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"GRAB A ROOT AND GROWL"

DALHART, TEXAS

by
JOHN L. McCARTY

"GRAB A ROOT AND GROWL," IS AN OLD HOMELY EXPRESSION THIS WRITER HAS HEARD SINCE HIS FIRST SUMMER IN HARVEST FIELD AS A HARVEST HAND WHEN HE WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD. IT SIMPLY MEANS TAKE HOLD AND HANG ON LIKE A BULLDOG. IT WAS AN OLD CUSTOM IN MY BOYHOOD DAYS FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE TO LOOK OUT OVER THE HORIZON AND SEE GREENER PASTURES. IT WAS A MORE OR LESS SIMPLE MATTER TO HITCH UP A TEAM TO A COVERED WAGON AND STRIKE OUT FOR "THE GREENER GRASS IN THE PASTURES OVER YONDER".

RIGHT NOW WITH THE FURIES OF HELL TURNED LOOSE HERE, LARGELY AS A RESULT OF MAN'S POOR FARMING, AND THE CONTINUED DROUTH, THERE ARE MANY WHO BELIEVE THEY SEE "GREENER PASTURES JUST OVER YONDER." PERHAPS THEY DO BUT WE DOUBT IT. IT IS OUR HUMBLE OPINION THAT A THOROUGH "CHECK-UP WON'T BACK-UP" THIS CLAIM.

WE HAVE EXPRESSED TIME WITHOUT NUMBER THE GREATEST ADMIRATION FOR THE SPARTAN COURAGE OF OUR PEOPLE, THE FACT THEY HAVE STAYED AND KEPT THEIR CHINS UP, THE FACT THAT BUSINESS IS GOOD IN DALHART AND EVERYONE IS LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, IS PROOF OF THE BRAVERY AND FORTITUDE OF OUR PEOPLE — THE GREATEST AND GRANDEST FOLKS ON EARTH. GOD BLESS THEM FOR THEIR COURAGE AND FOR THEIR MEETING THE TESTS THE BATTLING ELEMENTS HAVE FORCED ON THEM. ONLY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THIS IS A GREAT COUNTRY, FULL OF RICH NATURAL RESOURCES WITH A WONDERFUL CLIMATE AND AN INVIGORATING, HEALTH-GIVING ATMOSPHERE SUSTAINED THEIR CONVICTIONS. THEY ARE DUE EVERY PRAISE AND WE DOUBT IF BUT FEW OF THEM ARE SERIOUS IN SEEING "GREEN GRASS OVER YONDER."

THIS COUNTRY IS CONSIDERED THE GREATEST REGION IN THE NATION FOR PRODUCING PUREBRED BREEDING STOCK, ESPECIALLY HEREFORD BULLS. THIS CLIMATE, THIS GRASS, THIS ALTITUDE COMBINE TO PRODUCE

(MORE) —

BULLS WITH STRONG HEARTS, STRONG LUNGS, BIG BONE AND THEY IMPART THIS QUALITY THUS MAKING THEM IN DEMAND AS HERD SIRE'S WORLD OVER, IN FACT THE WORLD'S LARGEST BREEDERS OF REGISTERED HEREFORDS, COON AND CULBERTSON, HAVE THEIR HEADQUARTERS HERE, SURELY THE COUNTRY THAT PRODUCES THESE QUALITIES IN ITS FINE CATTLE ALSO PRODUCES IT IN ITS PEOPLE, SURELY SUCH A COUNTRY, PRODUCING THE FINEST PEOPLE AND THE FINEST CATTLE IN THE WORLD, IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR A WHILE LONGER.

THE GREEN GRASS OVER YONDER HAS A FEW BARE SPOTS IN IT, FORMER RESIDENTS OF DALHART IN QUEMADO VALLEY LAST THURSDAY LOST THEIR HOMES AND ALMOST EVERYTHING THEY HAD WHEN SEVERAL WERE KILLED AND 200 INJURED BY A TORNADO, THE SAME WEEK 34 WERE KILLED AT McCOMB, MISSISSIPPI, THE DROUTH WAS ALMOST NATIONWIDE LAST YEAR. THE SAND AND DUSTSTORMS ARE WORSE IN OKLAHOMA, COLORADO AND OTHER STATES THAN THEY ARE HERE OR ELSE THEY ARE A BUNCH OF SISSIES UP THERE BAWLING THEIR EYES OUT BECAUSE OF A NEW EXPERIENCE WHICH GREW OLD TO MOST OF US IN OUR CHILDHOOD.

SURE, THINGS ARE TOUGH, THE DUST IS TERRIBLE, THE WHEAT IS GONE, THE PROSPECT FOR A ROW CROP IS DIMINISHING AND ALL HELLS BROKE LOOSE BUT WE KNOW WHAT IS BACK OF THIS COUNTRY, WE KNOW WHAT IT WILL DO WHEN IT GETS HALF A CHANCE, WE KNOW THAT IT WILL RAIN AGAIN AND THE HIGH PLAINS ALWAYS BOUNCES BACK LIKE ANTAEUS OF MYTHICAL FAME, STRONGER AFTER EACH FALL. LET'S DON'T "CUSS" IT SO HARD BECAUSE WE HELPED PUT IT IN THE CONDITION WHICH PROMOTES SO MUCH DUST WITH OUR AVERAGE WIND.

"GRAB A ROOT AND GROW" - HANG ON AND LETS SEE HOW THIS ALL COMES OUT.

THE "GREEN PASTURES JUST OVER YONDER" LOOK BETTER AT A DISTANCE THAN CLOSE-UP AND BEFORE WE KNOW IT THE REST OF THE WORLD WILL BE RUSHING IN HERE SO FAST WE ARE LIKELY TO BE RUN OVER IN THE STAMPEDE TO GET A FOOTHOLD IN THIS PART OF GOD'S GREAT EARTH.

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John McClary Papers

East Man's Club

A TRIBUTE TO OUR SANDSTORMS

In 1928 in the Panhandle of Texas a crop, which was a little above the normal yield brought big prices. In many instances farmers made more than the price of the land from one acre of maize, wheat, corn, or kaffir-corn. While 1929 was not as good a crop year as 1928, it was still very good. 1930 was a fair crop year with cash returns not so good, and in 1931 the Panhandle of Texas and particularly the North Plains produced one of the greatest crops in its history. In the latter part of May 1931 wheat dropped to an unbelievable low price, finally selling below 20¢ a bushel. Trucks were waiting in lines as long as a half mile behind weighing scales in the North Panhandle and wheat was stacked on the ground in that part of the country. One farmer, G. S. Lashley, had over forty thousand bushels of wheat stacked in wind rows on his farm. Farmers were scarcely able to get cost of threshing and hauling out of their wheat.

The same story was repeated in the fall and winter of 1931 when it came time to harvest maize, corn and kaffir-corn. There was more grain stacked in the roads and in the fields in the North Panhandle than there was to be in the next five or six years to come.

Beginning with the high prices of wheat in 1928 a wild land boom was started which by 1929 or 1930 had reached big proportions. The entire north part of Dallam County was settled by German Minnionites. Bankers and real estate men teamed into partnership, which eventually resulted in the ruin of both classes. Thousands and thousands of acres of land, a lot of which should never have been broken out, was turned under with tractors and plows. The implement business reached a new high.

The winter of 1931 was fairly dry and in June 1932 there fell one of the hardest rains this Panhandle Country has ever seen. It amounted to about seven inches over a large territory. The rain did very little good, however, because it merely hit the ground and ran off and from that day may be dated the cycle of hard drouth years which, as I write this in 1937, is not yet broken.

1932 was a very poor crop year in the North Panhandle country. The year 1933 was a total failure and 1934 was worse. In the meantime, land had gone unplanted, unprotected with vegetative cover and in some instances had been made worse by heavy pasturage in the drouth stricken fields. The setting was perfect for the dramatic sandstorms of 1935. In the meantime, many people had starved out and left the country, others had gone broke and just about everything in the way of tough luck had happened in that region.

In the afternoon of February 2, 1935, Ed. Bishop, Elmer Elliott, Charlie Brydgen and myself attended a road meeting at Sunray, about thirty miles from Dalhart. We left Sunray about four o'clock in the afternoon and noticed a beautiful purple cloud some two or three feet high on the horizon to the Northwest. We, of course, recognized this as a northern or wind storm and we marveled at its speed. We raced alongside this storm and all of us were amazed at the wonderful coloring made by the light peering through the yellow, bronze and black dust. It was one of the most beautiful scenes I have ever witnessed. We raced into Dalhart ahead of the storm and saw there a group of people out in the street around gazing into the sky. I dropped Elmer and letting Ed walk on down to his house, which was some two blocks away. I made several snap shots of the storm while the women

and children in the community were out gabbing excitedly, some of them screaming that it was dangerous and others were fastening doors and windows. As illustrated by pictures in this volume, I snapped several shots just as fast as I could make them, showing the speed at which the sandstorm was traveling. Mr. MacDonald Leach, one of the editors of Fortune Magazine, later borrowed these pictures to use in the November 1935 issue of Fortune Magazine. The pictures he used were snapped about 6:30 o'clock in the afternoon. Within an hour the storm had abated considerably and I went to a Rotary program at the Gushwa Hotel. Strange as it may seem, the club attendance was heavy and the crowd enjoyed the program very much. Upon coming out we noticed that the dust was falling in sheets, much like a light snow drifting down out of the sky. I walked over to the Texan office. In front of it was standing H. H. Lawrence, Albert Law, Lon C. McCrory. In an attitude more or less of disgust I remarked, "By gad, I'm going home and write a classic tribute to these sandstorms."

We discussed the sandstorm's possible effect on the people and brought out the fact that they were not nearly so bad as floods and not nearly so bad as they had been pictured in papers in far off countries.

When I got home the children were in bed and Mrs. McCarty was reading. The house was foggy with dust, and the whitecover, which was over the food on the table was chalky gray. Mrs. McCarty and I discussed the program for a few minutes and I told her I was going to write something about the sandstorm and went to my room and brushed the dust from my typewriter and desk. That was about ten o'clock.

I began writing in a semi-sarcastic mood and found I could not keep that mood and so proceeded to finish the rough draft of the article and edit it very carefully and then recopy it, finishing at 12:30 in the morning.

I printed the tribute in the paper the next day and the paper was not off the press more than ten minutes until the effects of the tribute began to be felt. It created a sensation. Some agreed with it, some thought it was very beautiful writing, others thought it was just crazy. Still others bitterly criticized me for using my talent to praise something which was so terrible.

Mrs. Izard, Editor of the Amarillo Globe ran it on the front page of his paper and the other papers immediately began to reprint it.

As clippings in this volume will show, the tribute ranged far and wide and in addition to some of the papers and magazines, it was published in book form in Texas Writers of Texas, a 400 page volume compiled by Dr. Florence E. Barnes of Austin. It also ran in West Texas Today, official magazine of the West Texas Chamber of Commerce, and inspired a series of articles in similar vein by Douglas Hader, Jess Mitchell and myself, including such topics as cyclones, droughts, sandstorms and winds.

One of the dramatic sandstorms of which many photographs were made, a light gray duster from Oklahoma and Colorado, swept over the entire country, April 1, 1935.

The most terrible of all of the sandstorms was a black duster which swept across the Panhandle of Texas, and in fact, almost all

and children in the community were out gabbing excitedly, some of them screaming that it was dangerous and others were fastening doors and windows. As illustrated by pictures in this volume, I snapped several shots just as fast as I could make them, showing the speed at which the sandstorm was traveling. Mr. Macdonald Leach, one of the editors of Fortune Magazine, later borrowed these pictures to use in the November 1935 issue of Fortune Magazine. The pictures he used were snapped about 6:30 o'clock in the afternoon. Within an hour the storm had abated considerably and I went to a Rotary program at the Goshwa Hotel. Strange as it may seem, the club attendance was heavy and the crowd enjoyed the program very much. Upon coming out we noticed that the dust was falling in sheets, much like a light snow drifting down out of the sky. I walked over to the Texan office. In front of it was standing H. H. Lawrence, Albert Law, Lon C. McCrorey. In an attitude more or less of disgust I remarked, "By gad, I'm going home and write a classic tribute to these sandstorms."

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The most terrible of all of the sandstorms was a black duster which swept across the Panhandle of Texas, and in fact, almost all

of the Southwest, on April 14, 1935. It traveled from 40 to 70 miles per hour and probably moved more dirt than any flood. Most of the gruesome dust storm pictures used by the news services and magazines were made at that time as reporters and photographers from several big papers and news services were in the Panhandle covering the story which reached national proportions.

The continued drought, dust storms and other conditions which brought about a great deal of lowered resistance on the part of the people resulted in an unusually heavy death toll the first six months of 1935. In that period at Dalhart there were 73 deaths against a normal 63 for the year. Included in these deaths was that of A. H. Johnson, one of the best loved men in the Panhandle, former member of the Legislature and an outstanding citizen and Masonic worker.

There were ten deaths from this flu and dust pneumonia in one week in Dalhart and give funerals in one day. Three of these I attended. At the conclusion of that week I walked home Saturday afternoon feeling very much like a person who was marching into sure doom.

Out of the trials and tribulations of this period came my Last Man's Club, which was organized as Old Loco's Last Man's Club and the membership was limited to those people willing to pledge themselves to stay in the Panhandle of Texas until the last man.

The membership of the club was approximately 100 and a large number of people said they would like to join, but were afraid they might have to leave or might want to leave.

The encouragement of fine support manifested by the people after having missed crops entirely in 1932, 1933, 1934 and 1935 and getting nothing for their crop in 1931 was marvelous. Here on the Dalhart Texas and most newspaper editors over the Panhandle of Texas worked to bolster the courage of the people and did everything possible to prevent continued damage from the bad publicity which was being given us over the nation. Newspapers throughout the country were playing the dust storms as top banners and national emergency organizations were being formed to combat soil erosion. One of the sandstorms was so terrific that the dust was lifted into the atmosphere and filtered down on Chicago and Washington, vividly calling attention of the East to the condition existing in the Southwest. Various governmental experts and others predicted our country was wholly in ruin and advocated wholesale evacuation of the territory, and others predicted the area would be the Great American Desert.

My great pleasure from The Tribute To Our Sandstorms was not in the fine way in which it was received by other writers and editors, some of whom likened it to Senator Vest's eulogy to the dog and Senator Ingall's essay on grass, but to the fact that it played a big part in holding the courage and perseverance in a country that needed it badly.

In 1927 or 1928, perhaps earlier, I was assigned to write a story for Gerald Kirven, who was in business in Amarillo at that time, and this story had to do with a new plow being introduced in Amarillo, which was known as the one way plow. This plow was sort of a disc affair, which cut a wide swath in the ground, being very shallow, merely killing all the weeds, the mulch and vegetation which was on top of the ground. The plow was introduced amid a big volume of advertising as something that was going to regenerate the Panhandle.

revelations

It did revolutionize the Panhandle, but in the wrong way. The
one way blow was a public enemy Number 1 in the Panhandle of Texas. A
great much of the ills of today can be traced to the greed and selfishness
to get rich quick through the cultivation of an enormous amount of land.