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Open June to October

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AS OTHERS SEE US

Frederick J. Haskins Tells His Impressions of the Sandhill Community

A Syndicate Letter Sent a Thousand Newspapers by one of the Keenest Observers in the United States.



THE Sandhill Board of Trade is a great deal more than a commercial organization. It is the practical expression of an ideal of community life in the country. The members tell you this; then they lead you out in the sand hills and show you their schools and roads and scuppernong vineyards and peach orchards and cotton fields and tobacco patches. They show you a very mixed farming community that flourishes amazingly in a shallow and sandy soil, largely by reason of the fact that all of its members pull one way. They make you believe in their ideal.

The Sandhill Board of Trade can't be classified; it is the only one of its kind. It is an independent and self-constituted Democracy which has no regard whatever for county lines. This is the way it came into being.

Among those who have moved into the Sandhills within the last five years have been about forty men from New York, Boston and other big cities. Nearly all of them brought money, youth and brains. Most important of all, they brought a pretty definite ideal of what they wanted to do.

Mr. Raphael W. Pumpelly, once a New York engineer is the chief expounder of the Sandhill philosophy. Rural life, he points out, should be the best kind in the world. It may have much of the culture and variety of city life, together with the freedom and fresh air and health of the great outdoors. England, of course, is the classical example of this. But in England the wealthiest people do not go to the country merely to have a good time. They live there and the best of them devote their time and energy to the development of their communities.

That is what the Sandhill men organized to do, and they are doing it. Furthermore, they take themselves and their work seriously. They do not merely come here to visit once a year; they live here. They wear soft shirts and khaki and scout around in cheap autos. A presuming reporter from Philadelphia once wrote them up as "guilted youths," and they still frown when the name of this particular scribe is mentioned.

These men made the Board of Trade, but the natives made it go. They are highland Scotchmen whose forefathers came here in Colonial times. They move slowly but certainly—and they are the bone and sinew of the Sandhill Board of Trade. When the prime movers of the organization had made their plans, they called a big meeting of all these farmers, and laid the proposition before them.

The farmers "sat and studied" a while and decided that it was good. A circle of the Sandhill country forty miles in diameter was taken as the territory of the board. It was divided into twenty-nine districts, each of which had a bit of a village as its center. Each district was given three representatives in the council of the board, and each district had one vote. A meeting is held once a month, not to talk, but to pass upon some specific project. These meetings are heavily attended.

The Board has an executive committee which meets every week, and an executive officer in the person of Mr. Clyde L. Davis who is on the job every day and nearly every night. Among other things he has been a Kansas farmer, a rural evangelist, and a student of the classics. He needs all of his versatility. The Board of Trade calls upon him to produce anything it wants. Not long ago it wanted a fair, and told Mr. Davis to organize one, but not to hire any balloon ascensions, midways, or anything like that. Mr. Davis went among the people, and had them rig up their farm wagons to suit themselves for a great parade. The farmers fell back upon the story and legend of the countryside. They came as wild Indians, as highland clansmen, and as soldiers of the Revolution, bearing the muskets and powder horns of their ancestors. They showed such a vivid consciousness of their own remarkable story that Mr. Davis is now under orders to produce an historical pageant.

These, however, are the frills and furbelows of the Sandhill Board of Trade. Here is another thing it did. When the European war broke, and cotton went down and down until the little planter and the tenant farmer were within an inch of starvation, the Sandhill men were hard hit. They raised other things, but cotton was their best money crop. In this emergency the executive committee of the Board of Trade held a solemn meeting.

"If this Board of Trade is of any use, it's got to prove it now," said one, and the rest agreed. There was the emergency currency issued by the Government, of course. The executive committee went to Raleigh and found there was not going to be enough of that to go around. Then they went to New York. Although there were men in the Board of Trade with a lot of credit, they found that money was very scarce in New York, too. At last they got a credit of a hundred thousand in Boston. They returned to the Sandhills and built a warehouse in each of their districts. The farmers were told to come there and store their bales, that they would be given receipts based on a