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LIVING WAS CHEAP ONCE

In noting the soaring price of sugar at the present time mention was briefly made to the prices on this commodity in Grande Ronde in early days. Between forty and fifty years ago the price of sugar in all parts of the country was high in comparison with the quotations that have prevailed in the past few years. In fact it has not been so many years ago when sugar was classed as among the luxuries. Bulk shipments of sugar in the early days in this valley came in barrels and not in sacks. In the seventies the price of sugar by the barrel ranged between 20 and 25 cents per pound and the barrels contained an average of 140 pounds. There were many grades and none except the "granulated" was pure white. The best standard grade was known as "Extra C" and it was a light straw color. Even after the pure white, granulated sugar came on the market there were many who still preferred the Extra C for cake-making and putting on fruit.

Other articles which commanded extravagant prices as compared with the present time were the old-fashioned cut nails which retailed at 25 cents per pound. A good portion of the cost of such commodities in the interior country was due to the freight rates on transportation from the Columbia river which was done in wagons and by pack trains. The freight rate from the river "landing" was 2 1/2 to five cents a pound depending on the time of year and the distance to be traveled. For a long while the price of calico was on the uniform standard of two bits a yard.

But Living Was Cheap After the first few years of hardships it is doubtful if there ever was a new country in which the necessities of good living were so abundant and cheap. Clothing and what might be termed the luxuries came high but this was offset in a large degree by the inexpensiveness of home products. From \$12 to \$18 per head was a good price for two and three-year-old steers. Cows were in proportion. At the local "butter shops" four pounds of the best lard cut sold for 25 cents and if that wasn't satisfactory another cut for the same money didn't make any difference. There was no outside market for wheat and flour was cheap. With the cardinal essentials of "bread and butter, meat and potatoes" no one was ever compelled to go hungry.

Many Comforts Available Within a very few years the people of Grande Ronde enjoyed all the comforts and many of the luxuries of the older settled countries of the east. In wearing apparel, especially, there was access to supplies while possibly deficient in artistic make-up were of quality that could not be discounted. There was the finest of Oregon City fleece blankets and the same brand of clothing which the manufacturers did not know how to counterfeit and which in substantial wearing quality were "all wool and a yard wide." There were but two grades of women's shoes—the "coarse," or work shoe, and the "fine" or dress shoes. The men and boys all wore boots and nine-tenths of the supply came from the firm of Buckingham & Hecht, San Francisco. Everybody Had Credit Collection agencies and credit bureaus would go crazy these days with the system of business that prevailed in Grande Ronde thirty and forty years ago. To begin with every body's credit rating was about the same and that was A. 1. But the date of liquidation was indefinite. None of the merchants expected a settlement more frequently than once a year with the chances that the balance due would be settled with a written promise to pay in "gold coin of the United States, or its equivalent, with interest at the rate of one per cent. per

month until paid."

Usury Not Recognized Twelve per cent per annum was the legal rate in Oregon for a good many years and when the legislature finally began to cut this rate down the law was consistently violated both on the part of the borrower and the lender. The unusual plan was for the victim to execute his note for an amount about twenty per cent more than he expected to get and the money sharks would buy the note at a discount. And the plea of "usury" was never known to intervene when the time came for payment. The old form of

Was on Gold Standard notes always called for "gold coin or its equivalent." The equivalent was a provision by which the debtor could make payment in either bullion or gold dust in case he could not get hold of the coined money. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of business in the early days in this valley was done with the use of gold dust or gold bars, and hidden away somewhere around the premises of nearly all the settlers of the early days will be found a pair of gold scales which were used in weighing gold dust. There was no paper money and no silver in circulation. Of the coined gold the little \$2.50 gold pieces were relatively plentiful. This country, and all the Pacific Coast for that matter, was the original gold-standard section of the United States.

Twenty-Four Years Ago The marriage of Miss Helen Levy of Union and Mr. Max Lewin of Athena, is announced to take place on June 5.

Miss Josie Grandy who has been attending school at the Willamette University at Salem, arrived home Saturday morning on the summer vacation.

Rev. W. J. Hughes, formerly of Union, has become pastor of the Presbyterian church of La Grande, and removed here with his family last week.

Judge A. S. Bennett, the democratic candidate for supreme judge, was up from The Dalles Monday. His business was of a political nature although he does not expect to make an extended canvass.

G. M. Richey and John Monday have been selected by the La Grande baseball association to go to Baker City Sunday to attend a meeting of representatives of the Inter-State League. It is probable that a schedule for the coming season will be arranged at that time.

PENNIES IN GOOD REPUTE

LA GRANDERS NO LONGER SCORN COPPER

History of the "Bit as Expressing Money Values

There was a time not so many years ago when "two bits," or twenty-five cents was the smallest price recognized in a commercial transaction in the northwest. And when the ten-cent piece finally arrived it answered the purpose of a half of 25 cents. A ten-cent piece would be accepted as change for a quarter and two ten-cent pieces or "short bits," would be accepted in place of a quarter. When nickels came they were used in buying postage stamps, and were held in about the same standard of contempt as the one-cent piece was accorded a few years ago.

Penny Recent The gradual trend from the bit to the dime to the nickel finally its climax in the advent of the penny, and that, in La Grande, was but a few years ago. Even as recently as 10 years back the penny was persona non grata in La Grande. Now it is

recognized almost as assiduously as it is in the staid old Vermont or Mississippi river district. Time has worked its changes. But the study of changes in custom and habits in the Grande Ronde and the Northwest in general, brings on the question of all coins.

Codfish First Money

The first American money of which there is any record was dried codfish. Before metal came into use dried codfish was regarded as the most convenient and safest kind of currency. For small change a single fish answered the purpose admirably. It represented an idea. It stood for a standard. Only acquired by labor, easily presented and transported, at all times useful to tribes away from the seashore, and exchangeable for what they had which the seashore Indians had not, it became an exchange medium of constant and stable value. In time, naturally, some had more, as gold to the capitalist and banker. Then a currency based upon them was issued in the form of shell, and gradually arrowheads and furs came into employment in the nature of stocks and bonds. An inflated codfish currency made it an easy matter for the early settlers to float glass beads, and the Spaniards, having more metal coin than any other people at the time, gradually introduced in lieu of beads, copper, bronze and silver pieces which a century has not wholly displaced. In fact, although long out of circulation the names of these Spanish pieces continue to express values in some parts of the United States down to our day.

Exchange Mediums Varied

The different states of New England had their different mediums of exchange, and like some of their western sisters they still stick to money terms that have no representatives in actual coin. Four or five different values attach to the term "shilling" on the Atlantic seaboard. In New England and Virginia when one speaks of a shilling, a sixth of a dollar is meant; in New York and North Carolina a shilling is equal to the Missouri and California bit; in some parts of the United States what is meant by a shilling is two fifteenths of a dollar.

Picayune In Favor

During the civil war period when metal was scarce and gold and silver commanded premiums, paper fractional currency, familiarly and sometimes affectionately known as "shin-plasters," was in general circulation in denominations of 3, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents. In place of coppers postage stamps and "tokens" served a useful purpose. The half-cent piece, discontinued in 1857, was called a picayune in the South, and since then 3-cent nickels and 2-cent bronzes have come, enjoyed their day and disappeared. There never was a coin in the United States that could properly be called a "bit," yet to Missouri or to any of the "mountain states" or observe how quickly you will get into the habit of asking for two bits' worth of this or six bits worth of that at the grocery or dry-goods store.

"Two Bits" and So On

An Editorial in a western United States contemporary a few days ago went into an investigating discussion of the many things that might be done with "two bits." To the average Easterner, and in fact, to many Southerners and Westerners, the term "two bits" would be without meaning, yet strange to say, in several of the interior states of the Union and notably in Missouri and California, people think of small values in "bits" and so express themselves. The Missourians brought the "bit" with them to California in 1849, and there it took root and there it remains to this day first to puzzle and afterward to take a firm grip upon the favor of the newcomer. Quite likely the early English colonists on the Atlantic seaboard continued to apply the term "bit" to fractional silver pieces, but, if they did, it was always followed by "penny," as, for instance, "three-penny bit," "sixpenny bit," etc; but it was only upon the conjunction of races in the lower Mississippi that the "bit," which stands for 12 1/2 cents, came into use as a measure of fixed value.

The Spanish milled dollar became the unit of money in the United States in 1792. At that time there happened to be coined under Spanish authority a piece of silver for Mexico representing the eighth part of a dollar. That became the "bit" of the mixed Southwesterners, who had already adopted the picayune, and in course of time all the way from New Orleans to Ft. Benton on the upper Missouri the "bit" which had no existence save in thought, was in more frequent use as a measure of value than any other. A thing was worth two bits, or four bits, or six bits, that is, 25, 50, or 75 cents. Dimes were unknown. Nickels had not been invented. Silver 3 and 5-cent pieces were curiosities, sometimes to be used as ornaments in the form of earring or ear-ring pendants or as spangles, but too valuable to be employed in trade as mediums of exchange.

Just as the term "shilling" has survived all changes in other parts of the country so the "bit" has survived notoriously in Missouri and California. It is common to hear a man using it. In the finest shops of St. Louis and San Francisco the finest lady accepts the statement that a fabric is worth "two bits" or "six bits" a yard, or waits for her "four bits" in change when she has invested "four bits" in a purchase. People use the term "two bits" and "six bits" these being the more familiar denominations—as unconscious of doing anything out of the ordinary as people in other parts of the country talk of dimes and dollars.

Henry James—Strange withal some of the terms of the whirligig of time; the priceless structure came down to the sound of lamentations not to say of execration and of gnashing of teeth, and went up again before cold and disbelieving, quite despairing eyes; in spite of which history appears to have decided once more to cherish it and give a new consecration.

Forests Are Well Protected

Forest fires are rapidly being reduced to a minimum. Combined cooperation of all citizens with the efforts of those directly interested, has brought about a marked reduction in the previously enormous annual fire toll. Hand in hand with co-operation have gone the organization of kindred interests and the perfection of hand-made mediums of fire prevention and fire detection. A few years ago forest fires were detected and fought as best conditions and crude weapons would permit; now men are stationed, throughout the dry months, on promontories constantly alert like the pilot of a ship, for any sign of danger, and detecting danger, are quick to transmit the news to the nearest medium of warfare. Telephones, patrolmen and fire finders are raising havoc with fires—under this eternal vigilance there are small chances for distraction so long as the camper, the farmer, the mountaineer and what not co-operate.

Last year was a distressingly dry year, yet the total damages and number of fires in 1915 were reduced. The dry season for the current season is near at hand again and even greater vigilance will be maintained.

Appropos to the trend of times toward fire prevention, the timbermen of Eastern Oregon, more especially Union and Wallowa counties, held a meeting in La Grande this week, and drafted immediate plans. Work done by the association in this territory is outlined in the annual report of the secretary, A. A. Wenzel. Here is his report:

Secretary's report for 1916 Fire season to Union-Wallowa Counties Fire Association La Grande, Oregon, May 2, 1916. We now have 129 members in good standing who represent an ownership of 317,913 acres of which sixteen are now members who joined during the 1915 season, representing an ownership of 5600 acres. Twelve of our former members did not pay their assessments for the past season, who represent an ownership of 8120 acres. A list of these was sent to the state Forester with the description of their holdings and the assessments due on this land have been placed on the tax rolls for collection from the present owners, together with all other timber land owners who are not members of this association, and who own timber lands which are subject to assessment.

LIVED OVER 100 YEARS



Abraham Wilcox, who has just died in Fort Worth, Declared that he was 115 years old. His sons and daughters say he was 107. Until his last illness he walked two miles every day, and never failed to read the daily newspapers. He came to the United States at the age of thirty, and worked on a farm near Rochester, N. Y. Later he owned a farm in Michigan. He spent many years at San Luis Potosi, but could not stand the revolutions and he went to Fort Worth.

in these two counties which are within the districts patrolled by us. After this money has been collected on the tax rolls, it will be remitted to us by State Forester Elliott. The assessment for the past season was one cent an acre for timbered land receipts from which amounted to \$2,878.65. We received \$631.10 from State Forester Elliott, covering the amount of assessments collected on the 1914 tax rolls.

The fire patrol force consisted of two County Wardens two Federal Wardens, and four regular association patrolmen. Three special patrolmen were hired for a short time, during the extremely dry season and while we had a great many fires to contend with. There were also seven voluntary wardens who acted without compensation. The total salary paid to patrolmen amounted to \$1,201.15.

The improvement work in Union county consisted of repairing the Mount Emily look-out station telephone line. The telephone line from Starkey to the Forest Reserve was also repaired and maintained in service under a co-operative arrangement between the Umatilla National Forest Service and the Whitman National Forest Service. Eleven miles of new trails were built in the upper Grande Ronde district, and the old trails were cleared of logs and underbrush so as to make them more passable. A fire finding instrument was installed on Mount Emily and this was used very effectively in the locating and reporting of fires.

In Wallowa county we constructed about one and a half miles of new telephone line which connects the patrolman's headquarters in District No 4 with the George Palmer company line, which now makes it possible for all patrolmen in the county to get in communication with the County Warden and other patrolmen in the various districts. Permanent headquarters for patrolman in District No 4 were constructed and new fences around the headquarters of all patrolmen were built in which to pasture their horses when not on duty. About four miles of wagon road were also constructed in this county and the old roads and trails were cleaned of underbrush and logs.

During the past season we had forty-seven fires within the districts patrolled by this Association. The causes of these fires were as follows: Lightning 9; hunters 5; sparks from railroad and logging engines 8; carelessness of campers 6; careless slash burning 5; and unknown 14. There were also several small fires along the O-W. R. & N. right of way but these were taken care of by the section crews and it is estimated that the total loss of merchantable timber resulting from these fires was \$62,000 board feet at a valuation of about \$1225 and a very considerable damage to the young growing timber destroyed. The cost of fighting these fires in extra labor out side of our regular patrolmen amounted to \$1437.51.

The past season was unusually dry, in fact, the driest one we have had since 1910. The snow fall during the winter of 1914 and 1915 was exceptionally light in the timbered areas and the timbered section became unusually dry early in the season. In fact, they became so extremely dry that the association considered it necessary for a safe guard to ask the Governor to suspend the hunting season the latter part of August until such time as the fall rains set in. Beyond question this was a necessary safe guard against fires. From the conditions on the grounds in the case of the fourteen fires given in the above report as "of unknown" origin, it would appear to be more than probable that some of these fires were caused by the carelessness of people in the woods for an outing. Just as soon as we received sufficient rains, which was about Sept. 13th, we recommended to the governor that the hunting season be opened again. About thirty of the total forty seven fires occurred prior to August 25th, and these were taken care of promptly by our patrolmen with no additional cost for extra labor, which speaks well for the efficiency and prompt action of our patrolmen. However, between August 25th and Sept. 10th, the balance of these fires occurred and practically all within a few days of each other, which made it a very hard situation for our County Wardens to handle. These fires broke out in various localities and it required from 4 to 50 additional men in each crew to handle them.

Under conditions that existed in the woods during the summer of 1915, there is every reason to conclude that the efficient services of County wardens and their patrolmen, together with the very efficient co-operation and assistance of State Forester Elliott and our Governor, together with the assistance given and the co-operation with our Association by the National Forest supervisors, it would appear that we were exceptionally fortunate in controlling the forest fires and reducing them to a minimum under existing conditions during the past season. We are also pleased to report that the citizens in these two counties are now co-operating with us. Respectfully submitted,

A. A. WENZEL Secretary.

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