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## [Folkways, and Social Customs]

W13911

[Beliefs & Customs - Folkstuff

Accession no: W13911

Date received 10/10/40

Consignment no. 1

Shipped from Wash. Office

Label

Amount 29p

WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Form [md] 3 Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Folkways, and social customs in the Willamette Valley, from 1865 to 1900

Place of origin Oreg. Date 11/29/38

Project worker Andrew C. Sherbert

Project editor

Remarks [?]

Form A

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Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Andrew C. Sherbert, Date November 28, 1938.

Address Project Headquarters.

Subject Folkways, and Social Customs in the Willamette Valley, from 1865 to 1990.

Name and address of informant George Estes, Room 512 Board of Trade Building, Portland, Oregon.

Date and time of interview November 28. Forenoon and Afternoon.

Place of interview Room 512, Board of Trade Building, Portland, Oregon.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

Mr. J. Thorburn Ross, American Bank Building, Portland, Oregon.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None.

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Typical lawyers' office of two rooms - private chambers and ante-room. Ante-room walls lined with shelves of law books. Private chambers contain steel wall filing cabinets in which Mr. Estes keeps book manuscripts, etc. The door between Mr. Estes private chambers and ante-room is not equipped with a conventional door-closer so Mr. Estes has attached a long rope to the top of the door and has run the rope through pulleys to a point over his head. A tasseled hand grip is at

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the end of the rope (similar to early-day French bell-pulls), and Mr. Estes automatically reaches for the rope and pulls door shut as a person emerges. As Mr. Estes vigorously denounces the use of tobacco there are no ash trays on his paper-cluttered desk.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Andrew C. Sherbert Date November 28, 1938

Address Project Headquarters.

Subject Folkways, and Social Customs in the Willamette Valley, from 1865 to 1900.

Name and address of informant George Estes. Room 512, Board of Trade Building, Portland, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates

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6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

1. Elijah T. and Susan Estes.

2. Born 4-1/2 miles north of present town of Drain, Oregon, Douglas County, January 11, 1861.

3. Wife, Maud Estes, deceased. Daughter, Bertha E. Estes (Mrs. E. L. Fraley).

4. Place of birth, (Near Drain), Roseburg, Portland. Dates not available.

5. Was educated in Douglas County public schools and at the Yoncalla Academy, Yoncalla, Oregon. Graduated from Y. M. C. A., College Preparatory in Portland and from the Law Department of University of Oregon. Dates not available.

6. Telegraph operator for eighteen years, concurrently serving as train dispatcher and train master. (Dates not immediately available). Practice of law thereafter.

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7. Accomplished writer, author of seven published volumes. Skilled linguist, fluent in Scandinavian languages, Chinese, and several Indian tongues, notably Chinook and Calapooia. Keenly interested in natural sciences.

8. None.

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9. Short, stocky, gray hair. Gesticulates freely in dramatically recounting incidents of his past life. Convincing and eloquent speaker. Frankly and without restraint evaluates himself and his accomplishments in glowing terms which, in a younger man, would be set down as bragging or self-praise. He does, however, speak in equally laudatory manner of the accomplishments of his contemporaries.

10. Informant seems to have vivid memories of life and times in Oregon in the eighties and nineties.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Andrew C. Sherbert Date November 28, 1938.

Address Project Headquarters.

Subject Folkways, and Social Customs in the Willamette Valley.

Name and address of informant George Estes, Room 512, Board of Trade Building, Portland, Oregon.

Text:

As an index to my background and family tree, perhaps it might be well to start with a short sketch of the Estes genealogy. My great, great, grand parents, Jacob Shearer and his wife Sophia, emigrated from Germany to America in 1740. They settled in a portion of North

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Carolina known at that time as Guilford County. My great, great grandfather John Tate and his wife Elizabeth emigrated from Scotland.

Jacob Shearer was a two-fisted American from the start, was a Whig, and gave three of his sons to the cause of liberty - one was killed outright and the other two were hopelessly crippled for life. John Tate was also a soldier in the Revolutionary War. My great, grand parents, David Tate and Hannah Shearer, were reared and married in Guilford County, North Carolina, leaving there in 1793 to cross the Allegheny mountains on pack horses, hoping to establish a home for themselves in what was then, "the west". There were, of course, no roads then. After severe hardships, they forded the Kentucky river and settled in a cane-brake.

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Later, my great, grand father was drafted for service in the War of 1812. Leaving his family in the cane-brake, ten miles from their nearest white neighbor, he left for duty and was gone for three years. Returning, he moved his family to Illinois where he later became the first Justice of the Peace in Illinois Territory. He also, about this time, established a salt works, known as the "Saline Salt Works", in Johnson County, Illinois. Later the family moved to Iowa, about 1834, where my great grandfather again served as a soldier during the Black Hawk War.

James Estes, an uncle on my father's side, once served as Sheriff of Cook County, Illinois, then, as now, the county in which the city of Chicago is located.

My parents, Elijah T. and Susan Estes, emigrated from Iowa by ox-team, Oregon bound. They left Iowa in 1850 and arrived in the Willamette Valley in 1852, after nearly two years enroute. They remained a short time in the Willamette Valley, later moving south to a point near the foot of the Calapooia Mountains. The old homestead, near the town of Drain, is still known as the Elijah T. Estes Donation Land Claim.

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In the early fifties, there were no such things as stage lines, and, of course, there were no railroads either in Oregon. In the later fifties, however, a stage line was projected and established between Portland and San Francisco. As fortune would have it, the stage line's proposed route bisected my father's land claim. When the line opened for business my father set up a stage station on his place and did a thriving business. The station was a sort of division point, much as a railroad division is designated today. Here the stages changed horses and drivers - the coaches themselves remaining but a few moments before they once more sped forward. As many as fifty horses were kept at this point. Drivers and hostlers of course made it their headquarters. It became a very busy place. The stages in use were known as Thoroughbrace Coaches, the name no doubt indicating the staunchness and sturdy construction of the coaches.

It was in such colorful surroundings that I spent the first nine years of my life. In 1870 (?) the railroad stretched its gleaming rails the length of Oregon, relegating the colorful stagecoach to the limbo of hazy recollection, to be revived occasionally in sorry effigy during a pioneer celebration or wildest circus appearance. To my way of thinking, no more colorful or picturesque character ever crossed the horizon of pioneer times than the stagecoach driver. In my book, The Stagecoach, I have tried to make him live again, with debatable success.

In the year 1867, the first telegraph line was put through from San Francisco to Portland. It was called, The Union Telegraph Company. This amazing boom to the spread of intelligence, consisted of a single wire suspended precariously from tree to tree through the wilderness. The line followed the route of the stage line to facilitate reaching the source of trouble when the wire broke - which occurred frequently - because of wind or weather.

Upon establishing a telegraph station at Eugene and another at Oakland, Oregon, these two towns being 60 miles apart, the telegraph company decided that a station was needed somewhere between these two points. A station was then established on my father's place, where it continued until the stagecoach era ended. As a very small

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youngster I was initiated into knowledge of the intricacies of that marvelous instrument, the telegraph. I was fascinated with contemplation of the thought that by merely tapping a series of unintelligible sounds on the telegraph key, a person's express words could be conveyed by that slender strand of wire with the speed of light to Eugene (I had been there, and it seemed a long way off) and that they would arrive right side up, sensible and understandable. But the 4 unintelligible sounds did not long remain unintelligible to me. I soon learned to read the Morse Code and the messages which clicked through our station kept me informed of the happenings of the outside world, almost, if not quite as well as today's radio news flashes came to the ear of the modern boy. Telegraphy grasped firm hold of me at that early age and occupied my constant thoughts and activities for a great deal of my life. As a matter of fact, and though I have been in the practice of law for nearly 40 years, I still like to consider myself a telegrapher and am proud to say that I hold life membership in the O. R. T., union of railroad telegraphers. One of the most memorable periods of my life was during the formation of the O. R. T., an organization which I was active in establishing. But more of that later.

My work in the field of telegraphy brought me early to Portland. I have seen this sprawling metropolis grow from a compact little village skirting the banks of the Willamette. In my earlier days I contacted socially, many of the aging pioneers who have long since passed from the scene. Right here I should like to interject the statement that Portland's history, as set down by each historian in turn (including my old friend, John Gaston), seems to me to be entirely wrong. Too much stress is laid on the part played by Lovejoy and Pettygrove in the founding of the city. Perhaps they did stake out the town plot - perhaps they did flip a coin and give the town its name, but I contend that what ever else they contributed to the establishment of the city of Portland was of minor importance. I fully believe that I would not be sitting here in this office building, that you would not be here to interview me - for there would be no building here - if it were not for Captain John Couch. Captain Couch took a small group of primitive dwellings in a setting of stump-cluttered clearings and through his own efforts and determination gave Portland the impetus that made it a

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city. Surely, Portland's future was extremely doubtful had it not been for one man alone - John Couch. It irritates me to see him treated historically as an incidental figure.

I have seen the coming of the first horse-cars - and what a luxury and improvement over shank's mares they seemed! I have seen the advent of the electric street-car, hailed the coming of the first chugging automobile - and now, trackless trolleys. I have seen Portland's first squat buildings share ground with tall structures. Airplanes dot the sky. Change, change, change, always change, and no end in sight. But to me, the most noticeable change is in the people themselves, and their customs. Some writer once said, "Human nature never changes." I can't subscribe to such a promise. I think I see evidence of great change in the nature of man. For one thing, we of today have lost trust in our fellows, generally speaking. In the old days any man was accepted as an honest man and worthy of trust and friendship until he conclusively proved himself otherwise. Today, the reverse is customary. We mistrust any man and his motives until he proves beyond a doubt that his intentions are honest. Of course, we may accept him for what he says he is if he can produce papers of recommendation from some person in whom we have learned to place confidence. Even then, we are not above wondering whether or not the recommendation is forged.

In the matter of bodily health, I have seen great change. Nowadays the average person visits a doctor at the first twinge of pain. If his discomfort increases he skips from specialist to specialist. The average person today can glibly call off medical terms and can give the medical names of the many parts that go to make up his body entire. He mentions, sinuses, thyroids, 6 pineal glands, appendectomies and tonsillectomies as easily as the old-timer used to tell his neighbor that he had a lame back. With no disrespect for the old time medical practitioner - he was a wonderful character, and smart, too, for the times - according to my observations as a young man, his visits with his ominous satchel in hand, very frequently preceded the definitely-final visit of the village undertaker by but a few hours. As I say, this was nothing against the doctor or his knowledge of medicine. It was simply that most everyone trusted to the efficacy of home-compounded remedies until

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the shadow of the grim reaper darkened the pillow where he lay. Then they called the doctor. Every clan or family had a group of time-tried remedies which they had used at one time or another with enough success as to include in the family pharmacopoeia or file of receipts (pronounced "re-ceets"). People used their muscles in those days - life was active, vigorous, body-wearing. Liniments were used generously for anointing sore muscles of back and limb. Every family had a liniment of their own compounding the virtues of which they proudly boasted. White liniments, soap liniments, ammonia liniments, vinegar liniments, chloroform liniments, and liniments the formulas of which only the compounders themselves knew. Rock oil, later called coal-oil or kerosene, once was regarded as a veritable panacea. Sore throats, chest colds, croup, stiffness in the joints, lumbago, and a host of other common ailments were cured almost miraculously by gargling, sipping, or smearing the affected parts with this highly-praised, smelly fluid. I am a lawyer. Would anyone think of coming to me today for a remedy if he found himself ailing? Quite unlikely, yet I remember a time years ago, when a young neighbor girl came running into our home, her face marked by anxiety, with extremely agitated voice she blurted out:

"Mr. Estes! Mother has a dysentery and is getting weaker and weaker.

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I think she's going to die unless we can find something to help her. We've tried everything but nothing does any good." Which meant that they had tried their own family remedy for dysentery first, then probably several others offered by nearer neighbors, and then had come to me.

It was just about milking time. I told her to run home, take a full quart of milk warm from the cow, put it on the fire and boil furiously a quarter of an hour without allowing it to scorch, and then cause her mother to drink every drop at once while still as hot as she could bear it. The little girl did as I bade her. A couple of days later the little girl trudged in at our gate carrying a bag of seedling apples for me. Sort of thank offering I suppose.

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“Mother's dysentery stopped less than an hour after she drunk the milk and she started getting better right away,” the little girl said. “She's as good as new, now.”

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As I review the incidents of my past life I can but conclude that luck played a major role in all that I ever did or in all that ever happened to me. A case in point. As a young telegrapher in Portland, I had a great many acquaintances. At the time of which I speak, Burnside street was a busy thoroughfare — the cross-roads of the Oregon country, where one might meet anyone he had ever met or known before. In those few short blocks there congregated people of all types, from the more or less dandified Portland sophisticates, to the rough, uncouth wranglers of the hinterland. The gold miner from eastern or southern Oregon rubbed elbows with the almond-eyed Chinese. The farmer from Tualatin Valley walked the length of Burnside street a time or two, before he started for home with the new plow he had purchased. There was only one Burnside street on the face of the earth, 8 and that was in Portland.

One day I was approached by an acquaintance, a young fellow of no means, who asked to speak to me confidentially. He said that he had made the acquaintance of a miner, who at that very moment was waiting for him in a room in a Burnside street lodging house, and who had possession of a gold brick worth twelve thousand dollars which could be bought for three thousand. He said the miner was badly in need of money and had come by the brick “never mind how”. It looked like a splendid investment. Now as it happened, my bank balance - because of frugal personal habits - stood at a sum just about ample enough to take care of such an investment. Three thousand dollars becomes twelve thousand dollars - just like that. No long, tedious, slaving, scraping and waiting for slowly amassed principal and small, annual interest accruing to do the job. I hastened to the bank and drew out the three thousand. My acquaintance and I hurried down to the miner's room, anxious to get there before someone else did, or before he changed his mind. He was there. I bought the brick. Certainly I was excited. My eyes bulged. The brick was golden yellow and heavy as

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lead. I left the miner's room and with the winged heels of a Mercury ran over to the shop of a jeweler and goldsmith who was a very good friend of mine. I wanted him to appraise, and perhaps buy, my twelve thousand dollar brick. My friend was out when I entered. It was some little time before he returned. I jumped up and hurriedly told him of my good fortune. His face turned ashen. He clamped his head with both hands in anguish and cried, "George, George, what have you done? You bought a gold brick down an Burnside street? Oh, George! You damned fool! Give me the brick. Run down to Burnside street and see if you can find the fellow that sold it to you! Get the Marshal! Hurry! Run!"

Needless to say, I ran - but I arrived there too late. My miner had checked out and disappeared in the brief interim that followed the transaction. And here is why I say "luck" played a major role in all of the incidents of my life: whether for good or ill. I mended my way slowly back to the shop of my friend, the goldsmith. I was callow. I had never heard of anyone being gold-bricked. At that time I hadn't heard that the Brooklyn bridge was being "sold" by prosperous-looking New Yorkers to bucolic-looking strangers on an average of once a week. I walked into the shop of my friend - beaten, defeated, despondent. He jumped up excitedly at my entrance, shouting.

"George, you're the luckiest damn fool in the world. I've tested your gold brick and it's solid gold to the core. An ingot worth pretty near what your miner said it was."

Now there's a gold-brick story with a different twist. My whole life has been just like that. Just luck that my father decided to settle at the foot of the Calapooia Mountains, instead of taking up residence in the far-heralded Willamette Valley, as so many other immigrants did. Just luck that the stage line found it necessary to cross my father's homestead claim. Just luck that the first telegraph line followed the stage route through our place during my infancy, causing me to know the Morse code almost as soon as I had learned my letters. You might say it was luck that placed me at the head of all the railroad telegraphers of the English-speaking world, for a time. It was discovered early in my life, that I had the gift of elegant, and eloquent speech. Unimposing in stature - they called me "Piecrust" when I

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was a youngster, I was so short - I doubtless would have remained blushing unseen had it not been for the commanding resonance and timbre of my voice and the easy flow of impressive words I could summon at will in debate or discussion. Environmental changes cannot properly be said to change a man's nature, but such changes most certainly do change his habits and behavior. Perhaps the small boy of today who can rattle off the name of a certain automobile by the angle 10 of its fenders, the size and shape of its hubcaps or the design of its radiator ornament, is just as smart as the small boy of half a century ago, who could tell the name of any bird on wing, knew the names and habits of every animal that walked or insect that crawled. I am inclined to give the latter small boy a slight edge, however, in any test of the powers of observation. I am amazed at the lack of knowledge of the flora and fauna of this wonderful state, displayed by grown-ups, to say nothing of children, in this day and age. When I was a youngster it was extremely unusual to find anyone whom on a stroll could not call the names of all the grasses, flowers, trees, shrubs, etc., found on the way. Because of this lack of familiarity with nature on the part of most persons, I find it extraordinarily easy to pose as an authority on the flora and fauna of Oregon. How many persons, for example, know that the salmon - that God-given commercial fish of our waters - can drown in the Columbia river? Not many are aware of that fact, yet it is absolute truth. And here is why: A salmon's gills are so formed as to permit the fish to swim only against the current or in still water. If the fish swim with the current its gills soon became clogged with river silt causing the gills to become inoperative, thus shutting off the supply of oxygen necessary to keep the fish alive. For this reason, Salmon never enter the Columbia river except at ebb tide.

If you will look in your dictionary you will find the definition of "beaver" given somewhat as follows,

"Beaver - Any of a genus of amphibious rodents having palmated hind feet and a broad flat tail..."

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I contend that the beaver is not an amphibious animal. I have correspondence in my files from G & C Merriam Company, publishers of Webster's dictionary, regarding their dictionary's erroneous definition. I base my contention 11 entirely upon personal observations arriving at the following conclusion: The average human being retains full reasoning power for about two minutes while under water. After that he falls into a comatose state which obtains for an average of twenty minutes. He is then dead, or drowned, unless resuscitated by heroic and doubtful measures. Now, no one would think of terming a human being an amphibian - would he? The beaver is equipped with lungs similar to a dog, cat, or human being, as you will. Where the beaver differs from the human being, however, is in his ability to stay under water longer than the human before he falls into a comatose state. A beaver seldom stays under water longer than six minutes - never more than ten. If he did he would drown, exactly the same as any other land animal.

Possibly because of the country's vastness; the ruggedness of its topography; or the fact that the Northwest was a struggling young country - Oregon's men of wealth, in the past; have invariably been highly democratic. (I mean socially, not politically). Take, for instance, Portland's men of means of a generation or so ago - I won't name them, they are all well known and their names stand out prominently in any history of the city's growth. I do not recollect a single one of them who lacked what is known as "the common touch". They walked the streets of the town, meeting their financially less fortunate neighbors with a smile and hello, and a hail by their first names. These men were never unapproachable. Their doors were always open to callers. They did not dress differently, act differently, or appear to feel different from the poor folk with whom they came in contact. No real westerner in the old days, no matter how many thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars he could lay claim to, ever was "purse conscious" or expected you to make obeisance before him because of his money. And if you had any business to transact with him you dealt with him personally, and not with his twenty-second assistant vice president.

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As the result of personal observation, together with a number of business experiences still vivid in my memory, I regret to say that the eastern contemporary of the western man of wealth was quite the opposite. An easterner of means might arrive in Portland in his private car; step out at the depot clad in striped pants and swallow-tail coat, his nose elevated at an angle in keeping with a high degree of self-evaluation; and find a plain dressed Portlander rich enough to buy and sell him, whittling a stick on the depot platform.

I shall have to return to my experiences as organizer for the Order of Railroad Telegraphers to sort of illustrate the foregoing points.

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After having organized the entire Southern Pacific and allied railroad systems for the unions it then became necessary to present our demands to the railroad heads. Now in those days, businesses, large or small, were operated differently than today. I mean they were managed and controlled differently then they are now. The president of a railroad ran the railroad. His word was law. There was no board of directors to con and mull every new move the railroad contemplated making. Some question came up, we'll say, and if it was an important one the president of the road answered it; and his answer or decision was final. If he made too many mistakes, why the road merely got a new president, that was all. While he was in the chair, however, he ruled with as much power as a czar.

Before we could present our demands, it was necessary to appoint a committee to represent the various districts into which the line was divided. The choice of committeemen was not altogether a happy one. One member turned out to be a tightwad who refused to attend a committee meeting unless all his expenses were paid to and from the point selected for the meeting. And I was once foolish enough to advance him twenty-five dollars out of my own pocket to assure that he would attend one important meeting. Another member was a rabid socialist, which in those days was considered much further "left" than a communist of today. He was for disrupting the whole social system and insisted that we "take over" the Southern Pacific railroad for ourselves, and kick out the

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owners and higher ups — the president of the road and all his ilk. I, as general chairman, asked him what we would do with the United States Army after we had taken over the railroad. His insane answer was, "The Army is with us." I then remarked that perhaps the union members whom the committee represented, would not care to take over the railroad. He answered, "They don't know what they want. It's up to us to do their thinking for them." His answer was not a new one. It's the answer of tyrants and dictators since the world began. This committeeman was chosen by his people to represent them, and he was ready to sell them out. He was not different from Torquemada, who burned thousands of his countrymen because they didn't believe as he did. Here let me quote a page from my account of the railway struggle: [Primary??]

"This 'Communist' abolished many things: CAPITAL - MARRIAGE - HEAVEN.

He said there wasn't any.

That downed Heaven with a bang.

But it raised HELL.

Who sues by the Law is bound by his declarations. He gets no more than he asks for - if he gets that.

Having abolished Heaven, this 'Communist' was 'estopped' by the Law to ask of St. Peter, admission thereto. He could not ask for a place he had abolished.

He could not go to Heaven.

Whither was he bound?

There are but three destinations beyond here:

HEAVEN:

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HELL:

THE DEN OF CACUS:

4

Proceed by Cancellation.

STRIKE OUT HEAVEN:

HELL and The DEN OF CACUS remain.

The DEN OF CACUS is the final destination of Sodamites, infected JEW PERVERTS and the Gentile Women who have contacted their LEPROUS DEGRADATION. Against them HELL has shut its doors.

They are too vile for HELL.

They cannot go to HELL.

(If you want to know more about it, read my book, “[The Den of Cacus?]”),

Nothing but HELL is left for US:

For HIM, because he abolished HEAVEN:

For ME too, because he abolished it for me.

Both of us are in a HELL of a fix.

So, when I meet him in HELL——”

There were eight members on the committee. Six of them were logical and reasonable. The two above mentioned, balked all efforts at formulating any sensible plan. It was finally

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decided that if we were to accomplish anything at all we must first get rid of the two misfit committeemen. We could not legally dispose of them and no time remained to apprise their constituents of the trouble we had had with them, so the other members decided on a scheme to oust them without arousing suspicion. It was well known that we had practically no money to go on, so we simply let it be known that for lack of funds we were going to cut the committee down to five members. So not to arouse suspicion of connivery, we at the same time dispensed with the services of one of our most valuable committeemen, with his full knowledge and consent. We hated to have to do this, but it was the 5 only way. No one ever suspected the truth. But the railroad heads had already heard about the dissension in our ranks and decided to capitalize on it. Our first move was ignored completely. I might add here also, that a number of rank and file members withdrew because of our committee squabbles. Nevertheless, we went right ahead with our plan and issued an ultimatum to the head of the road. His name was J. A. Fillmore. That gentleman, whose home and headquarters were in New Orleans, was a living, breathing archetype of the cartoonist's "Bloated Capitalist". He weighed more than three hundred pounds, had a face as big as a cart-wheel and a "bay window" like an ocean-beach hotel, and a voice that rattled windows. He was hard as steel in bargaining. Gave no quarter. Had scant regard for the rights of labor, though he himself once was a laborer in the vineyard. When he gave an order he expected it to be obeyed. He was not afraid of us. I myself, was referred to derisively as, "a Moses from the hazel-brush of Oregon." But as hard and aloof and snobbish as Mr. Fillmore was at first, the time came eventually when he found out that he was no match for a handful of sobbusters from the back country such as we were. The day came when he was stuffing perfectos - or 'fusees' as railroadmen called cigars - that cost fifty cents each by the box, into the mouths of our committeemen.

The workingman of today who thinks he has a tough time of it, would hardly believe that such conditions could ever exist as did in those days. You would scarcely think it possible that a big, money-making enterprise like a rail-road would resort to such scheming tactics against labor as the railroads of that day certainly did. For instance: they

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seemed determined that no telegrapher or station agent would receive more than fifty dollars per month, regardless the duties performed. If a telegrapher worked at a station that also carried Western 6 Union wire traffic, the telegrapher usually received fifteen dollars per month from the Western Union Company. Then, we'll say, the station also happened to be the village postoffice and the agent was the postmaster. For this service the government paid the agent fifteen dollars per month. That made thirty dollars. Then the railroad company - who of course knew to a penny how much the agent received for those two services - made it a point to pay him exactly twenty dollars per month for the services he rendered them, making a total of fifty dollars per month the agent received from all sources. His duties as postmaster and Western Union representative perhaps were sinecures but his work for the railroad was certainly anything but that. He was on the job twenty-four hours a day for the railroad and in the above instance received twenty dollars per month for his services. If he hadn't had the postmastership or Western Union commission the railroad would have paid him fifty dollars just the same. How long do you think the worker of today would stand for such inequitable treatment at the hands of a corporation?

But I have always noticed that things usually have to get pretty bad before they get any better. When inequities pile up so high that the burden is more than the under dog can bear, he gets his dander up and things begin to happen. It was that way with the telegraphers' problem. These exploited individuals were determined to get for themselves better working conditions - higher pay, shorter hours, less work which might not properly be classed as telegraphy, and the high and mighty Mr. Fillmore was not going to stop them. It was a bitter fight. At the outset, Mr. Fillmore let it be known, by his actions and comments, that he held the telegraphers in the utmost contempt. In the early days of the hearings it was common for Fillmore to vent his feelings explosively in such terms as these:

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"I tell you, Estes, those God damned lazy, worthless good-for-nothing 7 telegraphers will have to take care of the switch lamps."

Now as I may have said before, I was raised a strict Methodist and up to this point in my life had never found it necessary to use profane words or phrases to add force to any speech I cared to make. But this was too much, even for a Methodist, and I hope I may be forgiven - for the first time in my life I called profanely upon the Deity to support me in the retort I thought Mr. Fillmore's statement demanded.

Jumping up at the opposite side of the table from the redoubtable Fillmore, I banged my fist on the desk with as much force and vehemence as he had done, and, surprising even myself, I tossed the following he-man threat in his teeth:

"I tell you, Fillmore, before the telegraph operators will ever clean and mount another switch lamp we'll see your God damned old railroad a million times in hell."

Instantly there came a change over Mr. Fillmore. His respect for me jumped a thousand points. My own estimate of my prowess took a sudden leap. Most business transactions, legal arguments, trades and deals, are one tenth 'will do' and nine tenths bluff. Fillmore saw his bluff couldn't stick. He had found a man who could pound a desk with as much vigor as he could. He had found a man - albeit a Methodist - from whose tongue could roll resounding, profane oaths, quite as well as from his own. Big man that he was, he promptly cooled down and quickly capitulated on this one point, saying with a smile:

"All right, Estes, they want have to do it then."

And with that statement from Mr. Fillmore, the filling of switch lamps became forever more no part of a telegrapher's work. But there were other points 8 to be settled. The filling of switch lamps was but an insignificant thorn in the telegrapher's crown. Each point was a new and important issue in its own right. Each had to be laboriously and bitterly fought out between the committee and Mr. Fillmore. Each bit of ground gained by the committee

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was given grudgingly by Mr. Fillmore. But in the end, right triumphed, as it always does if you give it time, and telegraphy at last came into its own as a pleasant, interesting, fairly lucrative occupation.

At the conclusion of negotiations, as a reward for the signal service I had rendered as Chairman of the telegraphers' union and indefatigable champion of the workers' cause, I was given a purse containing fifteen hundred dollars in gold, and a diamond-studded gold watch worth five hundred dollars. These gifts were purchased and donated by grateful telegraphers as tokens of esteem for their leader in a hard-fought battle for the rights of labor.

If anyone doubts the veracity of my statement regarding the watch, I will be glad to have him accompany me to my pawn-broker where the watch may be seen. I regret to say that because of financial difficulties the watch has been in "hook" for a great many years. Several years ago I attended a reunion of the C. R. T. in San Francisco. Mindful of the prominent part I took in the organization - or reorganization - of the union years ago, the present organization insisted that I be present. It was unthinkable that I attend the convention sans my watch. Some old timer would be sure to want a glimpse of the wonderful, diamond-studded watch which I so proudly wore away from San Francisco on that eventful day, half a lifetime ago. To me, it was either attend the convention with the watch in my pocket and the ornate chain across my vest - or not attend at all. I persuaded a friend to advance the money necessary to temporarily release my watch from custody of the three balls, whereupon I blithely journeyed to San Francisco to strut proud in the convention. Upon returning to Portland, I once more placed the watch in the hands of the pawnbroker to raise the money to reimburse my benefactor. For sentimental reasons I should like to have the watch in my personal possession - not that it's important for me to know the time of day, for I seldom go anywhere, and town clocks are everywhere.

Nature will be any man's friend if he will only let her. Take, for instance, the rattlesnake. Rattlesnakes have the reputation of being man's enemy. In my opinion this reputation is

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entirely unearned, I have had lots of experience with these snakes - I like them and they like me. They know I am their friend. They know I mean them no harm, and what is the result? The result is that I may walk into a den of rattlesnakes without the slightest danger to myself. They seem to know and trust a person whose intentions are not to molest them.

To my knowledge I seem to be the only person who has observed that the Columbia river always reaches its flood stage, with the astrological sign of the constellation of Leo rising. The only other place where such a phenomena occurs is in Egypt, and the river is the Nile which, like the Columbia, rises annually in the month of June.

(Interviewer's note). (While it is true that the Columbia - and I believe, the Nile - rises in June, the zodiacal period of Leo, the lion, is from July 21st to August 21st inclusive).

With the papers crammed each day with news of labor strife - and with two great labor factions at each other's throats, I am reminded of a parallel in my own early and more active career. Shortly before the turn of the century, in 1898 and 1899 to be more specific, I occupied a position with regard to a certain class of skilled labor, comparable to that held by the Lewises and Greens of today. I refer, of course, to the telegraphers and station agents. These hard-working gentlemen - servants of the public - had no regular hours, performed a multiplicity of duties, and, considering the service they rendered, were sorely and inadequately paid. A telegrapher's day included a considerable number of chores that present-day telegraphers probably never did or will do in the course of a day's work. He used to clean and fill lanterns, block lights, etc. Used to do the janitor work around the small town depot, stoke the pot-bellied stove of the waiting-room, sweep the floors, picking up papers and waiting-room litter. Telegraphy was just part of his job, though he performed was expected to keep his ear cocked at all times for the messages passing through the station sounder. In other words, he was an actor with a wide repertoire. Today, capital and labor seem to understand each other better than they did a generation or so ago. Capital is out to make money. So is labor - and each is willing to grant the other a certain amount of tolerant leeway, just so he doesn't go too far. In the old days there was a breach as wide

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as the Pacific separating capital and labor. It wasn't money altogether in those days, it was a matter of principle. Capital and labor couldn't see eye to eye on a single point. Every gain that either made was at the expense of the other, and was fought tooth and nail. No difference seemed ever possible of amicable settlement. Strikes were riots. Murder and mayhem was common. Railroad labor troubles were frequent. The railroads, in the nineties, were the country's largest employers. They were so big, so powerful, so perfectly organized themselves - I mean so in accord among themselves as to what treatment they felt like offering the man who worked for them - that it was extremely difficult for labor to gain a single advantage in the struggle for better conditions.

The Order of Railroad Telegraphers was organized in the late eighties, with a handful of members. The Order struggled along gaining little ground and adding few members for a decade, which brings it up to the period of which I speak. It was apparent that if the Order was to be of service to railroad telegraphers, was to force recognition from the employers, it would have to present a united front. Would have to enlist the support of every last telegrapher on every last line in the country. With ten years of stagnation behind it, the task of lining up the country's railroad telegraphers one hundred percent, seemed an impossibility for the wan, weak and puny organization. And right there, with failure unquestionably staring me in the face, is where I actively entered the picture. I was appointed chairman of the Order and charged with the hopeless assignment of expanding its membership until the most insignificant telegrapher on the least important branch of the smallest railroad in the remotest spot in America could reach into his jeans and jerk out a paid-up card in the Order. Fired with ambition to at least make a creditable showing, I entered the one-sided battle, and, how well I succeeded you may learn by asking any gray-headed faded-eyed "brass-pounder" who saw service forty years or more ago.

To give you an idea of the membership strength when I took over my duties as organizer, let me cite a few scraps of data from memory: The San Joaquin Division of the Order had about 110 telegraphers eligible for membership, but only two belonged. Of the two, one was a religious fanatic who was subsequently committed to an insane asylum. Out of

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140 eligible for membership, the Los Angeles Division had one lone member - doubtless a brave soul. It took courage to belong. If the "Company" discovered an employee dallying with the notion of joining the Order, they straight-way trumped up some excuse for severing him from his job. They did a neat job of it, too. Here's how they did it: They never discharged an employe because of union activity. It was always because of "reduction of force", "reorganization" or other reason. However, in giving him his clearance papers - any employee leaving the service of a railroad was given clearance papers - they employed a secret code, known only to railroad officials, which as effectively black-listed him as if it were written in plain English. The paper on which the clearance was typed, had a water-mark. The water-mark was a crane, a bird with long legs which extended nearly the length of the paper. If there were no red lines crossing the crane's legs or neck, the clearance was exactly what it appeared to be on the surface - a recommendation to be honored by any road in need of the applicant's services. But if the red lines were there, although the wording of the clearance was identical with the honorable one, the applicant could as easily obtain work on a railroad as fly to the moon.

So in October, 1898, with only one hundred dollars in the Order's treasury on this coast, I set about the work of breaking down the apathy towards the Order which existed among the telegraphers of the Pacific states. With more than six thousand miles of lines to cover, it was impossible for me to make personal calls on the telegraphers. Also, any organizing I was to do, must be done by me without relinquishing my job as station master of Grants Pass, Oregon - for I had a loving wife and beautiful daughter to think of, and could ill afford to surrender my position and go about junketing for a causes however worthy. How would you have gone about it? Well here's how I solved my problem: Do you recall a few years ago when a wave of chain letters flooded the country asking for dimes? It's no new thing. Similar waves of chain letters have spread over the country from time to time as far back as I can remember. Armed with a roster of names of all telegraphers at work on west coast railroads, I marked an "X" after the names - few enough they were, too - of those who already carried a card in the Order. To the ones marked "X" I sent a letter

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enclosing a tentative draft of a working schedule, which I promised the railroads would be forced to accept from us if we were only strong enough numerically as to speak with the voice of strength. I then asked each member to write a letter to the non-members near him, passing along my message and soliciting the non-member for his application to the order. Each non-member received from 100 to 200 letters and concluded he was the last to join. The effect was magical. The idea took hold, grew by leaps and bounds, like a snowball rolling down hill gathering size and weight as it sped onward. From time to time I sifted out the stubborn ones, the ones who resisted minor efforts at enlistment. To these I directed an overwhelming onslaught of mail from their brother telegraphers. One by one they come under the banner. Remarkable as it may seem, the day shortly dawned when we had gotten down to that "last" telegrapher in that remote place - a man named Fields, station agent at Reno, Nevada. Fields was reputed to be a "Company" man, and was said to have remarked "that he would see the O. R. T. in hell before he'd join." Now the truth of the matter is that the course of the Order's history should not have been altered a whit, had we concluded to forget about Fields and let him stay outside the fold, but a queer quirk in my nature caused me to want to "get that man". I wanted to make my conquest a complete, one hundred percent victory. To get this one man. I sent out thirteen hundred letters to key members all over the lines, asking them to write to Fields 5 at Reno, asking him to join the O. R. T.; also asking them to enlist the aid of all other members in their letter writing campaign. Fields was swamped. Having a sense of humor, a portion of which quality I hope I still retain, I also dispatched a letter to the King of England and the Czar of Russia - Russia was then a monarchy - apprising them of the situation and asking them to write to this man Fields urging him to join the O. R. T. I sent copies of these letters to Fields as a joke, never expecting to hear from the recipients of the originals. Imagine our surprise, however, when the [Czar of Russia?] - entering into the spirit of the thing - [sent Fields a letter?], bearing the crest of the Romanoffs, urging him to join the Order as I had suggested. In conclusion - yes, Fields came in.

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Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Andrew C. Sherbert Date November 28, 1938

Address Project Headquarters

Subject Folkways and Social Customs in the Willamette Valley

Name and address of informant George Estes 512 Board of Trade Building, Portland,  
Oregon

Comment:

For further information on the Rawhide Railroad, see "The Genesis of a Myth, Re Estes  
Book, The Rawhide Railroad."