

# To the Great Socialist Beyond: Fairhope, the Organic School, and Russia (The Journey of Willard and Helen Edwards)

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As a historian of education in the USSR, I was curious to learn whether any contact existed between progressive educators in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and people associated with the Organic School founded by Marietta Johnson in Fairhope, Alabama, in 1907. Johnson's institution, free of grades (marks), examinations, and homework, quickly gained national fame, a mecca for such pilgrims as John Dewey, Clarence Darrow, and Upton Sinclair. Although the school attained international renown as well, I found no evidence of cross-fertilization between the school's initiatives and similar efforts in the USSR during the first decade of Soviet power. I did, however, come across a host of material on one teacher at the school, Willard Hemenway Edwards, who expressed more than a passing interest in the "Soviet experiment." He became sufficiently enthralled with the new socialist state that he traveled to it in 1933. In 1934, his wife, Helen, and their three children joined him there. Willard returned home in 1935. Helen and two of their children departed later. One son remained in Russia for the remainder of his life.

As it has turned out, Willard and Helen Edwards have made for a fascinating study. "The lives they lived," Mary Lois Timbes Adshead, a graduate of the Organic School and local historian, has aptly observed, "were to take bizarre twists far beyond the norm even for Fairhope."<sup>1</sup>

## Sources

I rely heavily on reports in the weekly newspaper, *Fairhope Courier*. Additional information and photographs have been kindly provided by Marina Edwards, the wife of the grandson of Willard and Helen. I am especially grateful to Olga Bukhalova, the great granddaughter of Willard and Helen, for responding to multiple inquiries and providing many photographs. Images of the early history of the Organic School are at [alabamamosaic.org](http://alabamamosaic.org)

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1. Mary Lois Timbes Adshead, "When We Had the Sky: Fairhope beyond the Butterfly Tree," 55, in the Marietta Johnson Museum's computer, Box 4/Dissertations and papers on Marietta Johnson, no. 22.

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Considerable documentary evidence on the Organic School may be found in uncatalogued files at the Organic School and at the Marietta Johnson Museum in Fairhope. The latter contains an incomplete run of the school's senior yearbook, *Cinagro* (Organic spelled backwards). The Museum also houses a large number of scrapbooks that include correspondence and newspaper clippings. Most valuable to this, the present, project is a huge quantity of material stored in the Museum's computer. It is arranged in six folders, labeled "Boxes." Box 1 contains student records as well as Edwards' typewritten sketch of the content and purpose of his history courses taught at the Organic School. Box 4 holds dissertations and papers, including the informative fifty-five-page memoir, "Out of Russia," written in 1992 by Marjorie Edwards Ewing, the daughter of Willard and Helen. Her remarks, repeatedly cited below, are on the whole trustworthy, although they occasionally focus on, if not exaggerate somewhat, the negative. A separate folder labeled "Videos" includes interviews of former students. Among them, I found sessions with twenty-two individuals who attended the school in the 1920s and early 1930s when Willard and Helen taught there. Dorothy "Dot" Beiser Cain, a pupil herself during that period, conducted most of them in the early 1990s. Not all of the interviewees, of course, spoke specifically about the Edwards. Box 2 contains brief biographical information on the people interviewed. My heartfelt thanks to Maggie Mosteller and Wayne Miller for making the Museum's records readily accessible. And my thanks to the Fairhope Public Library for providing past issues of the *Fairhope Courier* in a digitized format. I am also indebted to Catherine King for directing me to documents in the Archives Collection of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation.<sup>2</sup> As discussed below, Moscow's archives were largely a disappointment.

### Early Life

Willard Edwards was born in Hinsdale, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, in November 1886. After work at the monthly *Engineering Magazine*, he served as an ensign in the United States Navy in 1918 and 1919. That experience in the armed forces helps to explain his interest and expertise, as discussed below, in boats and sailing. During the early 1920s, Edwards probably worked as a designer of maps, charts, and globes for the A. J. Nystrom Company in Chicago. The company, founded in 1903 and still in existence, proclaims on its website to be the "United States' oldest publisher of wall maps and globes for classroom use."<sup>3</sup> When in April 1933, Edwards left for Moscow, he traveled through London,

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2. These archives may be accessed at <http://fairhopesingletax.pastperfectonline.com/> In addition to documents, I found there, thanks to a tip from Olga Bukhalova, an interesting and useful paper by Shae Sherertz, "From Fairhope to Russia: In Pursuit of Utopia," a paper written in April 1984 to fulfill requirements for a senior level undergraduate course at the University of Virginia taught by Paul Gaston, a former pupil at the Organic School. Sherertz interviewed Marjorie Edwards and several former students who recalled the instruction at the school of Helen and especially of Willard. It is accessible at: <https://fairhopesingletax.pastperfectonline.com/Archive/E9C25A97-5CF4-4BFC-8E98-805207221339>

3. <https://www.nystromeducation.com/c/about.web?s@16pn.3fw9.zhI>. The firm produced pull-down maps as well.

Edinburgh, and Paris to represent, if not in France and the USSR, then certainly in Great Britain, the Nystrom Company, presumably to sell its products.<sup>4</sup> Helen May McCurdy was born into a well-to-do family in 1888. She and Willard married in October 1914.



Figure 1: Young Willard Edwards.

Courtesy of Olga Bukhalova

Attracted by Fairhope's reputation as a single-tax and politically progressive community, a subject discussed in detail below, Willard and Helen Edwards relocated there in late 1923 from Hinsdale. Before their departure south, the family purchased a new Ford, described as a "special family car" that awaited them at Fairhope's Gaston Motor Company garage.<sup>5</sup> With the approval of the city's Colony Council, Willard and Helen purchased 4.28 acres, the former "Jenney Place," on the southwest corner of Fairhope Avenue and Ingleside Drive.<sup>6</sup> It had first been developed by Truman and Susan Jenney, who came to Fairhope in 1916 where they established "a most attractive home."<sup>7</sup> In 1925, the Edwards hoped to purchase additional land. That June, Fairhope's Colony Council considered their application for property, much of which was a swamp, which the couple hoped to preserve for the purpose of protecting

its plant and animal life.<sup>8</sup>

When Willard and Helen arrived in Fairhope in December 1923, they brought with them their three young children.<sup>9</sup> Marjorie, born in November 1918, was adopted when she was two years of age. Three years later, her parents adopted a boy they called Bert.<sup>10</sup> They also had a son, Daniel Sheldon Edwards, often referred to as Kenneth, born March 22, 1916.<sup>11</sup> All three children were placed

4. See the report of Edwards' travel in *Fairhope Courier* [henceforth *FC*] April 27, 1933, 1. The report indicated that Edwards was a director of the Nystrom firm. The Nystrom Company's website indicates that shortly after the company's creation in 1903, it became the agent for W. & A. K. Johnson, school map publishers of Edinburgh.

5. *FC*, November 30, 1923, 4.

6. See *FC*, October 26, 1923, 3 and December 23, 1926, 2.

7. Information on the Jenneys is in the obituary for Susan W. Jenney, in *FC*, March 12, 1936, 4.

8. *FC*, June 19, 1925, 3. I do not know what became of the application. In 1928, Willard and Helen Edwards wished to lease land near the golf course: *FC*, April 26, 1928, 8. I do not know of the reason for this interest nor of its outcome.

9. See reports in *FC*, November 30, 1923, 4 and December 14, 1923, 5. Willard then returned for a short spell to Chicago and traveled back to Fairhope either in December 1923 or early January 1924.

10. Marjorie Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 3-4 in Marietta Johnson Museum's computer, Box 4/Dissertations and papers on Marietta Johnson, no. 20, Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia." I do not have a birthdate for Bert, but as indicated above, he was about three years older than Marjorie.

11. Folder "Videos" in the Marietta Johnson Museum, a thirty-eight minute interview of Kenneth Edwards, 1994. Later, Dan changed his name to Kenneth in honor of a family friend who had been wounded in World War I.

in the Organic School. Years later Marjorie recalled that she and her brothers enjoyed their time there. “We loved the school with its arts and crafts, English folk dancing, and casual approach to academic subjects.... We hammered and painted, danced and swam and sailed in our own Eden.”<sup>12</sup>



*Figure 2: Children, left to right: Marjorie, Bert, Dan (Kenneth).  
Courtesy of Olga Bukhalova*



*Figure 3: Willard Edwards, 1928.  
Courtesy of Marina Edwards*

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12. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 5-6.

## Instruction

Soon after their arrival in Fairhope, the Edwards began teaching at the Organic School, which by 1930 offered instruction to well over 200 students on a ten-acre campus that consisted of ten buildings. Willard taught history in the high school grades (and helped out with woodworking). Helen taught nature study—a mixture of biology, botany, and zoology in the elementary grades. The pay, as it was for all the school's instructors, was poor. The Edwards, as most of their colleagues, taught out of a love for the type of instruction on which the school's director insisted. The Edwards, however, did not need the income. As Marjorie later remembered it, her father "could do pretty much as he pleased because he was not dependent on his small salary from the school: he had a portfolio of blue-chip stocks."<sup>13</sup> That would remain the case at least until the stock market crash of October 1929. Moreover, the family grew much of its own food on its sizable plot of land.<sup>14</sup> They also possessed a large number of chickens to sell, presumably, eggs and chicks to their fellow citizens.<sup>15</sup> In March 1925, Willard offered to accompany at his own expense Marietta Johnson on some of her multiple visits to cities and towns throughout the nation in an effort to raise funds for the school.<sup>16</sup>

The Edwards also had an income from a boat, the "Osprey." It had been built in 1926 in the Organic School's arts and crafts building by Willard as well as by the school's woodworking instructor and students. Then and later Edwards served as an assistant in the school's shop. One former pupil, Douglas Kier, who attended the school from 1931 through 1934, recalled during an interview that Edwards was the shop teacher. His interlocutor injected that officially Edwards had taught history not shop.<sup>17</sup>

Upon its completion, the Osprey, a thirty-four foot structure, was large enough that the end wall of the school's arts and crafts building had to be removed so the boat could be pulled out. It was then transported on rollers to the pier about two miles away.<sup>18</sup> Powered by sails and an engine, the vessel, sometimes referred to as the "Ospray," was variably described as a "fine comfortable auxiliary schooner,"

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13. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 5. Willard may not have taught a full load at the school prior to the 1927/28 academic year. See the report in *FC*, August 25, 1927, 6. In an interview, Marjorie later recalled that her parents had profitable investments as a gift from Helen's father: Sheila Propp, "From Russia, with Love: Russian Citizen Returns to Childhood Home," *FC*, April 20, 1994, 1B.

14. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 5.

15. Information on the family's chickens in *FC*, January 2, 1925, 5 and August 30, 1928, 8.

16. See the report on a meeting of people in Fairhope to discuss the school's financial needs in *FC*, March 6, 1925, 5. Willard promoted nationally the school's philosophy and appealed for contributions and creative teachers willing to work for minimal pay. See "To Redeem the High School," *New Republic* 25, no. 553 (July 8, 1925):168-169, an article in which Willard is prominently mentioned and assuredly one prompted by information sent to the journal by him.

17. Interview of Douglas Kier.

18. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 5.

an “ocean-going cruiser,” and “a comfortable and commodious boat.”<sup>19</sup> It could take up to fifteen people, albeit, as one of Edwards’ advertisements in the *Fairhope Courier* put it, a group of five to twelve was best.<sup>20</sup> For those willing to pay for the privilege, the *Osprey* had six spring beds. Passengers could also take advantage of a stove, a toilet, electric lights, and awnings for shade.

Edwards was rightly proud of his ship’s wares. One advertisement in the *Courier* appropriately enticed paying customers to a vessel “luxuriously fitted out with box spring berths, a private wash room, clothes hanging lockers, etc.”<sup>21</sup> Often with “Captain Edwards” himself at the helm, the *Osprey* ventured forth on frequent fishing expeditions and on excursions to locations throughout the area.<sup>22</sup> By all accounts, these outings were popular especially with Fairhope’s finest.<sup>23</sup> Trips had to be booked days if not weeks in advance. Edwards also put the *Osprey* at the disposal of faculty and students at the Organic School, often, if not always, at no charge.

Multiple reports testified to Edwards’ expert seamanship.<sup>24</sup> On one occasion, he used his skills to save lives. In July 1932, a squall capsized a sailboat over one-half mile south of the Magnolia Beach (Fairhope) pier. Edwards who had just come in on another vessel that

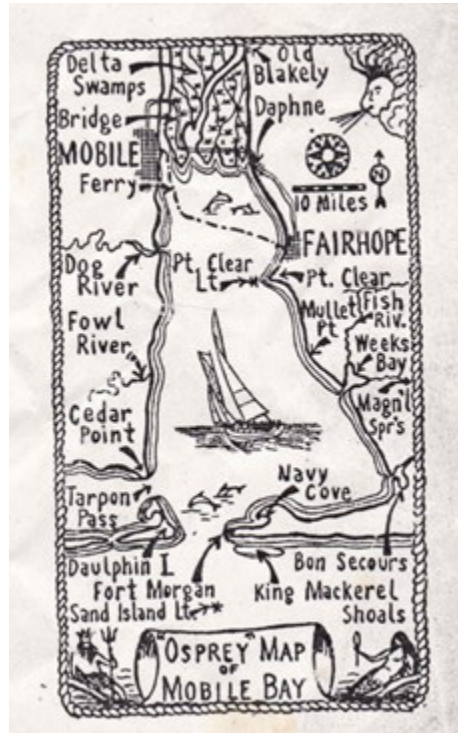


Figure 4: Map drawn by Willard Edwards. It features many of the designations of the *Osprey*'s tours.

Courtesy of Olga Bukhalova

19. In succession: *FC*, August 26, 1926, 5; *FC*, January 13, 1927, 8; *FC*, June 20, 1929, 8.

20. *FC*, March 31, 1927, 3.

21. *FC*, March 1, 1928, 2.

22. Excursions went to such locations as Magnolia Springs, Daphne village, Pascagoula, Dauphin Island, and Bon Secour. Ft. Morgan and Ft. Gaines were popular destinations for trips that could last several days to include a tour of the forts and presentations on the history of battles fought there during the Civil War.

23. The *Osprey* could be chartered for \$2.50 an hour, \$10 for an afternoon, \$18 for a day (coffee or lemonade served free of charge at lunch time), \$20 for a day and night, \$90 for a week (cooking extra, if desired): *FC*, June 16, 1927, 12; September 22, 1927, 8; March 15, 1928, 4. Tickets for most day excursions cost \$2.50 per adult, \$1 for children.

24. See, for example, reference to his skills in reports in *FC*, August 5, 1926, 1 and September 9, 1926, 5.

he had recently purchased, the “Bootlegger,” went to the rescue, accompanied, as strange as it seems, by his children, Marjorie and Kenneth. They found several boys clinging to the overturned boat “and pretty well water logged.”<sup>25</sup>



Figure 5: Willard Prepared to Set Sail?  
Courtesy of Olga Bukhalova

Willard and Helen Edwards quickly became two of Fairhope’s most prominent citizens. In April 1924, Willard was the secretary of the Fairhope Co-Operative Credit Association, for which the famed attorney, Clarence Darrow, served as treasurer.<sup>26</sup> The following year, he became a trustee of the Fairhope Colony Council.<sup>27</sup> Helen spoke on numerous occasions at meetings of the local Nature Study Society (Nature Club) and the Fairhope Bird Club. She served on several committees of the town council and as curator and director of the natural history exhibit in the library’s museum. These positions corresponded to her keen interest in nature and especially in birds and reptiles (most notably snakes and turtles). In November 1924, Helen addressed the Nature Study Society on the topic, “Poisonous Snakes of Fairhope.”<sup>28</sup> Both the Edwards joined the local Scribblers Club where members

read stories and poems that they themselves had written. Helen enjoyed, as her daughter, Marjorie, recalled, composing verses.<sup>29</sup>

Willard became an indispensable member of the community in other ways. In early 1924, he appeared before one of the periodic sessions of the Fairhope Forum with a presentation, “Preventive Medicine and Curative Surgery.” There he emphasized the importance of germ theory and warned against the many enticing nostrums for multiple ailments.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Edwards was an accomplished baritone and cellist.<sup>31</sup> In March 1933, shortly before his departure for the USSR, Edwards spoke at a mid-week luncheon of Fairhope’s citizens on astronomy and

25. *FC*, July 14, 1932, 5. By now, it seems, he had sold the *Osprey*.

26. *FC*, August 22, 1924, 8.

27. *FC*, February 20, 1925, 3. In January 1928, Edwards resigned as a trustee of the Fairhope Single-Tax Corporation: *FC*, January 26, 1928, 1.

28. *FC*, November 7, 1924, 4.

29. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 5.

30. *FC*, May 2, 1924, 1.

31. *FC*, December 30, 1926, 1 and May 22, 1930, 5. The report of December 30, 1926, indicated that apparently, when in Chicago, Edwards had performed as a singer on the radio under the name of Mr. Graham. Admittedly, all this sounds so impressive that it may have been the product of exaggeration. An Edwards, perhaps Willard, performed an offertory solo, “Jesus of Nazareth,” at a Christmas service at Fairhope’s St. James Episcopal Church: *FC*, December 23, 1926, 8.



Figure 6: Helen and Willard Edwards (and two ten-year old boys) with an alligator gar. Courtesy of Olga Bukhalova

making one's way by the stars.<sup>32</sup> As a sailor, he knew it well.

Students at the Organic School held Willard Edwards in high regard. In 1930, the school's senior graduating class devoted their yearbook, *Cinagro*, to "Mr. W. H. Edwards, our faithful history teacher ... whom we respect as a teacher and trust as a friend."<sup>33</sup> The following year, *Cinagro's* authors spoke of Edwards as "one of the most generally liked members of the faculty ... a born teacher always ready to assist."<sup>34</sup>

In the twenty-two interviews of former pupils who attended the Organic School when Edwards taught there, few mentioned any of their teachers by name. But those who did usually spoke specifically of Edwards. Jack Stapleton, who attended the school for only one, his senior, year in 1929, did so. Frank Beaty, who attended the school from the first through the twelfth grades, to graduate in 1935, recalled Edwards as "a really good teacher [who] made history very interesting." He and George DuBrock, the latter enrolled in the school from 1929 to 1935, fondly remembered Edwards' use of maps and charts, a practice, they said, that made it easy to recognize countries and the ebb and flow of boundaries throughout history. Helene Beiser Hunter, who attended all twelve grades at the school to graduate in 1934, brought up not merely her instructor's use of maps but also joint exercises he arranged with his pupils to make maps out of large sheets of paper.<sup>35</sup>

32. *FC*, March 30, 1933, 1, 6.

33. *Cinagro*, 1930, 20.

34. *Cinagro*, 1931, 5.

35. Willard's former students spoke glowingly of his instruction and personality when interviewed in 1984 by Shae Sherertz, "From Fairhope to Russia," 9-10.



The Marietta Johnson Museum contains no full-fledged syllabi or lesson plans of Edwards' instruction. Given the focus at the Organic School on a child-centered approach and "organic" activity-oriented learning, their absence is not surprising. They probably never existed. The museum's computer does contain, however, Edwards' notes on his instruction in the four high school grades for the 1930/31 academic year. There he described the purpose and content of his courses in ancient history, medieval and modern European history, English history, and American history.<sup>36</sup> A demanding instructor, Edwards required considerable reading and multiple written and oral reports. His efforts corresponded to Marietta Johnson's philosophy for schooling. To that end, Edwards emphasized over and over again class discussion. In so doing, he hoped to put the period or subject under study into a larger global and chronological context. Students were asked to grasp the past's relevance to contemporary issues.<sup>37</sup>

Former pupils also recalled fondly the instruction of Helen Edwards. In interviews, they mentioned how she often brought different animals to school, especially snakes. "We draped snakes around our necks," Bill Payne recalled.



*Figure 7: Friends Together at the Organic School.*

*Bert Edwards with a snake.*

*Source: [alabamamosaic.org](http://alabamamosaic.org)*

36. See Marietta Johnson Museum's computer, Box 1/Organic School/student records, 1923-1936.

37. See Edwards' notes in the Marietta Johnson Museum's computer, Box 1/Organic School/student records, 1923-1936. In the 1930/31 academic year, the school offered a six-week course in single-tax conducted by Marietta Johnson and under Edwards' tutelage when Johnson was out of town, as she often was. It included assigned reading of articles from contemporary journals *Survey*, *New Republic*, *Nation*, *Colliers*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Students also read, of course, Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*.

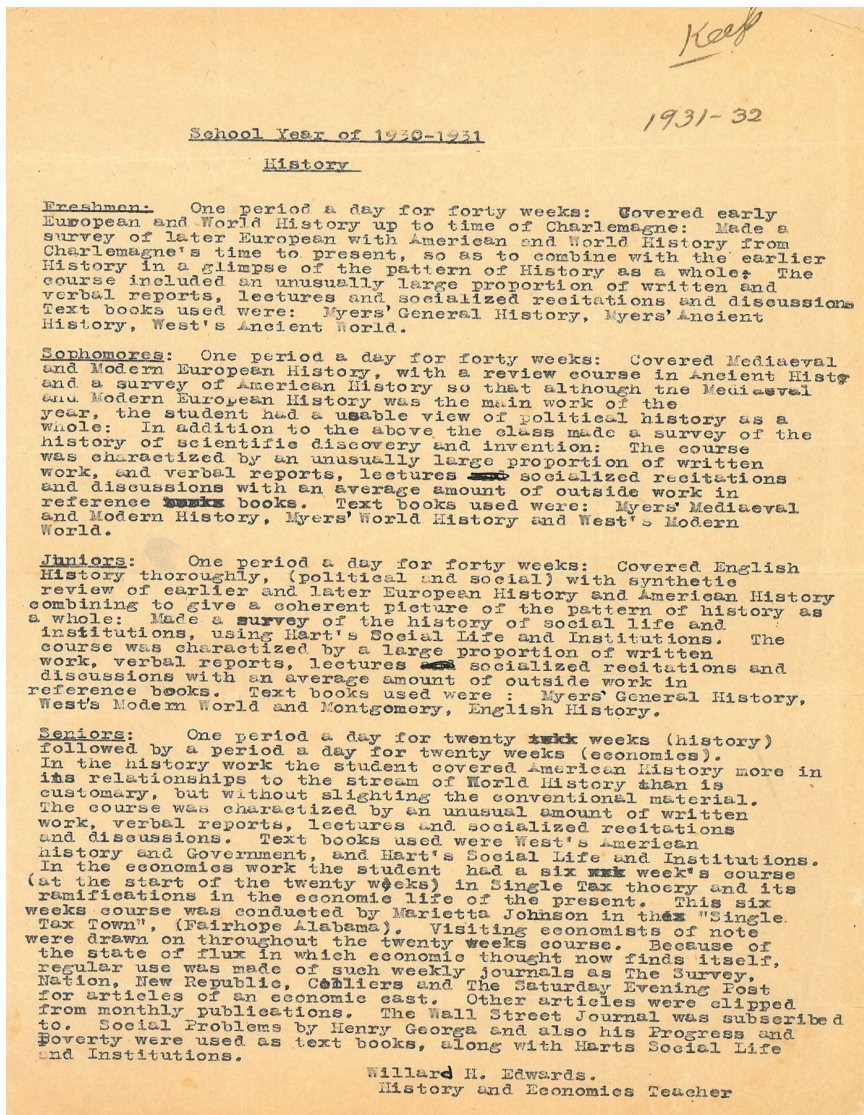


Figure 8: Willard Edwards on the Teaching of History.  
Courtesy of Marietta Johnson Museum

To this day, he added, he respected rather than feared even the poisonous variety. Mary “Buddy” Gaston Goddard, a 1939 graduate, credited Helen Edwards for her, Mary’s, lack of a fear of snakes “unless they hissed.” The interviewer, Dorothy Beiser Cain, a pupil herself at the time, injected that pupils and visitors had to take precaution when taking a chair at school. They might sit down on a snake.<sup>38</sup>



*Figure 9: Dan (Kenneth) Edwards with five-foot King snake.*

*Courtesy of Olga Bukhalova*

Willard Edwards endeared himself further with the school’s students by taking them on frequent trips on the Osprey. In September 1926, he captained a party of the Eastern Shore Yacht Club members that included six boys, presumably enrolled at the school, to New Orleans for yacht races.<sup>39</sup> On other occasions, Edwards arranged for a special trip for boys living in the school home (dormitory), or took members of a class, often graduating seniors, on a special outing.<sup>40</sup> Georgia Lloyd recalled that in 1931 Edwards took her and fellow members of the school’s graduating class on a three-day trip to Biloxi, Mississippi, where, among other activities, they put on a folk dance demonstration.<sup>41</sup>

### **Politics**

Prior to their arrival in Fairhope, the Edwards had shown sympathy for progressive politics. Helen had been associated in some capacity with Chicago’s Hull House, founded by Jane Addams. Upon adoption of their daughter, Marjorie,

38. Interview of Mary “Buddy” Gaston Goddard.

39. *FC*, September 2, 1926, 5 and September 9, 1926, 5.

40. See reports in *FC*, October 27, 1927, 4; May 15, 1930, 5; April 30, 1931, 3.

41. Interview of Georgia Lloyd.

they named Addams her godmother.<sup>42</sup> While temporarily moving back and forth between Fairhope and Chicago, Willard visited the Hull House in late December 1923. From there he sent to Fairhope Addams' Christmas greetings of good will and peace.<sup>43</sup> Years after her relocation to Fairhope, Helen spent time at the Hull House in the summer of 1928.<sup>44</sup>

Willard and Helen had become interested in Fairhope for its reputation among progressive circles for its single tax colony and emphasis on something other than business as usual for profit (despite their own profitable stocks). In his book published in 1879, *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George posited that unequal and unjust distribution of wealth resulted from private ownership of land. He proposed the collective ownership of all land and its rent by individuals through the payment of a "single tax." Inspired by George's vision, Fairhope was established as a single-tax colony, which issued leases on land to individuals and families for a period of ninety-nine years. By 1907, the Single Tax Corporation possessed 4,000 acres with 125 homes in which 500 people resided.<sup>45</sup> The town's citizens were proud of its radicalism. The community's newspaper, the *Fairhope Courier*, appropriately declared in its masthead to be "a progressive paper for progressive people." The town's reputation aroused the ire of communities around it. In the early 1920s, Eleanor Risley, who had moved to Fairhope as an adult, wrote sarcastically for the *Courier* about the scorn of those nearby. "It is so easy to make a scandal in Fairhope," she noted. "Over in a town right by here the minister preached the other day about Fairhope. He said we were all headed straight for the bad place."<sup>46</sup> In her book on Fairhope in the 1920s, Cathy Donelson described the town as "a cauldron of reformists, cutting-edge writers, sexual and social renegades."<sup>47</sup>

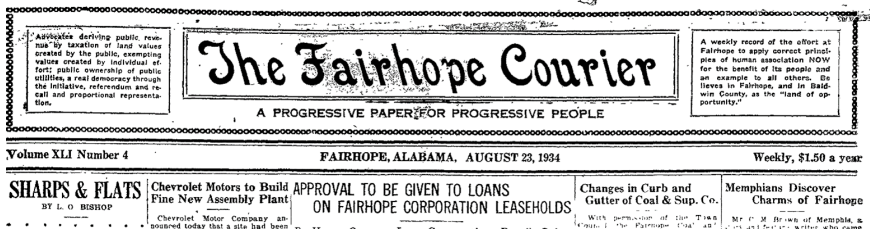


Figure 10

42. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 3. In 1916, Willard Hemenway Edwards of Hinsdale, Illinois, copyrighted a 148-page typescript, "Saving the Country; Comedy in 4 Acts," listed in the Library of Congress, copyright office, *Catalogue of Copyright Entries*, Part 1, Group 2, 1916, new series 13, no. 9 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), 1003. I have not been able to locate this typescript.

43. *FC*, January 4, 1924, 2.

44. *FC*, June 7, 1928, 7.

45. Phyllis Marie Lobdell, "The Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education: An Historical Study," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Auburn University, 1984, 99.

46. Eleanor Risley, *Real Fairhope Folks* (Fairhope, AL: Courier Press, 1928), 5. This pamphlet is a collection of sketches that appeared in the *Courier* from 1921 to 1924.

47. Cathy Donelson, *Fairhope in the Roaring Twenties* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), 8.

Just after their purchase of property in Fairhope, Willard wrote the *Courier* in September 1923 to explain his abiding interest in the place. He addressed in particular the editors of the newspaper's single page supplement, "The Co-operator" that represented a corporation operating a People's Cooperative bakery, lunch room, and mercantile store "of the people, for the people, by the people."<sup>48</sup> Edwards wrote that he had for some time subscribed to the *Courier* and had read with great interest the supplement. He and Helen, he added, had attended the last cooperative convention held in Chicago. He admired the *Courier* for its "progressiveness and insight, the poem instead of a cartoon, are what gives us confidence enough in Fairhope's emancipation from private profit domination to move there." He was buying a membership in the cooperative for fifty dollars.<sup>49</sup> Willard, identified as "a farmer and orchardist," soon became an associate editor of the supplement, presumably without pay.<sup>50</sup> That December, the *Courier* reported on Helen's pleasant experience in the store. She happily discovered that women selected their purchases from the shelves and wrote out their own bills for the amount due.<sup>51</sup> The following August, its shareholders elected Willard the store's director.<sup>52</sup>

In her memoir, "Out of Russia," the daughter, Marjorie, wrote that the depression further radicalized her father and mother. As she put it, they began to read (as if they had not done so before) left-wing magazines. Willard, in particular, grew disillusioned. "My father's private income was vanishing ... He had persuaded himself—and Mother, too—that capitalism had failed and would not recover."<sup>53</sup>

In mid-1932, Willard played a prominent, if not the leading, role in successful

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48. The store sold groceries, shoes, clothing, tools, and roofing materials, among many other items. In 1923, it had a membership of around 150 people with shares worth 50 dollars: *FC*, May 4, 1923, 8. Lunch was served for anywhere from 5 to 50 cents: *FC*, May 18, 1923, 8; February 15, 1924, 8.

49. *FC*, September 28, 1923, 8.

50. *FC*, December 14, 1923, 8.

51. *FC*, December 21, 1923, 8. The newspaper is citing a letter by Helen Edwards. She wrote about the store: "There is a different feel in the atmosphere, a spirit of good will and understanding helpfulness, I never experienced in any of our stores in the old home town. I feel so loyal to that store that I never want to bother going to any other, but get along with what they have."

52. *FC*, August 8, 1924, 8. See Willard's article written as the store's director in *FC*, August 22, 1924, 8. Members were a highly opinionated if not rowdy group. "In Fairhope, as elsewhere throughout the world," Willard wrote, "meetings of stockholders in the cooperative store are more or less stormy." Difficulties inevitably arose with "the effort to turn profits back to producers or consumers."

53. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 6. It is likely that Edwards suffered losses with the stock market crash. He may have felt it financially imperative to sell his Osprey. The *Fairhope Courier* no longer mentioned the boat after its edition of April 30, 1931. In late 1931, Edwards purchased something less luxurious, a new craft, the aforementioned "Bootlegger," so named for its previous use. Edwards christened it, appropriately enough, with salt water. It was, he said, "a fast and seaworthy craft." See the report in *FC*, November 5, 1931, 8.

efforts to organize in Fairhope a local of the Socialist Party.<sup>54</sup> By August, he was its candidate from Alabama's second congressional district for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. That month, he attended the state's socialist convention in Birmingham.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, Edwards actively supported Fairhope's Boatman's Union<sup>56</sup> and addressed a meeting of 200 local farmers in nearby Silverhill with a presentation, "The Need for More Socialization in America."<sup>57</sup>

Even prior to any radicalization of their politics in 1929, it is highly probable that Willard and Helen, like so many others in Fairhope, had been more than curious about the USSR. In late January 1926, Michael Gold, former editor of the monthly leftist magazine, *Liberator*, spoke at Fairhope's Forum. He had recently been in the USSR and, the *Courier* announced, would speak on "The Russian Experiment." An unusually large turnout heard a sympathetic account in which Gold declared that the Soviet government was "probably the most firmly established in Europe."<sup>58</sup> Months later, Oliver Carlson, one of the founders of the Young Communist League of America, was scheduled to speak on Russia to Fairhope's Forum.<sup>59</sup> In early April 1926, Carl D. Thompson, formerly a prominent socialist and Congregationalist minister and now secretary of the Public Ownership League, recalled for the *Courier* a previous pleasant visit to the town. Perhaps with the Soviet Union in mind, he now advised Fairhope's citizens: "Keep the land speculation out of Fairhope. Keep it to the wonderfully high ideals you have cherished. Keep it as a ... possible retreat and rendezvous of the rare souls who love life more than money."<sup>60</sup> In November 1928, Lola N. Lloyd of Winnetka, Illinois, socialist and pamphleteer for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, who had recently traveled widely in Europe and whose daughter, Georgia, attended the Organic School, addressed the school's assembly on the topic "Russia." The *Courier* reported that the presentation "was very vivid."<sup>61</sup> Almost ten years later, the secretary of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, C. A. Gaston, wrote of the Soviet Union's appeal over the years among Fairhope's citizens. On April 7, 1938, he did so in a letter to Alabama's senator, Lister Hill, regarding the case of Albert Melville Troyer, to be discussed below. Gaston described it well if, perhaps, with some exaggeration.

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54. See reports in the *FC*, July 14, 1932, 1; August 4, 1932, 1; and August 11, 1932, 6.

55. *FC*, August 18, 1932, 1.

56. See the report in *FC*, August 18, 1932, 2.

57. *FC*, March 16, 1933, 6.

58. See news of the planned presentation for January 31 in *FC*, January 28, 1926, 1 and the report on the speech, February 4, 1926, 1.

59. *FC*, April 1, 1926, 8. I cannot confirm that Carlson spoke as scheduled. In September 1932, now teaching at the University of Chicago, Carlson returned to Fairhope for a brief visit. See *FC*, September 22, 1932, 5. His parents resided in Fairhope: see *FC*, December 5, 1935, 5 and May 14, 1936, 8.

60. *FC*, April 8, 1926, 4.

61. *FC*, November 22, 1928, 5. See the fascinating description of the mother in the interview of her daughter, Georgia, in Videos in the Marietta Johnson Museum's computer. Lola's husband and father of Georgia, William Bross Lloyd, helped found the Communist Party of the United States of America (initially called the Communist Labor Party) in 1919. Several years earlier, Lola had divorced William.

In Fairhope many of us have, throughout the existence of the Soviet government, entertained a great sympathy for it and its people who are so ably trying to establish in their land a more equitable social and economic life. The Soviet Republic probably has a larger proportionate number of well-wishing friends here than in any other section of our country.<sup>62</sup>

So it was with Willard Edwards. Confronted with the purported failure of capitalism as the daughter, Marjorie later recalled, her father turned his gaze eastward. He decided that the “right and sensible course was to build a new, socialist society, to make a model for a better world. The Soviet Union, he thought, offered an opportunity to do precisely that.”<sup>63</sup> One evening over dinner the father abruptly announced that he was going to the Soviet Union. “Ten days later, he said goodbye.”<sup>64</sup>

In late April 1933, Edwards left Fairhope to begin a prolonged journey for Russia with stops in London and Paris.<sup>65</sup> Initially, he did not necessarily intend to stay long. His plan, as his daughter recalled it, was to summon his family only if all went well.<sup>66</sup> A report in the *Courier* indicated that Edwards thought he might return to Fairhope in mid-August or early September.<sup>67</sup>

### **Educational Policy and Practice in Soviet Russia**

Willard hoped to put his acumen as an educator and cartographer to good use in the USSR. He already had some contact, albeit undocumented, as best I can tell, with a person or persons in the Soviet Union’s Commissariat of Education. They had an agreement that he would design maps and charts for classroom use. Edwards no doubt envisioned their utilization, as at the Organic School, in a child-centered environment. It would all transpire in anything but the traditional eggcrate classroom with bolted-down desks dominated by a teacher’s lectures and canned questions and answers to follow. Sadly, Edwards was badly misinformed about educational policy and practice in the country of his destination. He had missed his opportunity by several years.

In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many educators in the United States, most notably John Dewey, believed that schools could inspire, if not mold, pupils into active agents for the creation of a just and more equitable community and nation. Emboldened by Marxist theory that espoused the possibility (indeed necessity) for grand socio-economic transformation, educators in the infant Soviet Republic embarked on a bold journey to remake human behavior and society through schooling. The Commissariat of Education created the United Labor

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62. Gaston’s letter can be accessed at [www.fairhopesingletax.com](http://www.fairhopesingletax.com), helpful links/Fairhope Single Tax Corporation Archives/Search by Name/Elva Troyer/7.9.1-17, 4.

63. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 6.

64. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 7.

65. *FC*, April 27, 1933, 1; *FC*, May 4, 1933, 5. He arrived in London on May 29.

66. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 7.

67. *FC*, April 27, 1933, 1.

School to offer all children nine years of non-specialized polytechnical instruction with a curriculum devoid of traditional subjects, homework, examinations, and grading marks.<sup>68</sup> The commissariat demanded the replacement of subjects with so-called complex themes, a system of instruction that integrated into a single whole reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography, literature, chemistry and other subjects heretofore allegedly isolated from each other. For the initial grades, syllabi featured themes on familiar and concrete topics concerning nature, labor, and society, such as seasons of the year, household labor, and the family. Themes for higher grades included more general and abstract fare, such as world geography, the international economy, and Soviet government.

The commissariat's reach, however, exceeded its grasp. School administrators and teachers refused to implement the new curriculum or could not manage after an initial attempt to do so. Teachers preferred to focus their instruction on the three R's in the elementary grades and on the usual subject-matter fare in the secondary school. They relied in the process on homework, marks, and the familiar cycle of dictation, memorization, and drill.<sup>69</sup> Faced with such resistance from below, the commissariat began to accommodate its critics with the adoption of curricula from 1926 to 1928 that retained the complex method in name but encouraged systematic presentation of a predetermined body of knowledge by subject. That compromise metamorphosed in the 1930s into an unapologetic embrace of a teacher-centered classroom and a curriculum that relied on subjects, fixed lesson plans for specific classes, homework, grades (marks), and annual promotion examinations. The state wanted an education that taught discipline, obedience, and order in and outside of the classroom.<sup>70</sup> It was not what Willard Edwards, the reform-minded pedagogue, had hoped to find. He had missed, as previously mentioned, his chronological window of opportunity in Soviet Russia by several years. He did not know it, or perhaps he chose not to know.

Years later, Edwards' daughter, Marjorie, understood her father all too well for her own comfort. He had ventured forth blissfully ignorant of Stalin's USSR.

In reality, he knew very little about the Soviet Union, and that little had come from sympathetic books and articles. He had no informed understanding of the conditions of life there, of the country's internal politics and the methods of Stalin's rule, of the limitations and risks to which foreigners were subject. Like so many other idealistic non-

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68. On the commissariat's initiatives and the philosophy behind them, see Larry E. Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917-1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-11, 33-36. In the following survey of policy, I skip the period from 1928 to 1931 when a newly radicalized Commissariat of Education attempted to impose on schools the so-called project method. This novel approach featured such highly politicized projects as campaigns against drunkenness, religion, and political deviation.

69. Holmes, *Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 36-55.

70. On this effort, see Holmes, *Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 80-83 and Larry E. Holmes, *Stalin's School: Moscow's Model School No. 25, 1931-1937* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 7-12.



Russians at that time, he saw himself using his energies and expertise—he had done innovative work in visual education—in the service of a grand and promising experiment in the use of reason and science for the benefit of humanity.<sup>71</sup>

### **In the Promised Land**

And so Willard Edwards went merrily on his way to the promised land. Willard was confident enough in the relevance abroad of his approach to teaching that he brought with him several world history charts to impress officials at the Commissariat of Education. His confidence only grew when in June in London he spoke about Russia at a conference of the Society on Cultural Relations with Russia. In it he used one or more of his charts. Russian representatives in attendance, Willard wrote the *Fairhope Courier*, appreciated his presentation. He was particularly pleased with three meetings he had with an official from the commissariat.<sup>72</sup> Cheerily upbeat weeks later while aboard the ship transporting him across the Gulf of Finland to Leningrad, he wrote the *Courier* of his imminent arrival in “a society that is owned and managed by workers with private profiteering left out of the plan.”<sup>73</sup>

Edwards may have been disappointed by the job that awaited him. He expected an appointment in Moscow to a position in the Commissariat of Education. Instead, he was sent 800 miles south to the Kuban region that bordered on the Black Sea. There he was put in charge of the educational and cultural upbringing of a wide range of residents from the youngest children in nurseries to adults in special courses at a grain and cattle state farm (*sovkhos* in abbreviated Russian), named after the American correspondent, John Reed, author of the famous book on the 1917 revolution. It was not an insignificant post. The farm, as Edwards informed readers of the *Courier*, consisted of 60,000 acres and 2,500 people. Nevertheless, he still hoped for something else, more in line with his original intentions of employment in the USSR. He wrote that he would stay in the Kuban region for a year and would then, he anticipated, work in Moscow. Once ensconced in the capital, he would summon his family.<sup>74</sup>

The farm, another example of Soviet gigantomania, no doubt failed to live up to official expectations. Edwards soon shared the state’s disappointment. His responsibilities involved “cultural education” not just in the classroom but also in the field to preach against the evils of drinking on the job and of lax discipline. Some of his students, peasants deprived of their private plots a few years earlier by collectivization and subsequently dragooned into the state farm, hardly appreciated Willard’s lessons. One night, as his daughter recalled it from a subsequent conversation with her father, he slept in the open field “to escape the

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71. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 6.

72. See Edwards’ letter in *FC*, July 7, 1933, p. 2. Willard identified the official only as the “head of the Soviet Pedagogic Institute,” perhaps the director of one of the commissariat’s research institutes. In his presentation, Willard also put in a good word about Fairhope and the Organic School. See also *FC*, August 3, 1933, 3.

73. *FC*, July 20, 1933, p.1.

74. *FC*, September 28, 1933, 1.

odors of the crowded barracks in which he and the workers lived. He woke to the sound of an approaching tractor. He rolled away [just] as the driver tried to run over him.<sup>75</sup>

The incident, happily for Edwards, led to his transfer to Moscow in February 1934. He began that month as a senior instructor for quality control at the State Academic and Pedagogical Press, then under the jurisdiction of the Commissariat of Education. The job paid him 200 rubles a month, a modest sum but slightly more than the average pay at the time.<sup>76</sup> Soon thereafter, Edwards received an appointment as a consultant at the commissariat's Research Institute.<sup>77</sup>

The posting to Moscow boosted his spirits. On February 14, 1934, with more apparent enthusiasm than ever, Edwards wrote the *Courier* from Moscow. He did not plan to write again, he said, or, perhaps ever. "I am so happily busy with my work that I begrudge the time, and if I fail with my work I won't feel like writing in the interval remaining before I return to America."<sup>78</sup> He described an idyllic life. Moscow boasted of eighty-one live theaters in addition to movie theaters and three opera houses that played to capacity. The city's multiple palaces and museums were open to the public at little or no cost. Edwards happily reported that he had just returned from a skiing trip with his colleagues where he had witnessed "the rosy cheeks and laughing faces of the workers" of a new world. They and all citizens of the USSR, Edwards added, enjoyed cradle-to-grave support "free from the heavy hand of economic uncertainty." They had a free choice of jobs "regardless of former politics or even enmity and crime." Divorce

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75. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 14. Edwards Ewing writes that her father aroused jealousy and anger among other workers by overfulfilling his norm and not by any instruction he might have given. The story of the Willard's brush with death is also recounted by Kenneth Edwards in his memoirs: "Kenneth Edwards Memoirs," in the computer of Marietta Johnson Museum, 23. "In the barracks where my father lived it was stuffy and at night he would go out to sleep on the ground. Once my father woke up because of the tractor's noise which was moving straight towards him. My father managed to dodge and the tractor passed by. Later it was found out that someone wanted to kill my father."

76. As of February 16, 1934, Edwards is listed in this position in a document in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii), fond (collection) R-4851, opis' (group) 1, delo (folder) 450, list (page) 58. Edwards was not mentioned in any other folders of potential relevance (folders 447-449, 453, 460-466) in that collection. Nor is he mentioned in any of the potentially relevant folders in the collection of the State Pedagogical Press, an agency that specialized in the printing of materials for schools: State Archive of the Russian Federation, fond A-514, opis' 1, folders 8-16.

77. In a page from Kenneth Edwards' handwritten autobiography, Kenneth indicated that his father worked as a consultant for the Commissariat of Education's Research Institute (Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut pri Narkomprose). Olga Bukhalova kindly sent me this page. I have examined the archival collections of the commissariat's Research Institute for Polytechnical Education, the Research Institute of Pedagogy of the Higher Communist Institute of Education, and the Central Pedagogical Laboratory and found no mention of Edwards. For these collections, see the Research Archive of the Russian Academy of Education (Nauchnyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Akademii Obrazovaniia), fond 11, 13, and 17. It should be noted that the lists of people associated with each of these agencies has been lost or discarded.

78. *FC*, February 15, 1934, 2.

was easy to come by and thus there was no need, as Edwards put it, for the “great American triangle.” And yet divorce in the USSR was rarer than that in the United States. Becoming more ecstatic as he went, Edwards proclaimed that people’s genuineness and wholesomeness made him “ashamed of the ideology that I brought from a harsher society.” He reminded his readers that just a year ago, he had spoken at the Fairhope Forum on the subject, “The Place in History of the Soviet Union.” “I am glad,” he continued, “that in my talk I made the Soviet Union’s place in history large enough [that] I don’t have basically to revise my ideas now. It looks to me here as it did there like the biggest thing in history so far.”

Edwards got a lot wrong about Soviet politics and society at the time, to say nothing of the near future. He also had badly misread, as previously mentioned, Soviet educational policy and practice. His ideology if not intellectual stubbornness did not permit him, for the moment at least, to think otherwise. For whatever reasons, still bravely confident about the land of socialism and his own, if temporary, place in it, Edwards invited his wife and family to join him.

In February 1934, Helen Edwards departed for the Soviet Union.<sup>79</sup> Her children remained in Fairhope in order to complete the school year. While en route, she wrote the *Fairhope Courier* that she had spent some time in Havre, France, and was now on a ship bound for Germany. One fellow passenger, Helen was delighted to report, had met Marietta Johnson, another had heard of the Organic School. Anxiety, however, tempered her good spirits. She worried that customs officials in a Germany now ruled by Hitler might show more than passing interest in her and the literature she carried. “With me are currently copies,” she wrote, “of *The Nation*, *New Republic*, *New Masses* and a small volume of Karl Marx. Fellow passengers say that confiscation is the only penalty. Well, I’ll soon know.”<sup>80</sup> In March, she, if not her literature, arrived safely in the USSR.<sup>81</sup>

On March 27, Helen informed the *Courier* of her experience, albeit modest to date, in her new locale.<sup>82</sup> She shared her husband’s enthusiasm for the place. Moscow boasted of many theaters and a multiplicity of other opportunities for common citizens who could now enjoy the benefits of high culture. Factories and schools possessed up-to-date equipment. Women employees at the Red Rose Silk Factory worked a seven-hour day and had access there to a modern restaurant, a day nursery, and a dispensary.<sup>83</sup> Like Willard before her, she enjoyed if not skiing at least the season’s last snow, something the couple had not experienced in the American Deep South’s Fairhope. “It is ten years since I’ve seen snow.” She wrote that her husband was gratifyingly busy with the preparation of a series of charts to illustrate classroom study of botany, zoology, geography, and mathematics.

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79. The daughter, Marjorie, reported that her mother departed for the USSR in February 1934: Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 8.

80. *FC*, March 15, 1934, 1.

81. See Helen Edwards’ letter from Moscow, dated March 21, 1934, in *FC*, April 19, 1934, 4.

82. *FC*, April 19, 1934, 4.

83. In the new post-communist Russia, the factory has been converted into upscale offices.

He hoped for their use according to the “same principles of synthetic visual presentation that we tried out experimentally in Marietta Johnson’s School of Organic Education in Fairhope.”

Helen was pleased to report that the Moscow’s Anglo-American School, serving children of the diplomatic corps, had hired her to teach biology. She had already spoken about nature to a group of the school’s twelve-year old pupils. Edwards had no doubt reminisced about Fairhope’s animal life because her audience responded in particular with questions about alligators.

The Edwards couple expected shortly the arrival of their three children. In June, accompanied by a friend of the family, Marjorie, Kenneth, and Bert departed by train for New York.<sup>84</sup> Before the trip, the family donated many, if not all, of the animal specimens in their collection to the Fairhope library’s natural history exhibit.<sup>85</sup> The library was also heir to 176 “fine volumes.”<sup>86</sup> The family’s Ford was parked in a garage, the house closed, and friends took the family’s furniture and other items. Later that month, the children left New York by boat on a seventeen-day trip to Leningrad (with stops in Copenhagen and Helsinki).<sup>87</sup> They arrived in Russia on July 10.<sup>88</sup>



Figure 11: Helen, Kenneth, Bert, Willard, and Marjorie Edwards. (Moscow, 1934-35)  
Courtesy of Marina Edwards

84. *FC*, June 14, 1934, 5.

85. See the report in *FC*, July 12, 1934, 5.

86. See “Library Notes” in *FC*, September 27, 1934, 1.

87. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 8.

88. On the date, see a letter from Helen Edwards to the *FC*, published in the newspaper’s edition of August 23, 1934, 1.

### Leading by Example: Fairhope's A. M. Troyer to the USSR

The Edwards' children had not been the parents' first rendezvous in the Soviet Union with people from Fairhope. Albert Melville Troyer, born in about 1870, a prominent Fairhope citizen had preceded them. After moving to Fairhope in 1909, Troyer, soon possessed a large orchard of satsuma oranges. Troyer was one of the associate editors of the initial issue of the *Fairhope Courier's* supplement, "The Co-operator," listed as a representative of the Fairhope Citrus Growers Association. By 1925, if not before, Troyer served as the president of the Board of Directors of the Peoples Cooperative Store.<sup>89</sup> In March 1934, two representatives of the Russian agricultural industry visited the area. They purchased a large number of satsuma nursery stock and buds. The items were for a major plantation, yet another Soviet monstrosity, envisaged for the USSR's south along the Black Sea coast. In need of an expert consultant for the enterprise, they hired Troyer to follow them to Russia. He might have been convinced to go in part because he had recently endured financial problems. For two consecutive years, he had lost his crop to freezing temperatures. In May 1934, the *Fairhope Courier* put it bluntly: Troyer "had suffered shipwreck in the depression."<sup>90</sup>

Troyer left for the USSR in mid-April.<sup>91</sup> A few months later, he proudly wrote the *Fairhope Courier*: "I am down on the Black Sea where we plan to produce the largest satsuma orchard on the globe." He added that he well understood that "it sounds like a phantasy." He would nevertheless plough blissfully ahead. His visa was good for only six months but "unless they put me out at the end of my time, I expect to stay here the rest of my days."<sup>92</sup> And so it was. On May 28, 1937, Troyer became a Soviet citizen.<sup>93</sup> He thereby renounced, in the estimation of the U.S. Department of State, as we will see, his American citizenship. The enterprise and "the rest of my days" turned out to mean something other than what Troyer had in mind.

Certain of her husband's success in the new land, Troyer's wife, Elva, left

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89. *FC*, May 1, 1925, 8.

90. *FC*, May 27, 1937, 4. See also information in "Seeks to Free Man in Russian Prison: Nebraska Woman Appeals to Washington to Act in Her Husband's Case," *New York Times*, April 4, 1938, 24. In general, Fairhope's satsuma industry fell on hard times in the early 1930s. A letter to the Troyers from the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, May 23, 1935, mentioned that the industry "has practically bankrupted all those who stuck to it." It added that in 1935, if not earlier, the Bank of Fairhope had foreclosed on the Troyers' property. That year, Fairhope's Colony Council put up for sale the Troyers' leaseholds to cover payments due and to find someone who could pay the rent. The letter can be accessed at [www.fairhopesingletax.com](http://www.fairhopesingletax.com), helpful links/Fairhope Single Tax Corporation Archives/Search by Name/Troyer/3.18.1-47, 14.

91. See reports in *FC*, March 15, 1934, 1 and April 19, 1934, 1. See also a later report in the *Courier's* edition of September 5, 1957, 1. In total, Soviet representatives purchased in Fairhope and in the surrounding region 9,000 trees and 40,000 buds.

92. *FC*, July 12, 1934, 1.

93. In 1938, Mrs. Troyer told a reporter for the *New York Times* that her husband was told that the Soviet government intended to dismiss all foreign consultants. If he wanted to continue his work on the development of useful hybrids, he should apply for Soviet citizenship. See "Seeks to Free Man in Russian Prison," 24.

to join him in May 1935.<sup>94</sup> Before her departure, she sold off their workhorse, household goods, furniture, including a solid mahogany dining-room suite, ornamental pieces, and an Olivetti typewriter.<sup>95</sup> She also turned over 145 volumes to Fairhope's library.<sup>96</sup>

The *Fairhope Courier* could not help but comment ruefully on the loss of so many of the city's finest to the socialist land faraway. Noting the departure for the USSR of the Edwards, then Troyer, and now the latter's wife, its edition of April 19, 1934, lamented on its first page: "This thing of drawing on Fairhope's citizens for emigration to Soviet Russia is getting serious." Fairhope was proud to send its people to the Soviet Union, although in the process the city had lost "it must be admitted regretfully the highest type of liberally minded and usefully inclined citizens."<sup>97</sup>

On his way in 1934 to the Black Sea area, Troyer dropped by to see Willard and Helen at their residence in Moscow. On June 11, he wrote to the *Fairhope Courier* that he found both in good spirits mentally and glowing physically. Helen "looks ten years younger, so pretty and sprightly and fairly bubbling with enthusiasm." "Mr. Edwards," he continued, "takes the cake. He is just boiling over." Troyer passed on Willard's wish to tell the *Courier's* readers that he was more enthusiastic about the USSR than ever.<sup>98</sup>

### Perils of Moscow

No doubt buoyed by his enthusiasm for Soviet Russia and his own projected contribution to it, Troyer exaggerated the well-being of his newly relocated friends. Marjorie Edwards described a reality far different from Troyer's and, as well, from her mother's commentary at the time. Helen Edwards described the scene in Leningrad on July 10, 1934, when she and Willard greeted their children "as a real family reunion."<sup>99</sup> Marjorie, then fifteen years of age, later remembered it quite differently. "As our ship moved to the pier in Leningrad, my brothers and I pressed against the rail, each trying to be the first to sight our parents." But what happened was "disappointingly humdrum." Their mother hardly looked for them. Ever the ornithologist, she was instead "gazing at the gulls overhead. Father, too nearsighted to pick us out on the deck, was pacing near the gangplank."<sup>100</sup> Marjorie described a couple, her parents, in a way that radically departed from what Troyer had purportedly witnessed just weeks before. Soviet life had worn badly on Willard and Helen.

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94. *FC*, May 9, 1935, 4.

95. See the items as advertised for sale in the *FC*, January 17, 1935, 8; January 24, 1935, 8; January 31, 1935, 8; February 7, 1935, 8; February 28, 1935, 4; March 7, 1935, 8; March 25, 1935, 8; March 28, 1935, 8.

96. See "Library Notes" in *FC*, May 7, 1936, 8.

97. *FC*, April 19, 1934, 1.

98. *FC*, July 12, 1934, 8.

99. See her report in *FC*, August 23, 1934, 1.

100. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 1-2.

After a year in the Soviet Union, Father had become almost an old man, although he was still in his forties. He had lost much of his hair, and his skin was pasty. Worst of all, there were gaps between his remaining teeth. Mother, shabbily dressed, looked thin and drawn. They hugged us warmly, but both seemed self-conscious and anxious. I began to chatter about the trip over, wanting to cover their embarrassment—and my own.<sup>101</sup>

Helen had written in March 1934 that she and Willard lived in a comfortable room in a newly built section of Moscow.<sup>102</sup> The daughter described it as a room only twelve by sixteen feet with a single table and four chairs and five camp cots. They shared the corridor, kitchen, and toilet with their landlady and her son, dog, and cat.<sup>103</sup> The Edwards' son, Kenneth, later recalled: "I remember a great amount of bed-bugs in that flat."<sup>104</sup>

Moscow was a shock for the daughter and, no doubt, for her siblings. Back home, they had performed well in the Organic School.<sup>105</sup> They had enjoyed their cruises on the Osprey. Marjorie became a Girl Scout first-class and Kenneth a Boy Scout.<sup>106</sup> Kenneth had accompanied his mother on forays to take a census of the local bird population<sup>107</sup> and once spoke to a luncheon of Fairhope's citizens on bird life, a presentation that "captivated listeners."<sup>108</sup> Now not three weeks in their new country, the children missed home. Their parents did not seem to share their sentiments, not yet anyway. In comments written on July 30, 1934, for the *Fairhope Courier*, Willard and Helen spoke of their delight with Soviet Russia. But in accompanying notes, the children expressed a more nuanced view. Marjorie wrote that she was having a good time but hastened to add for the benefit of her young readers in Fairhope: "Hoping to see you all again next summer." Bert mentioned an interesting campfire but then confided: "I would like to see all my Fairhope friends." Kenneth spoke of his enrollment in a course of sociology at Moscow State University and efforts to play the accordion. He then wrote: "Greetings to my Fairhope friends."<sup>109</sup>

### Going Home

In mid-1935, Willard Edwards wrote to a business acquaintance about his and his family's experience in Moscow. "We are all well and enjoying life in the

101. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 2.

102. *FC*, April 19, 1934, 4.

103. Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 10.

104. "Kenneth Edwards Memoirs."

105. For Kenneth and Marjorie, see the Marietta Johnson Museum's computer, Box 1/Organic School/student records, 1923-1926.

106. For Marjorie *FC*, December 14, 1933, 1; for Kenneth, *FC*, January 14, 1932, 6.

107. *FC*, December 31, 1931, 6.

108. *FC*, March 30, 1933, 1.

109. *FC*, August 23, 1934, 4. For the children, especially Marjorie, conditions went from bad to worse. See Marjorie's description of everyday life in Moscow in Edwards Ewing, "Out of Russia," 10-14.

new society.” He signed off with “Yours for public land ownership.” Edwards was at his disingenuous best. He knew better. He now understood that the era of progressive education in the USSR had ended, that there was little or no interest in visual aids that he might produce for a child-centered classroom. The Soviet state had dismissed many of his contacts at the Commissariat of Education. Those now in charge no doubt found Edwards an ill-fit with a traditional curriculum and assigned him few if any important tasks. Without meaningful work but still holding out hope for the Soviet project, Edwards left the USSR in late 1935 for New York City. According to Marjorie, he later told his family: “Revolutions are tough things—look at the French Revolution.”<sup>110</sup>

Before his departure, Willard talked to American delegates who attended the Seventh Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), held in Moscow from July 25 to August 20. He asked them for their help in arranging his return to the United States.<sup>111</sup> They may have put in a good word for him, but it is likely that most, if not all of the delegates, returned home before Willard left later in the year. Nevertheless, the permission for Willard’s departure may have been facilitated by Comintern’s central office in Moscow.<sup>112</sup> “Father,” Marjorie later wrote, “made up

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110. Interview of Marjorie by Paul Gaston: Sherertz, “From Fairhope to Russia,” 18.

111. According to a page from the diary of Kenneth, the son, Willard worked out an agreement with delegates from the Comintern who had come from America to go back with them. Kenneth also mentions that Willard helped prepare propaganda manuals. This page sent to me by Olga Bukhalova, June 1, 2022.

112. See a memorandum dated October 21, 1935, to Moisei Chernomordik, the deputy head of the Cadres Department of the Comintern’s Executive Committee: Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii) [henceforth RGASPI], fond 495, opis’ 261 delo 1517, list 6. I say “may have been facilitated” because in late 1935 and in mid-1936, a political inspector (*politreferent*), Arvid Brigader, in Comintern’s Cadres Department wrote that he had no information about Willard: see documents in RGASPI, fond 495, opis’ 261, delo 517, list 4 and 2. See also Brigader’s handwritten note of April 15, 1936, across a typed memorandum, l. 3. It should be noted that list 4 and 2 discuss primarily another Edwards, someone other than Willard and Helen.



his mind to go to New York and work for socialism in America.”<sup>113</sup> There Willard started a new business, the Visual Education Press.

Edwards left his wife and three children behind. Helen planned to soon follow him home. She had one problem—an application in July 1935 for Soviet citizenship. Now, later that year, Helen asked for its withdrawal from consideration.<sup>114</sup> In March 1936, her request was still pending.<sup>115</sup> Whatever the status of her application, Helen may have decided to remain for the moment in the USSR. Two of her children, for reasons discussed below, were not free to leave. In addition, Helen enjoyed her independence and her teaching position at the Anglo-American School.<sup>116</sup>

Willard had dabbled in the study of Russian when in Fairhope. On his way to Russia in 1933, he took it more seriously, writing from Paris that “I have put all spare time on the Russian.”<sup>117</sup> It is unlikely that he learned the language well enough for unassisted conversation with his colleagues at the Commissariat of Education. Helen, however, learned it rather well, a skill that no doubt contributed to her sense of fulfillment with work and life in Moscow.<sup>118</sup> And yet, ominously, she and her children soon learned of a wave of arrests in 1936 and 1937, the first years of the Great Terror. They also endured official suspicion of foreigners, especially, ironically, of those who had sympathized with the communist cause. In January 1938, the government closed the Anglo-American School. “Now, even Mother,” Marjorie recalled, “recognized that we must leave as quickly as

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113. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 13. When asked in 1994 in an interview about his parents’ presumptive disillusionment with the USSR, Kenneth seemed perplexed, strikingly puzzled, by the question. A handwritten page from the son’s, Kenneth’s, autobiography indicated that Willard returned to the United States on invitation of the American Communist Party and that he joined the party in 1935. That page shared with me by Kenneth’s granddaughter on April 14, 2020. On March 9, 1936, Boris Berman, deputy head of the Foreigners Department of the state security police, sent a memorandum about Willard and Helen to Bort Müller, head of the Comintern’s Department for International Relations. According to Berman, Helen had indicated that Willard had returned to the United States for work in the Communist Party: RGASPI, fond 495, opis’ 261, delo 1517, list 3. I have seen no documentation that confirms Willard’s membership in the party. Answers to a number of questions regarding the political affiliation and political connections of both Willard and Helen while they were in the USSR may well be in three documents in RGASPI’s folder about them (delo 1517) that remain classified, still labeled “secret.” The deputy director of RGASPI, M. S. Astakhova, informed me of the existence and inaccessible status of these items in a letter of June 9, 2022. The four officials, authors of the correspondence in RGASPI about Helen and Willard—Chernomordik, Brigader, Müller, and Berman—were subsequently shot, victims of the terror in 1937-38.

114. See the memorandum to Chernomordik, October 21, 1935: RGASPI, f. 495 op. 261, d. 1517, l. 6.

115. See Berman’s memorandum, March 9, 1936: RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 1517, l. 3.

116. This information as recalled by the daughter, Marjorie, in Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 14. On the children’s successes for the moment, see 14-19.

117. See Edwards’ letter to *FC*, June 8, 1933, 2.

118. Olga Bukhalova shared with me a letter that Helen wrote in Russian in October 1959 to her “Russian” family. Helen expressed her warmest feelings in excellent Russian, albeit with a few understandable grammatical and spelling errors.

possible.”<sup>119</sup> Helen’s application for citizenship by now presumably tabled, she and her son, Bert, received exit visas and left that year for New York. Kenneth and Marjorie, however, could not accompany them.

In 1935, Helen had willingly sought to become a citizen of the USSR. During the 1930s, however, tens of thousands of Americans (among other foreigners) who had come to the Soviet Union were asked, often coerced, to surrender their passports. Soviet authorities pressured still others to formally adopt Soviet citizenship, which the U.S. State Department interpreted as the abrogation of their American citizenship.<sup>120</sup> In a paroxysm of his bewitchment with the Soviet version of socialism, the father had encouraged to the point of compulsion his son, Kenneth, to apply for and receive Soviet citizenship.<sup>121</sup> The son thereby surrendered his American passport. Marjorie found herself in the same predicament. Under the threat, she thought, of arrest and imprisonment, she too had applied for Soviet citizenship.<sup>122</sup> Kenneth remained in the Soviet Union, earning a degree in engineering and finding gainful employment in a factory. He started his own family. Years later, accompanied by his own son, Kenneth visited Fairhope for a month in 1994 and then returned to Russia.<sup>123</sup> Marjorie had a difficult time that included an interrogation at the security police’s infamous headquarters in Moscow, Lubyanka. She eventually found employment at the American embassy. The ambassador helped her receive anew an American passport. She left the USSR on the last day of 1941.<sup>124</sup>

The Edwards’ fate, though troubled, was one far better than what awaited the aforementioned Troyer. In May 1937, now joined in the Soviet Union’s south by his wife, Elva, he informed the *Courier* that all was well with plans for a huge satsuma orchard. He had not forgotten Fairhope but remained enamored with the project in his new land. “Just now,” he wrote, “the Soviet economic experiment has the greater lure, but Fairhope will always be a close second.”<sup>125</sup>

But not all was well. No doubt, the fantasy of satsuma gigantomania, as Troyer himself styled it, failed to live up to expectations. Concurrently, foreigners, above all those sympathetic with the communist experiment, fell under suspicion for political heresy and economic sabotage. In June 1937, agents of the Soviet security police came to the Troyers’ home at 3 AM, searched it for three hours, and departed with the husband. A year earlier, Marjorie Edwards and her brother,

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119. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 22.

120. For a discussion of this matter, see Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), 48, 62, 64.

121. In an interview, Kenneth recalled his application to do so “at father’s behest.”

122. Edwards Ewing, “Out of Russia,” 24.

123. On Kenneth’s life in Russia, including his own reflections, see “Kenneth Edwards Memoirs” and “Russian Article-Kenneth Edwards,” both in the computer of the Marietta Johnson Museum. The latter is a copy of the article, “Rozhdennyi voinoi,” in *Biblioteka Zlatoustovskoi entsiklopedii*, originally published in the newspaper, *Vestnik Zlatousta*, January 4, 1991.

124. Marjorie was one of the more fortunate Americans. Many others disappeared, some of them after submitting urgent requests for help to the American embassy. See Tzouliadis, *Forsaken*, 106, 129, 135, 140, 195.

125. *FC*, May 27, 1937, 1.

Bert, had visited the Troyers. Now Elva journeyed to Moscow in the hope that their mother, if not her children, could help free her husband. There was nothing they could do.<sup>126</sup> Despite multiple appeals to Soviet authorities, Elva never heard from him again. She was told that he had been charged with counterrevolutionary activity and sentenced to a Soviet prison camp. Tired of her subsequent appeals, officials ordered her to leave the country in February 1938.<sup>127</sup> It is unlikely that Troyer, almost seventy years of age when arrested, survived what was probably a rough interrogation and subsequent journey to a forced labor camp.<sup>128</sup>

Back in the United States, Elva Troyer launched a concerted campaign on behalf of her husband, who, she hoped, remained alive. Shortly after her arrival in New York City in February 1938, she petitioned the Soviet embassy in Washington, DC. She enlisted the support of several senators, including Edmund Burke of Nebraska (her home state), William Borah of Idaho, and the aforementioned Lister Hill of Alabama. Two congressmen from Nebraska, Henry Lucky and Charles McLaughlin, wrote the embassy. In addition, more than 200 letters and telegrams were sent to it. The Soviet ambassador, Aleksandr Troyanovsky, personally received some of the petitioners, Senator Burke perhaps one of them.<sup>129</sup>

On April 7, 1938, C. A. Gaston, secretary of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, wrote Senator Hill. He suggested that the politician convey to Soviet authorities that they might have badly misjudged any apparent objectionable behavior on Troyer's part. Gaston desperately offered that Troyer somehow could have misspoken because he had not yet mastered the Russian language "sufficiently to properly express himself." Or a man Troyer's age might have suffered mental problems that could have led to a "reversal of long-held convictions."<sup>130</sup>

Hill duly appealed to the U.S. State Department for help. On April 21, 1938, Acting Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, responded to the senator in a formally correct yet heartless manner.

You will appreciate, I am sure, that in as much as Mr. Troyer abandoned his allegiance to this Government and formally acquired citizenship in the Soviet Union it is impossible for this Government to make any formal representations to the Soviet authorities on his behalf.<sup>131</sup>

Three weeks later, on May 7, 1938, the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull,

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126. Propp, "From Russia," 1B.

127. See reports in "Seeks to Free Man in Russian Prison, 24 and *FC*, November 16, 1950, 1-2.

128. There is no information on Troyer in the collection of victims of the Soviet terror, a source maintained by the Russian NGO, "Memorial" (unfortunately closed since late 2021 for violation of Russia's foreign agent law). The deaths of many individuals who perished during interrogation or transport to a camp were never officially recorded.

129. This information in letters from Elva Troyer to the secretary of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, April 7, 1938 and May 14, 1938. They can be accessed at [www.fairhopesingletax.com](http://www.fairhopesingletax.com), helpful links/ Fairhope Single Tax Corporation Archives/Search by Name/Elva Troyer, 7.9.1-17 [henceforth FSTC Archives, Elva Troyer], 2, 16.

130. FSTC Archives, Elva Troyer, 3.

131. FSTC Archives, Elva Troyer, 9.

reinforced that very point in a letter to Senator Hill. "Because of the considerations set forth in the Department's letter to you of April 21, 1938, this Government is unable to take any steps with a view to effecting [sic] the release of Mr. Troyer."<sup>132</sup> Hull was hopeful that other avenues of relief might succeed. The State Department did concede that if somehow the Soviet government freed Troyer, the United States would grant him a visa to return to his homeland.<sup>133</sup> It did not happen.

Elva Troyer continued her search of news of her husband, but to no avail. She died in October 1950.<sup>134</sup>

Marjorie Edwards later married Gordon Ewing, a member of the United States' diplomatic corps. Upon his retirement, the couple settled in Fairhope. Marjorie died there in February 2010 at the age of ninety-two.

Helen Edwards kept in touch with Fairhope through a subscription to its *Courier*. In February 1945, she wrote that she had recently read in the newspaper an article on native birds. The piece "brought my past experiences with the rich bird life of the Fairhope region vividly to mind." She added: "For real ornithological adventure and discoveries, the best area that I ever visited was the Fairhope region."<sup>135</sup> In May 1951, Willard Edwards offered to surrender his certificate of membership in Fairhope's Single Tax Corporation.<sup>136</sup> Meanwhile, as previously mentioned, he had founded the Visual Education Press. It sold teachers and parents visual aids appropriate for use in a variety of subjects offered in elementary schools. Such items, Edwards advertised, would "save young children now in their formative years from the harmful effects of large classes, text book limitations, worry, 'failure'."<sup>137</sup> Willard Edwards died unexpectedly on March 22, 1953.<sup>138</sup> Helen returned to the Soviet Union in the late 1950s to visit her son, Kenneth. She died in March 1969.

## Conclusion

How can we explain the behavior of Willard and Helen Edwards, especially of the former? Why despite all apparent evidence to the contrary, did Willard think he could venture "to the Great Socialist Beyond" in an attempt, however, unreal and phantasmagorical, to forge a new person, society and world? The same questions can also be put to Edwards' fellow Fairhope citizen, Troyer, and to many others like them. "Explaining the blindness of so many Western intellectuals when they looked at Stalinism," the historian Michael David-Fox has written, "has proven one of the most durable riddles in the history of the twentieth-century

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132. FSTC Archives, Elva Troyer, 14.

133. "Fruit Specialist Jailed by Reds; Release Sought," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, April 6, 1938, 2.

134. *FC*, November 21, 1957, 9.

135. *FC*, March 1, 1945, 2.

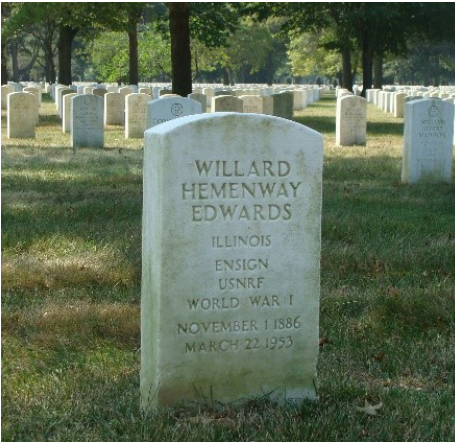
136. *FC*, May 24, 1951, 6.

137. This information from a letter Willard Edwards sent to his son, Kenneth, March 20, 1950. A copy provided by Olga Bukhalova.

138. In February 1955, Helen wrote the *Courier* of news of the family, informing her readers that her husband had "died suddenly in March of 1953": *FC*, February 10, 1955, 7.



Figure 12: Willard and Helen Edwards.  
Courtesy of Marina Edwards



Figures 13 and 14: Long Island National Cemetery, located in Farmingdale, Suffolk County, NY, and administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.  
Courtesy of Olga Bukhalova

politics and intellectual life.”<sup>139</sup>

This essay has provided several suggestions for Willard Edwards’ behavior. As his daughter, Marjorie, forthrightly (and bitterly) commented, her father was horribly naïve about Stalin’s USSR. He had read, as had so many others, the

139. Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 244. It is curious that neither Willard nor Helen wrote of their experience in the USSR after their return to the United States. Perhaps they preferred not to do so to avoid creating any problems for Kenneth and his family back in the Soviet Union.

appealing philosophical and ideological treatises of and about socialism but not the probing assessments of its practice. To be sure, many so-called objective accounts of Soviet reality, some of which Edwards might have examined, also missed the point by a wide margin. And like so many of his compatriots, Edwards wanted to participate, not just observe from afar as an armchair socialist, the building of a new society.

Willard and Helen were hardly alone in their adventure in the USSR. Thousands of their fellow Americans (and thousands more from other countries) visited the land of socialism in the 1920s and 1930s. Many of them stayed for prolonged periods. They did so for many reasons. The opportunity to participate in building something big—a dam or a sprawling factory, a state farm or, as in Troyer’s case, an orchard—brought Americans (and others) to the Soviet Union. Women and Afro-Americans went for the promise of gender and racial equality. Other people sought, often successfully so during the depression, meaningful employment at decent pay. They found a sense of fulfillment, a chance to be treated as professionals. And still others went, like Willard and Helen, to contribute to the making of a new world. The inadequate response of western governments to the apparent iniquities and inequities in their own societies in the 1920s and in the depression that followed reinforced a frustration by the Edwards with the west and an attraction to something they thought to be far different in the east.<sup>140</sup>

Perhaps Willard’s own conscience, guilt-ridden by his possession of blue-chip stocks (at least before the great crash of 1929) and by his hobnobbing with Fairhope’s finest, including its Yacht Club members, further inclined him to escape the west for the east. As David-Fox has perceptibly put it, the very elite status of people like Edwards led them to believe that as the chosen ones they could engineer souls and society, if not at home, then across the ocean. Their faith in the power of scientific planning, a reflection of their elitism, reinforced their

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140. On the hope to find an absence of racial discrimination in the USSR: Homer Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia: A Memoir* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1964); Meredith Roman, “Soul to Soul: Americans’ Discovery of Yelena Khanga and the Promise of Russian-American Relations,” *Journal of Russian American Studies* 6, no. 1 (May 2022): 52-72; and Joy Gleason Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008). On the appeal of the Soviet Union for American women, see Julia L. Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

belief.<sup>141</sup> Another American sympathetic to the Soviet cause, the journalist, Anna Louise Strong, much like Edwards, came to the land of socialism “full of awe, enthusiasm and muddled ideas.”<sup>142</sup> She long remained there out of an abiding faith that humans could “conquer all problems presented by nature, even the problems of our own very backward souls.”<sup>143</sup> Yet for Edwards any such faith, ironically, departed from Marietta Johnson’s very philosophy for Fairhope’s Organic School. Johnson insisted over and over again that the school did not seek to mold a person in a preordained image. Rather it sought to provide an environment in which children under the general guidance of the school’s teachers would fashion themselves by following their own instincts and wishes in concert with the surrounding natural world. Not so much the result but the process energized Johnson and, she hoped, her school. As for Strong, more emphatically than Edwards, she put aside what had initially motivated her—to be as an individual a “creator in chaos.” Unlike anything that Edwards expressed, she wrote how she came in effect to lose herself by a belief in the Communist Party “as a living mechanism through which a person attained their own deep will.”<sup>144</sup>

I would venture to suggest one other consideration for Edwards’ behavior. Surely somehow he and others realized that their urge to make the world anew through the example of the USSR emanated from inadequate information and willful ignorance. And yet they ventured forth and persisted at least for a time when confronted face-to-face with an unwelcome reality. To be sure, as Willard and Helen Edwards pointed out, the Soviet state provided its citizens with opportunities, albeit limited in many instances, for employment, relaxation,

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141. For a further discussion of these factors, see David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment* and also Larry E. Holmes, “Western Perceptions of Soviet Education, 1918-1931,” *Educational Forum* 39 (November 1974): 27-32. Much like the American friends of the USSR, the country’s critics were moved by a transformationist impulse. But rather than remake the Soviet Union in the image of what they thought the United States was not, they sought to remake it into the image of what they thought the United States (and the West, more broadly) was—a land of economic and political freedom. See Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967) and David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire”: The Crusade for a “Free Russia” since 1881* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). As Foglesong indicates, the American missionary spirit to remake Russia into something that the United States was presumed to be continued up to the end of the twentieth century and beyond.

142. Anna Louise Strong, *I Change Worlds: The Remaking of an American* (Seattle: The Seal Press, 1979), 159. See David C. Duke, “Anna Louise Strong and the Search for a Good Cause,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (July 1975): 123-137. Strong had “a deep personal need to be part of a great cause or movement” (136). On Strong, see Mickenberg, *American Girls*, 91-98, 106-117, 162-199.

143. Anna Louise Strong, *The Soviets Expected It* (New York: The Dial Press, 1941), 10.

144. Strong, *I Change Worlds*, 223, 417. In the end, it did not fare well for Strong. In 1949, the Soviet government expelled her from the country for alleged espionage (in fact, probably for her evident preference for Chinese communism over its Soviet variant). All that despite her earlier uncritical and naïve embrace of Stalin the person and politician, of collectivization, of the Moscow show trials which she attended, and of Soviet occupation of the Baltic states in 1940. Strong briefly returned to the USSR following de-Stalinization.

entertainment, and social mobility. But that state also made, as they surely knew from their own experience, everyday existence difficult for many of its people.

Julia Mickenberg has written that many idealistic American women in the USSR made “ethical concessions” out of a belief that the suffering that they and others endured validated as all the more authentic their own quest for a new world. Moreover, their overwhelming desire for what could be attained as opposed to what existed “made it possible to rationalize things that would otherwise be hard to tolerate.”<sup>145</sup> In that spirit, Willard and Helen may have regarded the uglier aspects of Soviet reality as an ephemeral phenomenon. The glorious future, not the difficult present, was for them the “really real.” They dismissed current problems as a mere passing reminder of what the “real ever-present future” was not. In so doing, the Edwards and others like them (including many Soviet citizens) engaged in a contraction of time: the glorious future became, in fact, the present. Time, like history itself, was a state of mind.<sup>146</sup> It was, of course, all very subjective, but when believed, such subjectivity was in its own way reality.<sup>147</sup> To Willard Edwards’ credit, if only because of personal disappointment with his job in Moscow, he may have eventually abandoned such subjectivity (while, in turn, abandoning his family).

### About the Author

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145. Mickenberg, *American Girls*, 20, 151, 241.

146. Stalin and his government vigorously promoted such thinking. Stephen E. Hanson has spoken of a Stalinist “charismatic-rational conception of time.” Stalin’s First Five Year Plan would in a charismatic way achieve the impossible by transcending the restraints of time and yet occur within a specified chronological period. See Stephen E. Hanson, *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). In 1932, Stalin declared that the impossibly ambitious First Five Year Plan had been achieved not in five but in four years. A year earlier, he had promised to compress time in an even more dramatic way. In February 1931, he famously commented that the Soviet Union lagged behind a hostile West that had had the luxury of decades to industrialize and then to weaponize the product. The Soviet Union would need, Stalin declared, to make up the difference in a single decade. “We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries, we must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed.” I. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 41.

147. On subjectivity as reality for many Soviet citizens, see Holmes, *Stalin’s School*, 101-104, 150-151.