

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS AFFECTING HAY, WASHINGTON

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Those interested in history never tire of visiting historic spots and seeing items of interest that mean so much in the development of the Great West, and at the present time we are witnessing an awakening in the history of our own region, especially of our own state. I attribute no little amount of this to the work being carried on by the history teachers in this field of the various colleges of the Inland Empire. Certainly those students who have been fortunate enough to listen to Dr. Herman Deutsch, of Washington State, and have completed his course of the same name, cannot fail to have a more appreciative understanding of the Pacific Northwest. This course has had that effect upon this writer and many others with whom he has come in contact during his brief career as a teacher in this state.

It is so common for many of us to wish to make a study of some area, personality, or place, that is already quite well known, and thus many interesting incidents or places are passed over. This person soon discovered that he was living in a village which was significant because of its obscurity, not only in other counties, but by business men and other laymen right in my own county of Whitman. Furthermore, it is not my wish to embarrass those present from the eastern part of this state by asking them to locate Hay, Washington. Yes, you are right—it is in the southwestern part of Whitman County some thirty-five miles southwest of Colfax, and fourteen miles south of Lacrosse. A like distance from Texas City or Junction City if you are acquainted with those two historic spots.

My interest in this little village became quite acute shortly after assuming the duties as superintendent of its schools in 1939. This never abated during the two years I served in that capacity, and it was given a new life when an offer came to do some gradu-

ate work in local history for the Social ate work in local history for the State College of Washington.

In attacking the study the first task of course was to determine just what area was to be included; this proved to be fairly easy through the interviews which had been previously arranged, with several of the early reputable pioneers of that section of the country. These interviews proved to be so valuable and so interesting that several of them were written up quite thoroughly, duly signed by the narrators, bound, and placed in the Library of the State College, and used as one of the basic references for the study.

Numerous leads were given in these interviews that were followed up in the old files of the local papers: the Lacrosse Clipper and Colfax Gazette. Your speaker found very little difficulty in getting these pioneers to relate their experiences, in fact he had some trouble in getting them to leave out some incident that was of interest to them but had little bearing on the subject at hand.

These two sources, pioneers and papers, were the chief ones used for the completed study, however County Office Files, old Atlases, general works, and minor surveys were used to a good advantage. Also it was found necessary to drive more than 2500 miles around over the area to check some facts and conditions that were read or learned of through various sources. The sermons listened to in the Lutheran Church proved to be an interesting source for the account relative to the Norwegian Settlement found in that area.

It may interest you to know that: one of the parties interviewed gave me information that is not to be made public until 1951; that one was an employee of Bradstreet's for many years.

but upon visiting Hay in the early part of the 20th Century decided that here was the place for him to make his fortune—his judgment was correct; that another boasted over the fact that his father helped defeat Chief Joseph, the cause for which perhaps needs strong defense, and that another received her certificate of appointment as the first postmistress of Hay direct from President Cleveland.

So one might go on with the background of this study, but perhaps some of the findings will be more acceptable. One soon finds that the population of this area is composed of two major groups: Those from the Piedmont Belt and adjacent region to the west; they are spoken of as "Tarheels," regardless of the state of nativity; the other group of course is the Norwegians who came up from California, from the Great Lakes Region, or from the Old Country. The migration of this latter class covers about two decades and was completed in the early twenties, while some of those from the Atlantic region were out here shortly after the close of the Civil War.

We find that there are about 175 Norwegians living in a well defined locality not intermixed with the other inhabitants of that community. These people like to let you know that they have not had a single member of their group convicted of felony and only one has ever been arrested for any crime—the one exception being for having too many spirits within. The "Tarheels" also have a very fine record in this respect but not to be compared with the former. In visiting with the Carolinians one will find those who like to tell of the horse rustlers that lived in their midst in the early days and how the *Vigilantes* worked. Rumor has it that one would not have to look far even today to find some of the remains of this old gang—of course the profession ceased to be lucrative long ago.

Of more interest however is the fact that 75 per cent of the youth of the Norwegians remain in the community. This means that the farms are absorb-

ing most of the population increase. Fifty-three per cent of the other group likewise stay at home, but the tendency of today, 1940-1941, is for the youth to leave and enjoy the high wages found in the defense industries. Whether they return or not, remains to be seen but no doubt will be a factor in changing the social pattern of the community.

The most surprising fact that this party discovered relative to the population was the very few marriages between these two peoples. There have been but four or five consummated; two occurred during the past two years. Thus it requires little stretch of the imagination to understand the interrelationship that of necessity must exist. Now this does not imply that these people do not mingle or associate with each other. On the contrary they attend the same schools, entertainments, visitation between a "Tarheel" and Norwegian family. It will be interesting to observe how long this condition will continue because members of the Scandinavian group are viewed as prize catches by many of the other.

This community was served at one time by several small trade centers but Hay is the only one that remains today. Three thriving little hamlets ceased to exist some years ago when the main line of the railroad was shifted farther west and a modern highway was put through. Riparia at one time was a terminal for both railroads and navigation lines but today there is not a store of any kind to be found there—not even a gasoline pump. A warehouse marks the spot where Pampa once thrived, and Canyon is no more, while Central Ferry, or Bridge as it is called today, does serve the tourists who pause for a few minutes to view the mighty Snake. Hay has been more fortunate in that no highway has molested it, however train service is just a skeleton of what it once was. Furthermore, indications are that it will continue to exist as a trade center for years to come but in a much minor capacity.

Its continued existence can be attributed to its being so far removed

from larger centers and the poor connections it has had with the outside world up until the past two years. Its life is being threatened now from two angles—better roads—and the loss of its school through the Reorganization Program. However it is very doubtful if the general store, repair shop, and two or three units will be forced to move out or close down for several years, because this area is such a secluded rural community that it will require many of the foregoing services—at prices which will warrant their remaining.

The village churches are decidedly on the decline but the Pentecostal which is a militantly Evangelistic group yet has a strong hold on the community activities, including such events as school programs and competitive athletics. There are those who adhere to the belief that their children cannot participate in any program where a costume is required, regardless of how simple it may be, even to a decoration in the hair or jewelry of any kind, furthermore taking a shower bath with other students is forbidden—a belief that works a hardship on those who need to, or want to, take part in physical education classes during the day.

The Lutheran Church which is located some six miles from Hay is one of the finest in the state and ranked as the best east of the Cascades. The membership is increasing at a fair rate and the Sunday School is growing very rapidly; it is one of the most active organizations that it has been my privilege to become acquainted with. Perhaps this group would enjoy knowing that the members of this church support their minister so liberally that they furnish him a lovely parsonage in Lacrosse, a salary of \$1740 per year and just recently they gave him a new Buick for a Christmas present. Yes, these farmer folk are quite well fixed in a worldly sense and not a one of them has made a failure of his undertakings so far in the history of the settlement, but some few have had to struggle to stay on top.

The value of farm equipment has increased quite rapidly during the period surveyed, an indication that they are trying to enjoy some of the comforts of life as well as to conserve human resources. This is a commendable practice if not carried to the extent to jeopardize one's economic position. A survey made of the farms lost because of this revealed that relatively few have lost their places because of living beyond their income.

One cannot help observing the number of new cars and other improvements that are very much in evidence. Especially has this been true during the time of the Federal Allotment Program. There are many farmers that trade for a new car each fall, and few there are who do not have a pick-up and truck in addition to the family car.

Another development which is becoming very pronounced is the change from the production of wheat to a combination of livestock and grain growing. The farmers have discovered that the marginal land, broken up when wheat commanded a good price, is now more valuable for other purposes and, further, that it is a good policy to market some of the grain on foot. This movement is of very recent origin and is gaining in popularity; perhaps the experiment being carried on by the Federal Soil Conservation Office on the R. D. Smith farm is a strong factor in promoting the change because of the success and advantages such a program has demonstrated.

The McGregor ranch is the outstanding one in this entire area. Its history goes back to the days when this state was but a territory, and, it has seen a constant growth until today it includes some 33,000 acres. It is not known just how many acres have been sold recently to farmers, but the acreage is considerable if one accepts the statements made by farmers that have purchased land from this family.

Many of us look back upon the year of 1932 as the darkest of the depression years, but at that time this ranch was feeding 25,000 to 30,000 hogs and 5,000

lambs, which were produced right at home. The wheat for all this livestock was stored in their 65,000 bushel elevator and in the steel tanks on the ranch which more than held the balance of the 100,000 bushels produced annually.

Their thrashing crew consists of three gangs of equal size in order to make for more efficient work; in addition to these three crews they are required to maintain three camps of twenty men each to care for the sheep during the year, therefore, it is readily seen that to operate this large ranch requires no little work and planning on the part of the present manager, Maurice McGregor.

For a number of years, the farmers of this community had been without any type of cooperative program; but of recent years the Grange and other related groups have begun to function. The Grain Grower's Association is definitely an organization which works for the welfare of the farmers, both as a group and individually. One of the greatest services which this Association renders to the farmers is that of supplying them with ready cash during the weeks preceding harvest. One of the officers told me that it was not uncommon to let out as much as \$80,000 each year to farmers in need of working capital. This organization does not wish to compete with the banks; but in many cases the banks are slow to make the loans, whereas the former is not afraid of the investment. The records show that not one dollar has been lost by this type of aid but many new members have been added because of this needed service and this year a nice dividend was declared for all the members.

The cooperative store in Dusty has been very instrumental in reducing the cost of gas and oil to the farmer and has paid him dividends on his purchases through the general store, and is also making for a uniformity in the growing of grain and livestock of that area.

There is little reason to believe that

the river transportation will become a factor of much weight within the near future. A rather extensive survey carried on by the speaker during the past year gave no indications that the Snake River would be the scene of the incidents reminiscent of earlier days. The big drawbridge which spans the River at Riparia has had to open but twice during the past year to permit the passage of a barge up the river and its return a few days later—but many elevators are being constructed, or have been erected, during this same time along the railroads to permit the moving of grain by the iron horse.

In trying to summarize this paper may I state that family life in Hay will continue stable for many years to come because the majority of the people are exceptionally conservative in their belief and view divorce in an unfavorable light. There is not a single divorce or divorcee in the community, although one family did move away and later separated, but it is no longer considered a member of the locality.

With the passing of the schools, fewer trading centers, and the consolidation of the farms, the people can look forward to a diminishing amount of wholesome recreation for the remaining number.

Just how long the land can absorb the younger generations as it has been doing remains a moot question. It is a well established fact that the youth of this community are remaining on the farms of an ever increasing acreage. This condition is balanced by a lower birth-rate, but here one must consider the conditions which the present composite population has created, namely, the major portion being the middle-aged group, which has a very low death rate. Modern transportation and the desire for a different type of entertainment than that found at home may be the factors that will cause the younger people to seek their future elsewhere. This belief is supported to some extent by the wider outlook found among the young couples and their discussions of

the shortcomings of the local community.

I should not care to leave you with too pessimistic a picture with this rather brief discussion of a local area of our state. We all agree that this century has brought the farmer much that history will call progress. His horizon has been enlarged until he is seeing and operating larger farms, and is visiting larger and more modern retail stores. The farmer of Hay and community is able to give his wife and children advantages such as no farmer in history could ever dream of providing. He is rightfully sharing in the luxuries that a highly effective machine culture has provided. He is remaking his life and is becoming adjusted to a new world which he undoubtedly finds more stimulating, interesting, and worth while than his forefathers found it to be.

Certainly this urbanization that we

are experiencing marks a major turning point in the cultural and social history of mankind. True, it has left the farmers, as well as the city man, with many adjustments to make. But have we ever had a perfect civilization? No. Certainly much that is ideal has been achieved in given phases of our farm life, and this applies to the little community in southwestern Whitman County. Our youth or farmers of Hay may readily escape from an environment that they dislike and find room elsewhere to develop the talents or special interests that they may have.

For the people within the little hamlet of Hay: They have the poor comfort of knowing that their lot is not solitary; there are many facing the same future. They read and hear of factories leaving the cities but likewise they know that such is not for them because the suburban areas secure such enterprises.