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IMPROVED COUNTY GOVERNMENT

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

One of the subjects for discussion at the morning session of the Press Association at Winston-Salem the other day was better business methods in county government. The newspaper men can well afford to devote some time to this topic. The county is the unit of government in North Carolina. There are exactly one hundred such units. The whole is no better than its parts. The government of North Carolina will never be much superior to the government of these one hundred units.

Those who have dug into the matter find that conditions in most of the counties are far from encouraging. Some time ago Dr. E. C. Brooks brought forcefully to the attention of the people of the state the weakness of our present system of county government. The conditions he brought to light, especially in regard to county finances, have set thoughtful citizens to thinking. That this is true is shown by the fact that the Press Association has taken up the subject as one of the few which it will have time to consider at its business session in Winston-Salem.

What are conditions? We have them best stated by the State Auditor, who is in better position than anybody else in North Carolina to know just what sort of shape the average county government is in today. After examining the records of many counties State Auditor Durham is moved to ask the question: "Are there private corporations whose business is conducted as is the public business?" "Yes, indeed," he answers, "but their names are carved deep in the records of the bankruptcy courts and some of their directors and officers are doing time."

The Auditor frankly states that there are few counties in this state that know their true financial condition. There are a great many, he declares, that do not know their bonded indebtedness, who holds the bonds, nor when they are due, when the interest is due, when they are to be paid, or how.

Moreover, he says that few counties know the number of acres of land within their borders, nor the valuation of each, neither do they know the number of town lots. He proves this statement by the fact that the reports coming into his office every year vary, and in some instances greatly, as to the number of acres and the number of town lots. Few counties, he tells us, have a control set of books through which all financial items pass. Few know what it costs them to conduct their business, or whether the price is high or low. And few know whether they buy at right prices when they purchase.

Compulsory Auditing

This is a brief statement of the present state of affairs in most of our counties. This does not apply, however, to counties like Forsyth which have whole-time county auditors whose duty it is to keep a control set of books and to tabulate and maintain up to date at all times the information which the State Auditor says is lacking in most counties. But a vast majority of the counties of North Carolina do not have whole-time auditors. Many of the smaller county units never will have. Some other way must be found to get them out of the woods.

We believe the way has been found. As a result of recent acts of the Legislature we expect vast improvement in the financial affairs of most of the counties of North Carolina within the next two or four years. What are the remedies that are to be applied? Specifically there are two:

1. The Sams Bill—that was introduced by Senator Sams of Forsyth in the late special session of the General Assembly. It requires all counties to file with the State Auditor at regular intervals the exact information which Auditor Durham says is now lacking. When the provisions of this bill shall have been complied with the auditor will have at his fingers' tips at all times the data on the financial condition of every county in North Carolina, including bonded indebtedness and date when interest is due and what provision has been made for paying off bonds when they mature. Moreover, the bill requires that every county issuing bonds must make provision for their retirement.

2. The Legislature of 1921, regular session, passed a bill that is far-reaching in its scope and should prove highly beneficial in its operation. This bill does two things that never before have been done in North Carolina. It requires that every county in the state shall be audited and a proper system of accounting installed. And it provides for this work to be done by a central agency—the State Auditor. The bill in its entirety may be found in Chapter 236, Public Laws of 1921. Section 1 reads as follows:

"That it shall be the duty of the State Auditor to cause to be examined at least once a year, and oftener if in the judgment of the State Auditor conditions require, all counties and county officers receiving or disbursing public funds, and that such State Auditor be and he is hereby given full power to examine all accounts and all official affairs of every county office and officer receiving or disbursing public funds."

A Press Program

Now, what can the newspapers of the State do to help apply the remedies which the General Assembly has here provided? There are, we think, three big things that can be done:

1. They can build a fire, and a hot one if necessary, under county authorities that do not comply promptly and efficiently with the provision of the Sams Bill requiring them to furnish the State Auditor accurate information as to bonded indebtedness and finances of their county.

2. The newspapers can and should back the State Auditor to the uttermost limit in his efforts to examine at least once a year the books of all counties and should support him in every possible manner in this gigantic undertaking.

3. And last and most important of all, the newspapers should use all the influence at their command to have competent and efficient men drafted, if necessary, to serve on Boards of County Commissioners. No county can get far without men of ability and integrity as commissioners, especially in this new day in the state's history when the counties are called upon to spend so much money on roads and schools and hospitals and other public improvements.

There is in all the Commonwealth today no more important office than that of County Commissioner. Upon the efficiency and integrity of these County Boards depends, in large part, the success of good government in North Carolina.—Santford Martin, in the Winston-Salem Journal.

SHABBY CITIZENSHIP

The failures of democracy are the failures of citizens to play their part. The governing departments belong to us. Their successes are ours; their mistakes disgrace us.

Think what a board of health might accomplish if the citizens made an effort to work wholeheartedly with it.

Think what a street-cleaning department might be in a city where every inhabitant felt as responsible for the sidewalk and street in front of his property as for his parlor floor!

Think of the quality a community might acquire with a school system which was the pride and anxious concern of every parent in the city!

Where are the members of the community who might have leisure and money to band their fellows together and work unresistingly with the public officials to build the City Beautiful?

In most of our cities the government, though often inefficient and unenlightened, is not corrupt, or beyond the influence of the citizens who have no private axe to grind. The worst failures are due to the fact that, as soon as the officials are elected, the public forgets all about them and leaves them to the companionship of the few who come to abuse and the many who come to get some favor for themselves or their friends. Citizens have no one except themselves to thank if an official, left to the mercies of the self-seeking, becomes careless in self-defense or corrupt through evil associations.—C. J. Cannon, in the Atlantic Monthly.

KNOW NORTH CAROLINA

Under this heading last week was given the concluding words of Governor Bickett's inaugural address five years ago. Before taking up messages from living North Carolinians, we turn this week to the concluding words of Governor Aycock's last-prepared speech ten years ago.

AYCOCK'S DREAM

We have indeed gone far in North Carolina. A recent writer has declared that the progress of a state may be determined by the things which are now done as a matter of course which used to be the subject of debate. Tested by this standard North Carolina has advanced rapidly.

The right of every child to a public school education is no longer a subject of controversy, but is acknowledged by everyone.

The duty and wisdom of adequate, excellent public roads is not only acknowledged by everybody but has recently been emphasized by the mud through which we have slowly dragged ourselves to the markets of the state.

The right of children to be safeguarded in the time of their growth and development against overwork in factories, is a right which no one now disputes.

The duty of caring for the afflicted, whether due to age or infirmity, has been translated into so beautiful an application and has been performed with such steadiness as to render one who would now deny it contemptible in the sight of all the people.

And no more does anyone, whatever may be his view about the efficacy of prohibition, ever expect to see again the dominance of the barroom and whiskey still in the civic and political life of this great State of ours.

We are entering upon a new day—the day of equality of opportunity. EQUAL! That is the word! On that word I plant myself and my party—the equal right of every child born on earth to have the opportunity to burgeon out all there is within him."

NEW HANOVER LEADS

The city of Wilmington and the county of New Hanover more than ten years ago realized the tremendous importance of local hospitals for local victims of tuberculosis. The local Red Cross chapter placed this matter before the two governments. A very commodious hospital was provided largely as a result of the work of the local Red Cross. Both the city and county readily agreed to make appropriations for the support of the institution. This custom has been continued on an annual basis ever since and the money appropriated has been well invested. Both white and colored patients have been cared for in the local tuberculosis hospital for the last ten or twelve years and a splendid work for the relief of suffering humanity has been accomplished.

Our present county government headed by Mr. Addison Hewlett and our board of city commissioners of which Major Jas. H. Cowan is head are displaying keen interest in the maintenance and up-keep of the hospital.

We thought you would be interested to know that our locality more than a decade ago took the step suggested in the News Letter of Dec. 7, 1921, as a necessary humanitarian movement in every county of the state.—Louis T. Moore, Secretary, Wilmington Chamber of Commerce.

ECONOMIC ILLITERACY

The most alarming illiteracy in America, said Mr. Vanderlip, the former president of the National City Bank of New York, is economic illiteracy—a

kind of illiteracy that keeps the masses thinking on childish levels about public finance—local, state, and national, about public taxation and tax principles, about debt and interest rates, about banks and banking, bank machinery, bank methods, bank services to the public, bank charges, and so on and on.

We are quoting from memory, but these are substantially the things Mr. Vanderlip said several years ago to a popular audience in the West.

We are recalling these things just now because we want to give widespread publicity to a little volume on Banking and Business Ethics, by Walter E. Borden, former cashier and vice-president of the Wayne National Bank, Goldsboro—a little volume of 224 pages, published by the Rand McNally Company, Chicago.

It ought to be a text in every high school in the state. The freshman class of every college the country over ought to have a chance at it. But more than this, the average man in the mass in America ought to know at least as much about banking and business ethics as this little volume can teach him.

It attempts to do nothing but give the abcs of banking in the very simplest language, but it is knowledge that the average man—farmer, teacher, preacher, wage-earner, what not—needs almost as certainly as high school seniors.

The charm of the book lies in its simplicity, competency, and rare literary craftsmanship. Not many business men are equal to book-making of this high order. The schools would be better if more business men could find time to write business texts on the practical matters of every-day life. What the business men are slow to do in textbook writing of this kind, teachers and college professors are obliged to undertake. They often succeed, but they more often fail.

Business men will have a smaller chance to criticize the schools when they write more of the books the schools ought to use.

PUBLIC WELFARE BULLETIN

The University of North Carolina through its School of Public Welfare and Bureau of Public Discussion has just issued a little bulletin on Social Service and Public Welfare. In cooperation with Mrs. S. C. Sitterton, chairman of the department of Social Service, State Federation of Women's Clubs, the bulletin has been sent to various workers throughout the state.

State and County Studies

Concerning the Federation program, the bulletin says: The plan of the Social Service department of the State Federation of Women's Clubs for 1921 to provide a program which will emphasize the fundamental aspects of social service, and at the same time give expression to concrete activities, is a most commendable one. In the effort to

work out such a program it seems clear that no service on behalf of the public good in North Carolina at the present time can be more fundamental or concrete than the state and county programs of Public Welfare. Social Service and the Public Good are the goals

which the State Department of Public Welfare seeks to attain through effective organization and service. It is therefore fitting that the Social Service department of the Women's Clubs should set itself to this large and definite task, a task to which the State Federation has already pledged itself in its platform endorsing Mrs. Clarence A. Johnson as Commissioner of Public Welfare. The selection, therefore, of a limited number of topics to which special efforts will be given during the year, ought to prove of great interest and value to the many members of women's clubs everywhere in the state. The subjects chosen are: The Meaning of Social Service and Social Work, The Meaning of Public Welfare, The North Carolina Plan of Public Welfare, The County Superintendent of Public Welfare, Social Treatment of Crime, Constructive Help of the Poor, Care of Neglected and Dependent Children, Community Organization, The North Carolina State Conference for Social Service, together with Practical Aids.

The Social Mind

With reference to Social Service, the Bulletin says: Perhaps there is no tendency in modern times more clearly defined or making more substantial progress than that of social service. This means, simply, that in the fields of religion, education, social science, politics, and perhaps in all the social relationships, the fact is being recognized that the highest good and the greatest service may be attained through the development of the individual in service to society and his fellowman. In terms of moral sanction it means that they who live unto themselves live in vain; in terms of social welfare it means that the individual who neglects the development of his social nature, or who grows rich upon society to its hurt, or who uses the public moneys for personal gain, is the greatest of social offenders. The growth of social consciousness is in evidence on every hand; in the ideals of government and civic righteousness; in the increased activities of women in constructive social work; in the creation of a national welfare conscience; in the broadening instruction of schools, colleges and universities; in the creation of special schools and departments of social service administration within universities, as the School of Social Service Administration in the University of Chicago or the School of Public Welfare at Carolina, or the Pennsylvania School for Social Service. It is very clear, therefore, that the promotion of social service and the training for community leadership constitute an important undertaking rich in substantial rewards.

FARMS USING GAS OR ELECTRIC LIGHT IN U. S.

States ranked according to ratio of farms reporting gas or electric light to all farms in the several states. Based on reports of the 1920 Census, as published in the Federal Monthly Crop Reporter Nov. 1921.

In the United States at large 452,809 farms or 7 percent of all farms reported use of gas or electric light. In North Carolina 8,005 or 3 percent of the farms were thus equipped, and 38 states made a better showing.

Department of Rural Social Science, University of North Carolina

Rank	State	Pct. of all farms	No. using gas or electric light	Rank	State	Pct. of all farms	No. using gas or electric light
1	Utah	43.4	11,125	26	Michigan	8.0	15,695
2	Massachusetts	28.3	9,062	27	Minnesota	7.6	13,539
3	California	25.9	30,519	28	Maryland	7.0	3,330
4	Connecticut	17.5	3,963	29	Colorado	6.5	3,925
5	Rhode Island	17.1	700	30	Arizona	6.0	592
6	Iowa	15.3	32,552	31	North Dakota	5.8	4,518
7	New Jersey	15.3	4,551	32	Missouri	5.5	14,341
8	Pennsylvania	15.2	30,669	33	Wyoming	4.6	717
9	West Virginia	14.8	12,900	34	Virginia	4.2	7,874
10	Ohio	14.7	37,745	35	Delaware	3.9	397
11	Idaho	14.2	5,982	36	Florida	3.8	2,042
12	Washington	13.8	9,178	37	Oklahoma	3.7	7,010
13	New York	12.9	24,882	38	Montana	3.5	2,013
14	Nevada	12.2	885	39	Alabama	3.3	8,345
15	Vermont	11.4	3,328	40	North Carolina	3.0	8,005
16	New Hampshire	11.3	2,322	41	South Carolina	2.7	5,170
17	Oregon	10.9	5,463	42	Kentucky	2.2	5,925
18	Indiana	10.0	20,584	43	Texas	1.9	8,228
19	Illinois	9.8	23,273	44	Georgia	1.9	5,826
20	Nebraska	9.7	12,062	45	Tennessee	1.8	4,554
21	Maine	9.6	4,625	46	New Mexico	1.4	422
22	Wisconsin	8.8	16,574	47	Louisiana	1.1	1,471
23	Kansas	8.7	14,390	48	Mississippi	1.1	2,896
24	South Dakota	8.6	6,445	49	Arkansas	1.1	2,643