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# Colony Life in Washington

by Walter O. Griggs

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After visiting around among friends and relatives at different points on the [Puget] Sound, I am now at a cooperative colony about three miles from Edison, Skagit County.

This institution is the one thing worthy of especial note on my trip, and is the prime object of my visit to these parts, and well it might be for any student of social and industrial conditions. Here a little band of 220 souls are trying to solve the industrial problem in a small way by substituting cooperation for competition, and through a method of production and distribution among the members which makes the interest of one the concern of all.

They have 605 acres of land all paid for with any amount adjoining or nearby that can be secured very reasonably as fast as necessary. They have a saw mill, printery, cooperative kitchen and dining rooms, etc., with all the buildings needed at present. They have their own schools, entertainments, literary society, and amusements. They publish a paper called *Industrial Freedom*, which is devoted to the solution of the industrial problem. Three hundred acres of their land is in the flat and is amazingly fertile, but a great big task to clear it.

A few individuals undertaking it singlehanded would make just about as great headway as in dipping a well dry with a tin cup, but with a 35-horsepower donkey engine and wire cable to drag the logs to the mill, or pile them up and pull stumps with, considerable showing is made, and instead of a capitalist absorbing all the benefits except a limited wage, the members fare and share alike.

Just now the members work 9 hours, but in time expect to be able to reduce the time considerably. They are yet in the pioneer stage, having been here about 16 months, and work is pile up ahead of them.

The object of the colonists is to produce all that is required to satisfy their needs as nearly as they can, but where they can do it more

cheaply to exchange some staple product. In doing this they will use all the labor-saving machinery they can use to advantage, and each share alike in the increased production.

As an illustration of the wonderful fertility of the soil they produced about 40,000 heads of cabbage on three acres of land last season. Some of these weighed nearly 50 pounds each. From this they sold 50 barrels of sauerkraut at \$4 per barrel and have 40 barrels left besides all they could use in the meantime. All other kinds of vegetables do equally as well and form a large part of their food supply. I am told that at the season when they have to buy the most the cost of living is about 7 cents per head per day. Their food is all cooked in one large kitchen and served on common tables where all sit down together as one family, the little girls doing service as waiters.

An allowance of 45 cents per day is paid the men, while \$2 per week is charged all adults for board. The women also receive an allowance. A timekeeper keeps account of every man's work and it goes down on the books of the colony. At present the income is small and is used in making improvements and buying necessaries, but as soon as it is large enough to warrant it, it will be divided *pro rata*.

This is about all worth noting of their method of operation. It lacks a whole lot of being a paradise, or a Bellamy ideal, still as a preparatory school of experience the cooperative colony is no doubt a success.

There are many people who come here and go away. The number of members is constantly changing. Some leave during an exhibition of bad temper, because they have failed to get their way in something. Some come here just for an "experience" — get it, and go away for another of a different character, while occasionally one get in whom they have to take rigid measures to shove out again. There has been two of the latter cases — one a woman who could give the devil pointers on an exhibition of temper; the other case was that of a family who came here without any previous correspondence or solicitation, and both the father and mother of a large family being invalids, it was not thought advisable to burden the colony down with that class in the pioneer stage.

Some also come whose habits of industry are somewhat questionable, but these as a rule find it too warm for comfort and get away of their own accord.

This place is a great attraction for "cranks" of all sorts, sizes, and shades of opinion. Here you find the sensible "crank" who really has

ideas, and you also find the erratic sort who thinks he has. Some of the “cranks” only reach here by letter and then their crankiness if of the fanatical sort is duly consigned to the wastebasket. Occasionally a new member starts in about the second day to make converts to some pet theory or method he has but the frequent applications of cold water he gets soon dampens his ardor.

As a rule those people who ride in here on the high tide of their own emotions are not long stayers, they can't stand the wreck of their air castles. It is the cool, calculating, level-headed sort that is to come in on the home run, if there is going to be any home run. The leading spirits here seem to be made of that mettle, they never think of going away, judging by what they say nothing is further from their minds, and some of them are noble souls, too, wholly deserving of success.

There is no reason why this enterprise should not be made a success unless bad management creeps in. It all depends on the average intelligence and earnestness of the members — both appear to be above par. The management of the concern is strictly democratic, trustees being elected every year by the general assembly and their authority should they choose to use it cannot go beyond the general sentiment.

They do not regard their methods of operation as perfect, but they are learning by experience and improving as they go along.

Taking it all in all the cooperative colony can hardly be regarded as a solution of the industrial problem. In their primary stage, at least, they are not able to compete with the trusts — still they can make a vast improvement over the individualistic home, both from a social and an economic standpoint, and after all may prove to be the school of experience calculated to show us the way out of the desert of competition.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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