



Fitzgerald, Georgia: The Soldiers' Colony

Gloria Swift, March 1, 2021 (originally published October 15, 2019)
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Union veterans in Fitzgerald, 1896 | g.galileo.usg.edu

When people retire or are looking for new jobs, especially those in colder climates, they often think of moving South so that they might enjoy warmer temperatures during the winter months. Today we view this as a modern phenomenon, given that people are much more mobile now than in years past.

But back in 1895, Philander H. Fitzgerald of Indianapolis, Indiana, provided that opportunity in one town in Georgia. Fitzgerald was a pension attorney after the war for Union veterans, and he also owned and ran a newspaper called *The American Tribune*, formerly the *Veteran's Review*, with a circulation of 25,000 copies per week. The 1890s in the Midwest were not good ones. Widespread depression and severe, long-term drought ruined many farms. Worried for his veterans, Fitzgerald came up with the idea of purchasing land for a planned community where veterans and their families could live out their days in a milder climate. He bought 100,000 acres in Georgia for the creation of a soldier's "colony." Fitzgerald used his paper to sell the idea. He sold 50,000 shares of stock in the American Tribune Soldiers Colony Company for ten dollars per share.



Early Fitzgerald

Shares were to be converted into lots in town or farmettes of 20 to 40 acres. Money quickly poured in from veterans seeking relief. Surveyors and work teams laid out the town that became "Fitzgerald." Fitzgerald was not a town reserved only for Union veterans. Southern veterans were invited to live there too, and many moved into the community.

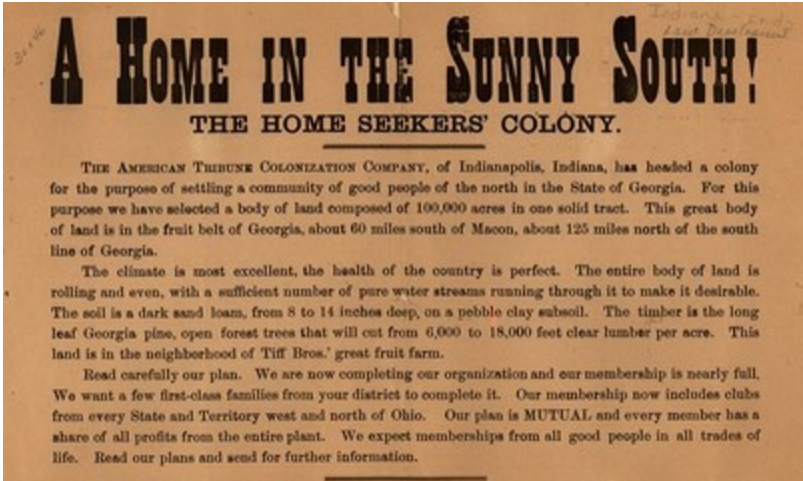
An equal number of streets were named to commemorate Southern generals as

Northern. Other streets were named for Georgia rivers and trees. A sense of humor appeared to be had when the fire department was built on Sherman Street! Eventually, a railroad connected Fitzgerald with the outside world bringing in supplies. So, too, came tourists, because of advertisements and regular excursion trains scheduled to "look at the Yankees!"

Fitzgerald grew quickly and prospered. Despite the widespread depression, the town benefited from the influx of cash into the economy created by the veterans' pensions. Combined, the pensions added to more than \$50,000 per month. With prosperity, the town continued to grow. A hotel named the Lee Grant was constructed to accommodate visitors, and an event hall called the Corn and Cotton Palace also was built.

In 1896, the citizens of Fitzgerald wanted to celebrate their good fortune. Invitations were sent for an exposition to be held at the Corn and Cotton Palace and to watch a grand parade of veterans. The parade was planned so that the Southern veterans would go first. After a short break, the Union veterans would start. When the doors of the Palace opened, all of the bands stepped out, and all of them were playing the National Anthem. Behind them were the soldiers, some in blue, some in gray, all following as one behind the Stars and Stripes. The veterans were giving the signal that this was once again the United States of America. The parade became known as the Parade of Unity. The soldiers who marched formed Batallion One of the Blue and Gray.

You can visit Fitzgerald, Georgia, today and learn more about this amazing town.



An ad seeking veterans

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