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WRITING FOR HOMER'S AUDIENCE

A Paper Read by Clyde Davis, Secretary for the
Sandhill Community

Before the North Carolina News Paper Institute at Chapel Hill,
December 7, 1916



WHENEVER the late Marcus Tully Cicero emptied the Roman Senate in order to fill a modern text book, he usually devoted a considerable part of his speech to matters which he said, "I shall pass over in silence." You have asked me to talk about the use of the local paper in community development. I think I have something to say about the use of the local paper; but just what to do in order to develop a community is a subject that "I shall pass over in silence." We Sandhillers are making progress, and much that we are doing is, we trust, worthy of being put into operation elsewhere. If any of you care to know just what we think most worth doing for the development of our section, I will be glad to give you a copy of a circular letter written by Mr. Tufts of Pinehurst to the members of the Sandhill Board of Trade. From it you will learn that we divide our work into two parts. The first is the stimulating of immigration by means of advertising. To get our section before the eyes of prospective buyers we have used booklets, magazines, lectures, lantern slides, exhibits,—and Bion Butler. The second and more important part of our work is to prevent emigration by making our community a place which people cannot afford to leave. The first step toward the accomplishment of this is to work out more profitable methods of crop

production, less expensive ways of marketing, and all else that makes for prosperity, for as wise old Dr. Knapp persistently pointed out, without prosperity all else must fail. But this is not enough. The philosophy of the belly will never get a community very far. Statistics prove this, for we find that where farm and village people are making money the fastest that there they are going to the cities the fastest, because in the cities they find schools, household comforts, entertainment, society, and other things for which they wish to spend their money while they are well and when they are sick in the cities they can find something more than antediluvian hospital facilities at something less than multi-millionaire prices. That is why we are working so hard to improve our rural schools, build up a successful farm life school, establish our hospital, get public health work to going, and to do all else that Mr. Tufts mentions in this circular letter, and which I, like Cicero, now that I have stated the matter pretty fully, "shall not mention but shall pass over in silence."

BLUES AND PAGES VS. A COMMUNITY

Now before taking up the use of the local paper in community development, let's get clearly in mind what a community is. Concerted thought which makes concerted endeavor possible is what distinguishes a community from a settlement. Without concerted thought and concerted endeavor you may have good people, big houses, and broad fields but you cannot

have a community. Six months ago the North Carolina State Journal came out with a paragraph on its cover which Mr. Derby had written about the settlement along Drowning Creek. He said that so long as these people drifted along each thinking only of himself the power of the community must be wasted just as the power of the stream is now drifting along unused. Some old brother up here in the State somewhere immediately spoiled several sheets of good paper proving that Mr. Derby was all wrong because along Drowning Creek one can find such people as the Blues and the Pages. I live among the Blues and they are indeed a good lot. The Pages, too are pretty hard to beat. But if we could stack our section ten feet deep with Blues and Pages we would still not have community unless we could get these excellent people to think together and work together for the things that the section needs. There must be a group consciousness, a group pride, and intelligent team work. A hive of bees is a community. A trap full of flies, each struggling hard, does not represent a community,—not even if two thirds of them are Blue Flies and all the rest born on Page Hill. The flies represent a settlement, for with them it's every fellow for himself and the devil may take the group.

WISDOM IS A HEN

In transforming a settlement into a community the importance of the local paper can hardly be exaggerated. Without the Agora, the place where all citizens met continually for the discussion of current problems, Pericles and the rest could never have developed the settlement of Athens into the most powerful little democracy that the world has ever seen. The only Agora that a modern community can have is its local paper: Through it the modern Pericles must speak his wisdom and the modern Alcibiades his folly. Through it the people hear the words of both just as in old Athens they heard the spoken word. Because of it concerted thought is possible. In any democracy a vast deal of palaver must attend every

forward step. Wisdom, says Dean Swift, is a hen. We listen to her cackling because along with it we occasionally get an egg. We Sandhillers are doing more cackling than any other part of the State, and we are also getting more eggs. The local paper is not only the community's ears. It is the community's eyes, for through it the folks see what the community lacks and also what it has to be proud of. Therefore, I say that the importance of the local paper in the development of a community can hardly be overestimated.

CABBAGES AND KINGS

He who writes for a cross roads paper should take his work seriously. William James who could put his productions in any publication he chose and at almost any price he chose usually sent them to very ordinary magazines and papers because these, he said, reached the folks and every article so published got results. The local paper, too, reaches the folks,—not the machine-made Tomlinsons who read the North American Review, theorize and discuss Ibsen; not the speeded-up, whistled-in-and-whistled-out city employees who read Brisbane's big-type oracles while jiggling along in street cars, (these are special groups) but he who writes for a forks-of-the-creek paper has today the same audience that wept and applauded, smiled and jeered, when "'Omer smote 'is bloomin' Lyre'" when all the world was new. This is the world's best audience evidently, for it is the one the world has chosen to produce all through the ages. Out of this audience all the world's leaders have come and to it their children have all returned in the course of a few generations. Let not the man who writes for the big city daily look down upon us who write for the local paper unless the man who use the telescope is to disdain the man that uses the microscope. Our little world is just as important as your big one and just as interesting. Your items tell of the Battle of Verdun. Our items tell of the birth of Mrs. Jones baby. The one is quite as

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