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Kristenstad: Utopia on the Brazos

In 1928, the settlement of Kristenstad began as an experiment in practical utopian living, a self-sufficient farming-industrial community in Hood County. Although the colony enjoyed some success in the early years, the Depression eventually deprived it of customers who could afford to pay for its products. It ended in 1938 after the death of its founder, John B. Christensen.



Kristenstad Trade Token, front and back

The Brazos River Authority completed construction of the De Cordova Dam in 1969, creating Lake Granbury. The Leonard Family of Fort Worth started development of the area, called the Pecan Plantation, as a residential community in the late 1960's. A country club, golf course, airport and several recreational areas and parks were opened in 1971 on the site of the former settlement.

Google Earth: GPS directions to the approximate location of the former site of Kristenstad:
N 32° 25' 55"; W 97° 45' 33"

The following is a news article about the settlement, published in The Texas Weekly newspaper on August 29, 1931.

Kristenstad: A Practical Utopia

C. M. Hammond tells of a model farm-industrial Community

which is being built from the ground up in Hood County.

An experiment that will bear watching.

John B. Christensen, on January 1, 1928, took possession of 6,000 acres of high, flat, table land heavily wooded and enclosed within the De Cordova band of the Brazos River, near Granbury, Texas. This tract of land, almost an island, has nineteen miles of river front which insures it an abundance of water for stock, but is high enough to prevent its 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 the prevailing sandy loam of that area.

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 selected 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 any one 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 per acre and care is taken to see that he does not buy more land than he can take care of. No down payment is required and newcomers are encouraged to use what 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 interest charges are at the rate of 6 per cent 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 saw mill was installed to convert the trees into lumber for the houses. 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 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 Dairyman, 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 a real farm paper published in a farming community by farmers and the advertising of the industries not in Kristenstad 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 reaches five hundred, 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 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 was opened 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 was erected across the Brazos on the northern bank of the community and a short road built to connect with the Fort Worth highway. This will be a much more direct route to Fort Worth. Estimated costs of this project are \$15,000 and \$20,000.

FOR THE carrying on of the business of the community, there are three separate and distinct corporations: The Marketing Association, The Cooperative Association and The Loan Company. The Marketing Association, besides efficiently marketing the surplus produce of the farms and the productive industries, buys the supplies which must be brought in to the community store. Though the association the community is afforded the best of their combined purchasing power. The Cooperative Association deals only with livestock and final purchases of cows, hogs, sheep, goats and for the individual farmers. The Loan Company organized to finance the Cooperative Association is affiliated with the Federal Intermediate Bank at Houston. It is capitalized at \$10,000 and enables the members of the community to finalize livestock purchases at 6 per cent per annum and a member of the community is allowed to have shares in any of these associations as well as different industries and about two-thirds of them now own an interest.

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 field, every man who wants to work is given a job and they prorate them from two dollars to two and a half days. Thus the farmer is given the opportunity to turn his surplus time into money. No man is required to work if he does not want to. The whole scheme, while realizing all of the benefits of a communistic or socialistic plan; the weakness of communism in that each individual is rewarded in proportion to his own initiative enterprise. As its founder expressed it, there are flaws in the Kristenstad plan but it is pure Americana.

The industries already there and those now planned for Kristenstad will also serve another purpose; that of affording training schools for the children of the community. Any boy or girl who does not wish to become a farmer can receive some form of industrial work which will fit them for life either 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 of 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, of budding paper shell pecans on the large native pecan 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 games played.

Thus everything possible has been and is being worked out to make life happy, prosperous and free from worry for the citizens of Kristenstad. 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 a prosperous independent State it should be, every one of its communities and towns must attain something like the ideal of 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 build 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 for utilizing the energy and ability of their citizens, a far more important thing than the much preached utilization of our raw materials.

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

C. M. HAMMOND