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Kristenstad: A Practical Utopia

(C. M. Hammond tells of a model farm-industrial community which is being built ground up in Hood County. An experiment that will bear watching)

THE FOUNDATION stones upon which the economic structure of any State must rest are the individual communities and towns which compose that State. Our old economic structure in Texas has fallen on our heads and buried us, for the time being, over its debris primarily because its foundation is too weak to support it in the time of storm. Common sense would tell us, therefore, that we must strengthen the foundation or the new building which we are attempting to erect will be no more substantial than the first. The trouble with most of the plans being addressed for the rebuilding of this structure in Texas. Too much time and attention in formulating has been devoted to the super-structure and not too the foundation. We must not lose sight of that the only safe foundation on which to build new edifice is the strength and self sufficiency in the individual communities of the State. This can not be done, nor should anything be attempted toward this rebuilding until the communities across the state of Texas are made more self-supporting and self sufficient than they have been in the past.

Realization of this fact should give a great sense of responsibility to everyone of our communities and arouse them to action in strengthening .. And it should, at the same time, open up for every citizen of Texas to the opportunity to participate in this vital work. For no one how small is his community, any man whose efforts makes it a little bit more self-supporting and self-sufficient is performing a very necessary work in the building of a better and stronger structure in Texas. The leaders in our business economic life, to whom we are looking to in his new edifice, can do nothing until the communities and towns of the State help them with the strong foundation necessary to do it.

How can these communities and towns strengthen themselves and thereby make of themselves the foundation stones for this new building. There possibly no better way to answer this question or tell the story of the plans and aspirations for the community of Kristenstad, Texas. For the kind of community that, the builder of Kristenstad is trying to do it is the only kind of community on which it is safe to build our future economic state. On January 1, 1928 John B. Christensen took possession of 6,000 acres of high, flat, table land heavily wooded and enclosed within the De Cordova bend of the Brazos River near Granbury, Texas. This track of land, almost an island, has nineteen miles of river front which insures it an abundance of water for livestock but is high enough to prevent overflowing. It lies in Hood County with the exception of 200 acres, in the toe of the bend, which are in Johnson County, and the soil is prevailing sandy loam of that section

WITH THE VISION and colonizing zeal of an Austin and a deep understanding of the shortcomings of the average Texas community, Mr. Christensen resolved to

bring in and settle on this land a carefully number of farmers and to build there a model community. Using the family name as it is spelled in Denmark, from which he is but one generation removed, he named the settlement Kristenstad. It is the purpose and intention of the founder to make of Kristenstad a community that will ultimately be as self-supporting and self-sufficient as it is possible for a community reasonably to be. The first lesson taught the new settler is that of doing things for himself. He is taught that he should not attempt to produce a surplus of anyone thing until he has first produced all of the things he needs himself so far as possible. After he has produced all of the things he needs for his own consumption he is encouraged to produce a surplus of products for sale, but not before. That is the gospel of Kristenstad and that should be made the gospel of Texas.

When a new settler comes into Kristenstad he becomes an integral part of the community and if he is willing to do his part he is not allowed to fail or suffer. Every possible help is extended him and even interest payments on his land are suspended when necessary for this reason every prospective settler is closely examined as to his character and ability, since Kristenstad does not want to admit any citizen who has not the courage and stamina to fight it through or who might abuse the aids and privileges extended. If the prospect passes the test he is then allowed to select any of the unoccupied land at \$40.00 per acre and care is taken that he does not buy more land than he can take care of. No down payment is required and newcomers are encouraged to use the money they may have in building improvements on their farms rather than to pay it on the purchase price. Twenty years are allowed for payment and the interest rate is 6% per annum.

On taking possession of the land of Kristenstad Mr Christensen was told that a great part of the success of his venture would depend on how low he could hold the cost of clearing the land. To this advice he replied that instead of the clearing of the land being an expense to the settlers he intended that they should make a profit at it. And this they are doing. As the land was covered with magnificent trees and the settlers needed houses a sawmill was installed to convert trees into lumber for the homes. Each settler felled the trees on his land, hauled them to the saw mill and paid for having them turned into lumber. Hauling the lumber back he built his own home having nothing to buy but a few nails, roofing and windows. Then realizing that 60 per cent of every tree is wasted in the process of sawing it into lumber the burning of charcoal was started to utilize this waste. This charcoal is now being sold to railroads, stores and makers of chicken feed and finds a ready market. A small portion of it is pulverized and put up in cans as medicinal charcoal.

AFTER THE saw mill and charcoal industries had been operating profitably for some time a small chair factory was started. Utilizing the wood that is too small for lumber but too good to burn into charcoal this factory turns out old fashioned straight and rocking chairs with cowhide bottoms. The cowhide comes from beeves they slaughtered in the community and outside in neighboring communities. These chairs sell for \$1.50 and have been sold in quantities in fourteen States besides Texas. The latest move in the industrial development of Kristenstad has been the purchase of the *Southern Dairymen* a twenty page monthly magazine with 25,000 circulation A model printing plant for the publication of this journal is being built and it will be

edited and published in Kristenstad. Hereafter it will be real farm paper published in a farming community by farmers and the advertising of the industries now in Kristemstad and of those to come will assure it enough advertising to pay its expenses.

Every assistance is given the settlers in the purchase of dairy cows and when the number of cows in the community reach 500 a complete creamery and ice plant will be installed. This will afford a profitable market for the dairy products of the community over and above those consumed in the settlement. A grist mill will be in operation soon to grind oats, barley and the like for feed as well as corn meal.

All along the river front there is a quantity of fine limestone and lime kilns will be installed in the near future which will furnish a supply of lime for building purposes. Coupled with the plentiful supply of sand, gravel and native rock this will permit the building of permanent, substantial rock buildings and homes without the outside purchase of anything except nails, roofing and window glass. The large school building, built of this native rock will open this Fall. Plans for the immediate future call for a continuous program of road and bridge building financed by the creation of a road district. A bridge erected across the Brazos on the northern boundary of the community and a short road built to connect with the Fort Worth highway. This will furnish a much more direct route to Fort Worth that is now possible. Estimated costs of this project are between \$15,000 to \$20,000.

FOR THE carrying on of the business of the community there are three separate and appropriate corporations; The Marketing Association, The Corporative Association and The Loan Company. The Marketing Association, besides efficiently marketing the surplus produce of the farms and the product manufactured by the industries brought in and it buys the supplies which must be brought in and runs the community store. Through close association the community is afforded the best way to combine their purchasing power. The Cooperative Association deals only with livestock and financing the purchases of cows, hogs, sheep, goats and for the individual farmers. The Loan Company is organized to finance the Cooperative Association and is affiliated with the Federal Intermediate Bank at Houston. It is capitalized at \$10,000 and enables the members of the community to finance more purchases at 6 percent per annum.

The industries usually are idle during the time the men are busy with their crops and then when there is no work to be done in the fields any man who wants to work is given a job and pay at the rate of from two dollars to two and a half per day. Thus the farmer is given the opportunity to turn his surplus time into money. No man or woman is required to work if does not want to but can be a part of the whole scheme while realizing all of the benefits of a communistic or socialistic plans and show the weakness of communism in that each individual is reward in proportion to his own initiative and enterprise. As its founder expressed it there is nothing in the Kristenstad plan but pure Americanism.

The industries already there and those planned for Kristenstad will also serve another purpose, that of affording training schools for children in the community. Any boy or girl that does not wish to become a farmer can receive training in some form of industrial work which will fit them for life in the community or outside.

Community interests and amusements also are not lost sight of in Kristenstad. In a non-sectarian church, Sunday School is held each Sunday morning and church services afterward. Any preacher of any denomination or sect is always welcome and assured of a hearing. The new rock school building will be made a community center with a radio, piano and other things of interest and amusement. Experts are brought in to lecture on various subjects and to give demonstrations of the best methods, for instance, or budding paper shell pecans on the large native trees along the river, the feeding of livestock and the like. A baseball club has been organized and this season has a record of fourteen victories out of sixteen.

Thus everything possible has been and is being worked out to make life happy, prosperous and free from worry for the citizens of Kristenstad does not worry for instance, over the affairs of Germany or of Europe, for Kristenstad has declared its independence. It is not basing its prosperity on factors over which it has no control but rather is controlling its own destiny. It is doing things for itself and supplying the needs of its own people rather than piling up a surplus of some one thing to sell for less than is required to pay for the things it does not produce. In doing this Kristenstad is merging industry with agriculture and striving to make of itself the ideal community of the future.

If Texas ever is to be the prosperous independent State it should be, everyone of its communities and towns must attain something like the ideal Kristenstad. They must be made more self-supporting and self-sufficient before they can support the new economic structure of the State which must be built to replace the old one founded on the crumbling foundation of export cotton. There must be brought about in these communities an integration of the urban and the rural-of industry and agriculture, They must provide means of utilizing the energy and ability of their citizens, a far more important thing from the much preached utilization of our raw materials.

Kristnestad is an interesting experiment along this line which will bear watching.

C. M. Hammond.