

BENNETT DESCRIBES THE TUMALO PROJECT

(The Oregonian.)

BY ADDISON BENNETT.

TUMALO, July 1.—(Special.)—When the Legislature of 1913 appropriated \$450,000 for the taking over and completion of the Tumalo Irrigation project, a great many people were skeptical as to the wisdom of the action. But the settlers on the lands, then called the Columbia Southern segregation by some and the Laidlaw project by others, had certainly a kick coming, and that kick was as much aimed at the state for the dereliction of the State Land Board as at the promoter who had taken the settler's money for water which was never delivered and never could be delivered until a new ditch system was installed.

It has been estimated by the state engineer and other professionals that something under \$450,000 would pay the \$59,000 for the improved farms on the reservoir site, build the diversion dams and canals, put in the reservoir dams, build the feed canals and the necessary main laterals for the complete and perfect irrigation of the 22,500 acres under the project and that the work could be completed before the first day of January 1915. In fact, it was provided in the appropriation bill that any of the money left on that date should revert automatically to the state. The funds were to be available on the first day of June, 1913, and just prior to that the Desert Land Board appointed Olaf Laurgaard as engineer and superintendent of the project. Shortly after June 1 he began to assemble a plant and started to work, having 19 months to complete the job. He reported to the Legislature in 1915, or to them through the Desert Land Board, that the work was completed, and presumably, every portion of the 22,500 acres could be watered as soon as settlers came to take the land, and that the work had been done within the appropriation.

Delayed Recovery Forecast.

It ought to be told, for the benefit of those who never knew or have forgotten, that the project was initiated, planned and completed under the Carey act, and that the price fixed for the irrigable land was \$40 an acre, and the upkeep was to be the actual cost. The tracts were in units of 40 acres. These tracts were surveyed and the irrigable and non-irrigable land in each fixed. For the latter the settler was to pay \$2.50 per acre. The initial payment for each tract was to be 10 per cent, the balance in nine equal annual installments, with six per cent interest. The enthusiasts and optimists said the state would get back all of its money, with interest by the close of 1926, or thereabouts.

It might be said right here and now that the state will undoubtedly get back every dollar and with interest. That is just about as sure as anything controlled by states, corporations or individuals can be. But if I were asked to fix a date prior to which the state would get back the last nickel from that appropriation I would fix it as the last day of 1946—provided everything goes just as fine as the optimists expect. But as a bet I think about 1950 would be a fair proposition at even money.

But to accomplish even these results, and to make the project the ideal spot and the land owners the prosperous people they ought to be, the Legislature ought promptly next winter to extend the term of payments far beyond the 10 year period, with but a small initial payment and nothing but interest for the first three to five years. It is preposterous to think that the class of settlers wanted on the land can stand a payment of \$6.75 per acre for the second year, \$6.14 the third year, etc. Nothing can be made on the land the first year, very little the second year. Why exact payments that cannot be earned from the land? To do so is but a warning for poor men to keep away from the project and a hint that the settler on the Tumalo project is expected to get away from and neglect his land while he goes off to work for wages to pay fees into a treasury that is in no present need of the money. That will not build up the prosperous settlement that we have a right to expect on those splendid lands and under that fine irrigation system. As to security, the best that the state can have is the man and his family at work improving his land and making headway towards prosperity—making a home that he and the state will be proud of. The 10 year plan is antiquated. The Government has long since abandoned it, why should we show our ignorance by adhering to it?

Easier Terms Suggested.

A far better plan would be to go to the most extreme and exact only the 10 per cent, or even five per cent down, then, to those actually on the land not even the interest for two or three years, then a small but slowly advancing payment to complete the payments in 25 years. The chances are that three out of five would pay up before maturity. That would tend to keep each tract on the upgrade all the time, and would eventually build up on the Tumalo project one of the finest and most prosperous communities in Oregon.

The people of Oregon have a right to know the conditions here. I have

heard all over the state reports that the project is a failure, that the people who are here are not making a living, that many have left in disgust, broken in pores and cursing the state, the land, the climate and even themselves. Not a syllable of that is true. Practically none have left, and the one or two that have gone away did so for reasons of a personal or family nature and left with regret. There are today 250 40 acre tracts actually alive, water is being used upon a cropped area of 5940 acres, upon which there are living over 250 people, embracing a little less than 100 landowners. Of these I think it is well within the bounds of truth to say that 75 per cent are making more than a living, and 20 per cent are holding their own while of the 75 per cent who are making money fully 25 per cent are laying the foundation for a fortune. How many old irrigation wrecks have been so thoroughly rehabilitated in 18 months?

It has been reported that the big reservoir will not hold water. In that report there is more than a grain of truth and the taxpayers of Oregon have a right to know the facts. When water was turned into this storage reservoir, which has a capacity of 20,000 acres-feet, in the winter of 1915, it was found that it leaked through fissures in the bottom. The land which it was proposed to cover with water had been tested by both Government and state engineers and pronounced satisfactory, so there can be no blame fastened upon anyone. But it would not hold water. As it happened there was no rush of new settlers and consequently the upper or small reservoir has been sufficient to furnish the landowners all the water they needed or asked for and quite a lot more could have been supplied. In the meantime Mr. Wallace, the gentleman in charge of the project, has been busy in searching for, finding and plugging these fissures through which the water escaped, with the result that there is now an area of about 30 acres covered with water, and this is being augmented almost daily. Both Mr. Wallace and the inspection engineer of the Land Board, Mr. Dubois, are confident that it will only take a couple of years to remedy all troubles from leakage, and that purchasers can have all the water they want as rapidly as the land is sold.

I have heard it stated that Mr. Laurgaard left the project only partially finished, that he made many egregious errors, that the reservoir leakage was due to his faulty engineering. The latter statement is not true. He did make mistakes. But he made less than on any irrigation project I ever went over. He did the work economically, without a tinge of graft. His mistake was principally in trying to do too much work for the money he had and in building ditches far out where there has been no land sold. You see the land in the project is scattered over an area of 12 miles north and south by nine miles east and west, say 100 square miles, or 64,000 acres, while only 22,500 was to be watered. Now if he had been given the time to make a topographical map of the entire area, and the \$75,000 to it with, he would have more than likely escaped some of the errors he committed—and the job would have been finished probably some time next year.

Now, I am neither attempting to censure Mr. Laurgaard or to give him undue praise, but I will say that like all human beings his foresight is better than his foresight. But the job was done. The state has paid for it and owns it. And I will venture to say, after considering some dozens of irrigation projects that I have seen in my brief life, that the work was done better, more expeditiously and more economically than four out of five of the projects done under the direction of the U. S. Reclamation Service.

I think the state was fortunate in getting Mr. Laurgaard's services but I think it was more fortunate in getting the services of Mr. Wallace, who has been in charge of the project since Mr. Laurgaard turned it over to the state. Fred N. Wallace went to work in the project under the regime of Mr. Laidlaw, whose ineptness and devious business methods, winked at by the Desert Land Board, got the people on the project, as well as the state authorities, into a mess that smelled to heaven. Mr. Wallace was about the only one connected with the Laidlaw epoch who came through with the respect and confidence of this community. He has been on the project ever since, save a brief period in 1911. He was one of Mr. Laurgaard's chief assistants and knows the project and the people under it better than anybody else. He is a tireless worker, a man of great versatility, never has any trouble with anybody, the water users and their families believed in him and respect him for his sterling manhood, for they know he is "square" and that in cases of trouble of any sort he flies to their relief day or night.

Community is Contented.

Under the leadership of Mr. Wallace there is here the most peaceful and contented irrigation community I ever saw. Of course he is backed up by the good people of the town (now Tumalo, formerly Laidlaw, but the people hereabouts wouldn't willingly call a dog by the name of Laidlaw.) First I guess ought to be mentioned the ubiquitous W. D. Barnes, formerly in the banking business here. Now he is a professional trout fisher and peace maker, and one of the chiefest of the Central Oregon boosters. Indeed, Crook

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county without Barnes would—well, I hope this section will escape the calamity of his departure for many long years. His loss would be a blow to the entire state.

But I have not the space to go over the names of the fine people here. Many people in Oregon know them nearly as well as I do, for they are ever entertaining somebody, either simply individuals or by the score or hundred as a community or through their fine commercial club. It ought to be said that the townsite, on the west bank of the Deschutes river, about five miles north of Bend, is one of the finest in Oregon. It is not a large place but everybody here seems to be doing well.

The land under the project was all at one time pretty well overgrown with junipers, with now and then a pine. It is a rolling country, even hilly. The soil is a gravelly loam, the roads are always good, domestic well water is obtainable at about 50 feet, the altitude is around 2000 feet, it is 155 miles from Portland to its nearest railroad station, Deschutes which is three miles to the east. Deschutes is situated on the Oregon Trunk Railway, which is a feeder for the S. P. & S., running from Fallbridge, Washington, to Bend, Oregon.

There are no bananas grown here, and I never saw one or near the project anything resembling an orange grove. Nor do the people of this section give sleighing parties in June, skating tournaments in July or ice carnivals in August. The climate is not greatly different from that of Harney, Malheur, Klamath or Lake counties. The growing season is short, but nature compensates for that by making it rapid. Good apples and plums are grown here and every thrifty settler has a family orchard. Garden stuff of almost all sorts, with the exception of tomatoes, grow and yield well, potatoes of fine quality give big yields every year, corn is being grown to a limited extent and does well, wheat, barley and oats of the best quality give big returns, alfalfa produces about four tons to the acre—those facts will give the reader an idea of the situation. As to grain there was sold last year 13,000 bushels of wheat and oats, and far more than that fed on the farms.

Sheep are Introduced.

As a rule the people are working into the dairy business, and with the dairy cows are coming the pigs, bees and sheep. Mr. Wallace advocates the keeping of sheep and many have followed his advice and have demonstrated that the returns from a good ewe are about \$10 a year. When the time comes that every 40 acre tract has 25 to 30 fine ewes, a dozen dairy cows, a few hogs, several stands

of bees, a lot of fowls, a few fat steers and some heifers coming along with an abundance of feed for all and a good garden growing—why a family so situated on the Tumalo project would be better off than a Portland landlord in good times. And the best part of it is there are a number of the owners and occupants of the Tumalo lands in precisely that fix today, with a nice bank account besides, people who came here practically broke a few years ago.

Any intelligent man who is not afraid to buckle down and work can do well here, better than on most irrigated tracts. If he has a family so much the better. In going over the project on this trip—and I rode over 75 miles through it, so you see I am not speaking second-hand—I noted two families of eight children and one of seven children are making a fine living, clothing and educating the children of school age, and rapidly improving their places. Yet they came here with mighty little more than enough to make their initial land payments. Will you believe me when I tell you I found their houses neat and tidy, the children clean and neatly clothed and children contented and happy? Then will you still believe men when I tell you all three families were of Scandinavian birth or parentage?

Tumalo and the Tumalo project were and are worth while. Oregon need never be ashamed of the action of the Legislature of 1913. It will take a long time to get that \$450,000 back into the state treasury, but it will be returned without any further appropriation. Of that there is no doubt in my mind, no doubt in the mind of Mr. Wallace. But I do hope every candidate for the Legislature will read this article, and when the 1917 session opens in Salem next January let every member remember that to make the Tumalo project one of the most successful in the country the initial payment should be reduced, there should be no interest demanded from those actually living on and improving their lands for three to five years, and the term of payment should be lengthened to 20 or 25 years.

For farm land loans see J. Ryan service.—Adv.

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