Family" trial, Box 36, Folder 2, 83, Redmond S. Cole Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman.

[53] Ibid., 50.

[54] Ibid., 27.

[55] E. S. Lowther to Governor Robert L. Williams, March 4, 1916, Williams Papers, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma City, quoted in Sherry Warrick, "Radical Labor in Oklahoma: The Working Class Union," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 52 (Summer, 1974): 184. Lowther, like many newspapermen and politicians, asserted that the WCU was part of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Nigel Anthony Sellars's 1994 study, "Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1994), found no affiliation. Mary also denied any involvement with the IWW. Shawnee resident Bill Hixon, an old friend of Cash Stevens, one of the colony's original directors, in a 1995 telephone interview with the author, said he was certain that Stevens, who after leaving Milton worked for the WCU secretary in Davenport, was never an IWW member.

[56] Langthorp, personal communication.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Langthorp, "Everything Was Common," 4, 6.

[59] Ibid., 3.

[60] Langthorp, personal communication.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Langthorp, "Everything Was Common," 6.

[64] Langthorp, personal communication.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] T. G. McMahon to Robert L. Williams, March 8, 1916, Robert L. Williams Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, quoted in Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red*, 141.

[69] Ibid., 142. McMahon's wording causes some confusion over whether what was blown up was a gristmill, as Mary said, or a cotton gin. It is possible that the same engine was used for both purposes.

[70] Ben Sharp to Mary Langthorp, May 15, 1969, Langthorp Papers.

[71] Langthorp, "Everything Was Common," 6.

[72] Reynolds interview, 301; Fannie L. Eisele, *A History of Noble County, Oklahoma* (Covington, Oklahoma: Fannie L. Eisele, 1958), 116.

[73] Langthorp, personal communication.

[74] LeFlore County photorecords, Book 84: 138–141, LeFlore County Clerk's Office.