"Enlightened selfishness": Montana's Sun River project

Judith Kay Fabry
Iowa State University

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“Enlightened selfishness”: Montana’s Sun River project

Fabry, Judith Kay, Ph.D.

Iowa State University, 1993
"Enlightened selfishness":
Montana’s Sun River project

by

Judith Kay Fabry

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Friends and mentors warned me against choosing a thesis topic that required doing most of my research in distant places. Though their advice was wise, and I would now repeat it to other graduate students, I remained committed to studying a federal reclamation project in the West. Fortunately, two institutions found my topic worthy of summer research grants: the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University and the Montana Historical Society. Without their support this work could not have been written. Another grant, from the James Jerome Hill Reference Library, made possible a fruitful week in St. Paul, using materials at the Hill library and the Minnesota State Historical Society. Finally, a semester's support from the Robert and Elizabeth Garst Foundation allowed me to finish reading forty years of microfilmed newspapers, the most tedious but essential part of my research.

Though he didn't know it, Richard Lowitt, my major professor, was the rock to which I clung during the days and nights when I wondered whether there really was a thesis in that mountain of notes and photocopies. Throughout the entire process, he gave me complete latitude to approach the project in my own way and at my own pace. Only once, when he may have sensed that I was getting bogged down in unnecessary research,
did he remind me that I shouldn’t make a career of writing a dissertation. His patience and unflagging confidence helped me to believe in myself.

Friends from Iowa State who graduated before me also provided much needed mentorship and psychological support. Special thanks to Valarie Grim, Anne Effland, Maureen Ogle, and Suzanne Schenken, who always seemed to come through with a letter or phone call just when I needed encouragement. Thanks also to Carole Kennedy, another friend from Iowa State, who helped me meet program deadlines even when I was a thousand miles from campus and smoothed the way to completing graduation requirements.

Finally, the contribution and patience of my husband, Kerry, must be recognized. He was the inspiration for my entering graduate school and for my decision to go on to a doctoral program. Without complaining he endured my summers away from home, and, though the time I needed to complete the research for my thesis probably seemed endless, he never, even jokingly, asked when I was going to finish. For his scholarly sensitivity and personal support, I am grateful beyond words.
CHAPTER ONE

THE LAND AND PEOPLE OF THE PORT SHAW DIVISION

Along this wide level country the Missouri pursued its winding course, filled with water to its even and grassy banks, while, about four miles above it was joined by a large river, flowing from the northwest through a valley three miles in width, and distinguished by the timber which adorned its shores.  

Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1805

With this entry in the journal of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Montana's Sun River became part of the historical record. Meriwether Lewis made his observation near the present-day city of Great Falls. He noted that the river flowing from the northwest, which he believed was the one the Indians called the Medicine, was clear and appeared never to overflow its banks. This impression led him to speculate that the Rocky Mountains, from which it flowed, must give up their snow "reluctantly," and must seldom be "drenched by very heavy rains."  

The river Lewis observed, which has been known as the Pile of Rocks, the Medicine, and most recently, the Sun, rises on the Continental Divide, some eighty miles south of the U.S.-Canadian border.  

From this source, the North Fork of the Sun flows south through rough and timbered country, then turns rather sharply east as it joins the South Fork on the
eastern front of the Rockies. Dropping to an elevation of about 3500 feet, it flows sixty-five miles through the western edge of the Great Plains, creating a valley that rises rather steeply on either side to level benches and gently rolling plateaus that are punctuated by isolated flat-topped buttes. (See Figure 1.1)

It is the lower reaches of the Sun, the last forty miles before it joins the Missouri, with which this study is concerned, for it is this part of the valley that in historical time humans have most utilized. This study focuses on a federal reclamation project that was built along the Sun River in the early twentieth century to divert its water for irrigated agriculture. More specifically, it is about the Fort Shaw division of that project, which lies along the south side of the lower Sun River valley.

The century that separated the visit of Lewis and Clark and construction of the Sun River project changed the character of the river and the land through which it flowed. Beginning in the 1860s, wood-cutting in the foothills of the Rockies had increased the amount of run-off the river carried, causing it at times to become muddy and to overflow its banks. By the 1880s, the timber at the mouth of the river was gone and the budding city of Great Falls stood in its place. Scattered ranches dotted the land along the river. By 1900,
Figure 1.1. The valley of the Sun River in central Montana
the work of white Americans to change the face of the land of central Montana was well under way.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the business interests of Great Falls sought to change the land still further, to encourage economic growth. The average annual precipitation in this part of Montana is only thirteen inches, and usually less than seven inches come during the growing season of May to September. This factor had limited agricultural development near Great Falls. Since the 1870s, ranchers had used the land along the Sun for livestock-raising. By the early 1900s, some people were having considerable success raising wheat and oats on dry land, but their experiments were risky and they had to be prepared for years of failure. After Congress passed the Reclamation Act of 1902, which made possible federally subsidized irrigation of semi-arid land, the business interests of Great Falls seized the opportunity to change the course of agriculture in this part of central Montana. They lobbied—with success—to have a federal reclamation project built on the Sun River.

This study explores the social and economic consequences of the Sun River project. It focuses on the Fort Shaw division during the period from 1910 through 1940, the time in which a generation of farmers took up the land, made pragmatic adjustments to the agricultural structure the Reclamation Service had imposed, and established a niche for themselves in
the local economy. The year 1940 marks the end of the division's developmental stage and the onset of early maturi-

ty.

Early advocates of reclamation claimed that irrigated agriculture would stabilize agricultural production and create strong rural communities. This study tests that hypothesis. The economic record of the Fort Shaw division gives insight into whether irrigation stabilized agricultural production, but measuring a strong rural community is less straightforward. Two approaches will be taken. One examines the composite community of the Fort Shaw division and the nearby dryland agricultural community of Cascade. By comparing the development and permanence of social and civic organizations, their leaders, and the issues with which they were concerned, one may make broad generalizations about how the two communities were similar and different. The second approach involves a study of settler persistence in the irrigated and dryland communities. Within the limits of the data available to the author, this approach provides a quantitative comparison of the two communities and the stability of their populations. These analyses, then, permit some evaluation of how well federal reclamation fulfilled the ideals of its proponents. It also assesses whether the experience of settlers in a federal irrigation project was essentially different from the experience of dryland farmers and ranchers in the same area.
The purpose of this opening chapter is to set the scene, to describe the land, its previous uses, and the way in which the Reclamation Service adapted it for settlement. It also introduces the people who came to the Fort Shaw division and sketches some of their early experiences. Finally, this chapter briefly summarizes the historical period during which the people who settled in the division worked to build paying farms and comfortable homes.

Low annual precipitation is the factor which most limited settlement of the Sun River valley by white Americans. While the average annual precipitation for the central plains of Montana is 13.0 inches, the average at Fort Shaw between 1867 and 1935 was 10.9 inches. The driest year, 1874, had only 4.2 inches. The maximum recorded, eighteen inches, was in 1927. In eighteen of the years from 1910 to 1935, Fort Shaw received less than thirteen inches of precipitation.\(^4\)

In the vicinity of the Sun River valley, warm chinook winds moderate winter conditions that are severe in other parts of the state. While snowfall may be heavy and may begin early in the fall, the ground often remains bare in winter, with snow melting quickly under the effects of a chinook. The mean annual snowfall is less than thirty inches and the mean minimum winter temperature is about fifteen degrees. The growing season extends from the last frost in early- to mid-May to the first frost in mid-September. Summer temperatures
are moderate but hot winds may occur in June and July. Summer hailstorms are not uncommon.\textsuperscript{5}

Countless generations of native Americans had adapted their lives to the climate of the Sun River drainage before white Americans began to develop what they considered to be its untapped potential. The foothills of the Rockies and the grass-covered benchlands north of the Sun River, home to many kinds of game and vast herds of buffalo, were valuable hunting grounds for native Americans. The Sun River valley was a thoroughfare between these western hunting grounds and the Judith and Musselshell hunting grounds east of the Missouri River. During the seventeenth century, the Flathead-Salish-Kutenai group of tribes occupied the Sun River drainage, but warfare throughout the first half of the eighteenth century gave the Blackfeet control of the area. They maintained their supremacy until the mid-nineteenth century, when they could no longer resist the force of the U.S. Army and the encroachment of white settlement. The Blackfoot nation, with a population of more than 10,000, had dominated territory covering 32,000 square miles, extending from the Milk River on the north (approximately the U.S.-Canadian boundary) to the Sun River on the south.\textsuperscript{6}

Under the terms of an 1855 treaty with the Blackfeet, the United States established an Indian agency about one-half mile upriver on the Sun from the present-day town of Sun River. In
1858 the agent, Colonel A.J. Vaughn, who intended to teach agriculture to the Blackfeet, began experimenting to determine what kinds of fruits, vegetables, and small grains would be suited to the soil and climate. He failed, however, to interest the natives in the idea and in 1866 the Blackfeet burned the agency buildings.\textsuperscript{7}

Beginning in the 1860s the Mullan Road, which connected Fort Benton and present-day Helena, followed the Sun River valley for some distance. Freighters carried gold from the mines near Helena to Fort Benton, the westernmost point of steamboat navigation on the Missouri River, and returned with supplies for the miners. By 1861 stockmen also had begun to move into the foothill area of the Sun River valley and the Indians actively protested their encroachment. The increased white presence in the area prompted the Army in 1867 to establish a military post four and one-half miles above the Sun River crossing on the Mullan Road, a site where settlement had already begun.\textsuperscript{8}

The post was first known as Camp Reynolds, but within a few months the name was changed to Fort Shaw, in honor of Colonel Robert G. Shaw of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, a regiment of enlisted, free, black men. Shaw had been killed in action in 1863. Fort Shaw became the Regimental Headquarters of the Military District of Montana and provided protec-
tion for travelers and settlers until 1892. In that year the facility became an Indian school, which operated until 1910.9

In 1870 Colonel John Gibbon, in charge of the 7th Infantry, took command of Fort Shaw. Gibbon wasted no time in putting his soldiers to work to divert water from the Sun to irrigate the post's garden. The ditch they dug was considered a marvel of engineering skill and was the largest in the vicinity. Water from this ditch system irrigated the garden and wild hay land west of the Fort until closure of the Indian school in 1910.10

With the military presence at Fort Shaw insuring their safety, more settlers came to the Sun River valley. During the 1870s, Indians and white men hunted to extinction the buffalo herds that had dominated the grasslands. Stockraisers found that cattle fed on the abundant grass growing in the river valley and adjacent benchlands, short buffalo and gramma grass, and a wheat grass the ranchers called "blue-joint," brought premium prices on the eastern market, so cattle soon replaced the buffalo. Between 1870 and 1874 Robert S. Ford and Tom Dunn brought in several thousand head of Shorthorn cattle from Colorado, California, Oregon, and Washington and ran them in the valley. The Ford-Dunn partnership also had sheep on their Sun River range, a livestock combination that became common in Montana Territory. Also during the 1870s, A.G. Flowerree brought herds of Texas cattle and Shorthorns
from Oregon to the valley; Conrad Kohrs brought in the first Herefords. At their ranch headquarters along the river, these people also built simple irrigation systems to use the water of the Sun for their gardens and hay crops.

Many people saw the possibilities for irrigated farming on the benchlands north of the river. In 1884, a group of investors from Helena began construction of a canal to divert water from the North Fork of the Sun and use it to water the benchlands. They soon abandoned the project when they realized the extent of the work that would be required. Five years later, H.M. Wilson, of the United States Geological Survey, surveyed canal lines to cover the same tracts. His party also made detailed surveys of ten reservoir sites in the vicinity. In 1893, stockholders of a private corporation considered developing the benchland irrigation system, but abandoned their plans in the financial disorder of that year. Still another group, the Montana Carey Land Act Board, surveyed and examined the project in 1901 but chose not to proceed with it. The following year, a number of settlers who had filed desert land claims on the benchlands organized the Kilraven Cooperative Canal Company with the purpose of reclaiming their land according to the terms of the law. However, they abandoned the work in 1903 when the newly established Reclamation Service withdrew from settlement the remaining public land on the bench. The Service wished to investigate the
feasibility of establishing a federal reclamation project on this land. As a result, the settlers who had made desert land claims received extensions of time to fulfill the irrigation requirements of the land law.\textsuperscript{14}

Motivated by what they considered to be the economic assets of having a federal reclamation project in the vicinity, the business community of Great Falls was largely responsible for securing authorization of the Sun River project. A campaign that began soon after the Great Falls Commercial Club learned in 1903 of the investigations of the Reclamation Service, ended on February 26, 1906, when the Secretary of the Interior authorized construction of the project and made an allotment of $500,000 to begin work on the first phase, the Fort Shaw division.\textsuperscript{15} (See Figure 1.2.)

While the vast majority of the land that would make up the Sun River project lay north of the river, the Fort Shaw division was south of it. It comprised only 16,000 acres of the 300,000 which the Reclamation Service proposed to irrigate in the project. The Fort Shaw division appealed to officials in the Reclamation Service who hoped to provide Congress with early evidence of the efficiency of federally subsidized irrigation. The Reclamation Act had been hotly debated and many Easterners remained unconvinced that the entire nation would benefit from what seemed to be a program to benefit the West. The purpose of federal reclamation was to create homes
for Americans who could not afford them in other parts of the nation, a place for young farmers or displaced and discontented laborers to make a living. By skillfully managing the soil and water resources of the semi-arid West, federal reclamation would bring into production land that otherwise been had useless and give Americans an opportunity to improve their lives.16

Because the Fort Shaw division was small, the water supply was sufficient, and the estimated cost for construction of the canal system was only thirty dollars per acre, it seemed to be a model for early reclamation work. Especially attractive was the fact that until the project was authorized, most of the land of the Fort Shaw division had been part of the Fort Shaw military reservation and, therefore, not open to homesteading. This eliminated the necessity of the government having to purchase or appease existing private interests and meant the cost of land to settlers, excluding the cost of the irrigation system, would be only the ten-cent per acre fee for government homesteads. In June, 1906, Congress approved opening the former military reservation to settlement under the provisions of the Reclamation Act.17

At Fort Shaw, as at other federal projects, the Reclamation Service adopted the view that reclamation was basically an exercise in resource management. To that end, the Service planned the size and make-up of farm units and townsites,
devised standard procedures for irrigated agriculture, and expected settlers who accepted and adopted these parameters to achieve economic success. The quintessence of reclamation planning was the small farm unit. Practice showed that the average farm family engaged in intensive irrigation agriculture could handle little more than forty acres of land. More important, small farms meant denser settlement with increased opportunities for social interaction and cooperation among farmers. In the Fort Shaw division the engineers laid out 206 farm units containing an average of 88 total acres, with 60 acres irrigable. The size of farm units ranged from 40 acres to 160 acres. Usually about half of the land in a 160-acre unit was non-irrigated and was intended for use as pasture. While the farms were not equal in size, the engineers sought to make them as nearly equal in value as possible.¹⁸

Soil science as a profession did not exist in 1906, so there were no experts to advise the engineers about the quality of the agricultural medium they parceled out into farm units. When Lewis and Clark traveled through the Sun River valley, they made notes in their journal about the soil they walked upon. Some eight miles west of where the Fort Shaw division of the Sun River project would be located, they noted, "The bottom continued low, level, and extensive; the plains too are level; but the soil of neither is fertile, as it consists of a light-colored earth, intermixed with a large
One hundred years later, the engineer in charge of the Sun River project was more optimistic about the soil in the river valley, which probably had been enhanced by intermittent floods during the previous fifty years. In 1910 he reported that, "A large per cent of the soil in this region is sandy loam, which is well drained by a subsoil of gravel....The river bottom lands are mostly alluvium....The land is highly productive...."

Nearly twenty years later the soil scientists would arrive on the scene and confirm what the farmers had already learned by harsh experience. During 1926 they worked with the farmers to analyze the soil of the Sun River project and classify it according to productivity. While the land on the benches north of the river was generally of a productive quality, the land in the Fort Shaw division was much poorer. The scientists found that in some areas the silt loam was thinly deposited on top of gravel, and in other places it was on top of clay. The former drained excessively and the latter poorly. In one portion of the division the soil was so heavy that water stood on it in the low spots. Of the 13,624 acres included in the division in 1926, the soil scientists classified only 11 percent as being highly productive, or Class 1, soil. Of the remaining land, 25 percent was Class 2, 30 percent was Class 3, 5 percent Class 4, and 29 percent Class 5, land which could not be cultivated.
Settlers who took up land in the Fort Shaw division during the first few years of its operation were, in effect, buying pigs in pokes. As prospective settlers looked over the farm units the engineers had laid out, those who had farming experience were probably better able to choose a tract with good topsoil. However, only a handful of the people who came to the Fort Shaw division had experience with irrigation, which would have given them the knowledge of other important soil conditions to look for. In any case, the soil condition that promoted either slow or fast drainage was hidden several feet below the surface and probably was not a factor that prospective settlers often considered. In general, the land at the west end of the division was better suited for irrigated agriculture than that in the central and southern parts.

Besides laying out the farm units, planners also provided for towns in the Fort Shaw division, evenly spaced along the river. The town of Sun River already existed at the eastern end of the division. At the western end, the planners laid out Simms. Approximately halfway between Sun River and Simms, near the old fort, they located Fort Shaw. In federal reclamation policy, farm villages were important. If they desired, settlers could live in the village nearest their farm unit and commute to their fields. If they chose to live on their farm, children would have no more than three miles to travel to school. Easy access to these villages and their amenities
would encourage the development of strong rural communities and would eliminate the isolation farm families so often complained about.

When the Reclamation Service began planning the Sun River project, the town of Sun River was already well established; it is one of the oldest communities in Montana. The town started as a stage stop where the Mullan Road crossed the Sun River. By 1887 its residents aspired, unsuccessfully, to have Sun River become the seat of Cascade County. It was the center for a rural population that in 1900 numbered about seven hundred. With a store, a hotel, a saloon, a school, and a church, Sun River had served the needs of ranchers and Indian school employees for many years.

Unlike Sun River, Fort Shaw and Simms were 160-acre government-planned townsites, with eight main streets radiating from a central square, like spokes in a wheel. After appraisal of the town lots, the Reclamation Service established minimum prices and offered them for sale at a public auction. To promote compact development, the Reclamation Service offered the lots in only one quarter of the townsites for sale at a time. After most of those lots were sold, they appraised and opened the next quarter. The Service encouraged commercial development by making the purchase of town lots open to anyone, not just settlers who had taken up farm units. Central wells provided water for both Fort Shaw and Simms.
Although the Fort Shaw division opened in May of 1908, only thirty-five settlers filed on claims that year. The crop year was already too far advanced for people to get a good start. Instead, most people arrived during the next two years. With few exceptions they were American citizens who had lived in the Midwest or in Montana, in small towns or on farms. Origins are known for 175 heads of households who came to the Fort Shaw division prior to 1916. Of these, 43 percent came from the Mississippi River valley states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. The largest number, twenty-four, came from Iowa. Montana was the state of origin for 25 percent of the settlers whose backgrounds are known. Nineteen heads of households came from the Great Falls area and twelve came from the Bitterroot valley, one of the first areas of Montana to be irrigated. Twelve percent of the heads of households came from the Great Plains states of Nebraska, Kansas, North and South Dakota. The remaining 20 percent of the settlers whose origins are known came from all parts of the United States, four European countries, and Canada. Of one hundred heads of household who were in the division by 1910, the median age was thirty-five. The youngest individual who took up a claim by 1910 was twenty and the oldest was seventy.24

By the end of 1915, settlers had claimed 164 farm units. Of those, 127 were experienced in farming and 48 were not.
Only twenty-five had previous experience with irrigation. The ratio of experienced to inexperienced settlers changed rather dramatically during the first six years of the division's operation as some first-comers realized their inability to succeed and relinquished their claims. In 1912, the first year for which data are available, settlers had claimed 180 farm units. Ninety-eight were inexperienced farmers and eighty-two were experienced; eighteen of the experienced people had practiced irrigated farming.

The Reclamation Service recommended a settler should have a minimum of a thousand dollars to begin with, but no system existed to assure that anyone was financially qualified to take up a claim. Ignoring the basic capital investment needed to build a house and barn, fence the land, and break ground, all concerned seemed to think that diligence and thrift could compensate for any lack of money. The engineers had laid out a number of forty-acre units near Simms, expecting that they would not be taken up until the railroad reached the town, and then by laborers from Great Falls who would remain employed and commute to their jobs. To the surprise of Reclamation Service officials, settlers who came to the Fort Shaw division took up these small units first, an indication of the limited amount of resources many of them had.

When a settler filed a claim on a farm unit, he or she accepted certain financial responsibilities. In addition to
the ten-cent per acre homestead fee, settlers also had to pay for the irrigation system the government had built. At Fort Shaw this cost was thirty dollars per acre, a very reasonable amount to pay for irrigated farm land in 1910. Upon taking up a claim, the settler signed a contract to repay this cost in ten equal annual payments, with no interest charged. Finally, one other cost applied to land in a reclamation project, that of operating and maintaining the irrigation system (called O&M). For settlers who arrived before 1913, the cost of O&M was fifty cents per acre per year. This cost was not fixed and Reclamation Service employees told settlers who came during these early years that the cost of O&M probably would go down to thirty-five cents by 1911. Not surprisingly, this cost went up, not down, and continuing increases became a sore point for the settlers.

The typical settler arrived in the spring of the year and lived in temporary quarters while leveling and breaking a few acres to plant in wheat and oats. The irrigation works the government provided brought water to each farm unit, but distributing the water on the unit was left to the farmer. While clearing primarily involved simple hard labor, leveling of the land required more skill and was extremely important to future success. Most settlers spent the summer building a dwelling, barn, and fences. Since the nearest lumber yard was in Vaughn, at least ten and perhaps twenty miles away, depending
on one's location in the project, hauling building materials added considerable time to the process of construction. When the first season's crops were harvested, they usually were not enough to feed the stock the settler owned, much less provide a surplus for sale. People depended on their savings or worked somewhere for wages so they could buy food for themselves and their stock during the first winter. During the second year they broke more ground and gave more attention to better agricultural practices. With savings exhausted and payments for construction and O&M coming due at the end of the season, a surplus to sell was imperative.

The experiences of the Joe Crepeau family are typical of many of the early settlers of the Fort Shaw division. In 1907, after learning that the Reclamation Service was offering opportunity for employment, the Crepeaus came to the Sun River valley from Minnesota. Crepeau and his wife were both in their early thirties and had five children under the age of seven. Crepeau and his brother secured a contract to do grading and construct laterals for the Fort Shaw division. While he worked for the Reclamation Service, the family lived in a tent near the Sun.

After completing his contract, in the summer of 1908 Crepeau filed on a 168-acre unit with 66 acres of irrigable land. He broke forty acres in the fall and sowed oats, which yielded a respectable thirty bushels per acre the next year.
However, the cash income he received from the oats did not cover the expenses of planting. In 1910 he sowed twenty acres in alfalfa and twenty in grain. A hailstorm in July reduced the grain yield to twenty bushels per acre. Using the grain for feed for his livestock, he had no cash income that year. In 1911 he had forty-eight acres in alfalfa and harvested enough to feed his own stock. The family of seven lived on Crepeau’s wages from outside employment, a garden, and sixty dollars from the sale of poultry and dairy products. By that time he had spent $3400 for buildings and other permanent improvements to his property. In 1912, finding no market for his alfalfa hay, he worked away from home and sold most of his livestock to make his construction and O&M payments. The next year the Crepeaus sold what was left of their livestock and equipment, returned to Minnesota, and began truck farming. However, they did not sell their farm unit near Simms. Exactly when they returned to the Fort Shaw division is not known, but they were back on their land by the early 1920s and two of the sons were still in the division in the late-1930s. 

Though his children were young, Joe Crepeau had a family to help with the work of improving the claim. This availability of labor made it possible for him to work elsewhere and earn money so that they could make the payments to the government. Although most settlers in the Fort Shaw division came as families, or at least as couples, some single men and women
also took up claims. Establishing a paying farm was especially difficult for these people. W.S. Kirlin, a single man from Illinois, took up a forty-acre farm unit in July, 1910, but he did not move onto it until fall. The filing fee of $150 had exhausted his savings and made it necessary for him to work for wages for a while. In the fall he fenced his land and prepared for spring work. His crops in 1911 were oats and hay, but, he reported, "...by living on the place all the time I did not have enough money to make a payment and pay expenses having to buy seed and paying other bills." In spite of another crop of oats and hay, by 1912 he was unable to raise the cash to make his payments to the government. Kirlin had trouble finding a market for his small crops. He said, "...we have to depend on people coming in or some one that did not raise a crop to sell our grain to unless we hauled it 50 miles to the [F]alls which would take 2 days which of course it is a big expense....I could not sell chickens or eggs for cash[.] I have had at one time enough stuff to sell to make a payment...but could not find a buyer for cash." Kirlin lived alone on his forty acres until his death in 1935. He had selected one of the poorest farm units. The soil classification in 1926 identified only seven of his forty acres as being productive land. Virtually nothing is known of his life after 1914, when he bought some dairy cows, but given his land and his circumstances, it must have been difficult.
George and Lucille Tuck provide an example of a couple in their mid-thirties who came to the Fort Shaw division with better financial resources than either the Crepeaus or Kirlin, but by 1913 they were little better off. They arrived in January of 1910, with their two young daughters and George’s parents, who also took up a claim. They had previously lived in Hamilton, Montana, in the Bitterroot valley, and were attracted to the Sun River project by the promotional literature the Reclamation Service distributed. The Tucks took up an eighty-acre farm unit near Simms, all of which was irrigable. Within two years they made $5,440 worth of improvements to their farm, an amount far greater than the average of $2,000 that most settlers had put into their claims by that time.

While they made many improvements to their farm unit, the Tucks’ success with farming was poor. During the first crop season Tuck hauled lumber twenty miles from Vaughn to use for buildings and fences. Since he had only one team of horses, which he used to do the hauling, he had to hire someone to do most of his sod-breaking. He planted ten acres of potatoes on the broken land, but at harvest time realized he had been sold poor quality seed, for he harvested only ten bushels of potatoes. During the first year he also lost three head of cattle from locoweed poisoning before he learned about the toxic plant. Over the next two years three of his milk cows also died, but from other causes. Tuck bought all of his hay and
grain for seed and feed for the first two years. He paid twelve dollars per ton for alfalfa during that time, but found in 1913, when he had alfalfa to sell, that he couldn’t get more than six dollars per ton for it. In 1912 eleven acres of winter wheat he planted were winter-killed, making his yield from that venture nothing but three loads of hay. The potatoes he planted in 1912 were more productive, but prices were so low--forty cents per hundredweight--that he fed some of them to his stock. The Tucks also tried raising chickens for broilers in 1912. Even without considering the large amount of labor involved in caring for them, the cost of the feed and the two-day trip to Great Falls to market the chickens left them profitless. By 1913 Tuck had forty acres seeded to alfalfa and was satisfied that he could make a go of farming, but he was broke and unable to make the payments that the Reclamation Service required. Financial concessions that the Reclamation Service granted to settlers in 1913 and 1914 made it possible for the Tucks to remain on their farm unit, but in 1917 they sold their eighty acres to their neighbor and left the division.32

Single women who took up farm units usually came with members of their families. Most of them married local men with a few years of their arrival, so the Fort Shaw division had few examples of long-term single women farmers. Ida, Anna, and Bertha Eggler, ages twenty-four, twenty-nine and
thirty-two, came to the project in 1909 from Wisconsin with their two younger brothers and their mother. The family members took up adjoining farm units. Esther Strasberger came to the division with her sister and brother-in-law and took up one of the forty-acre tracts adjacent to the town of Simms. Women with children to support also took up claims. Eliza Saylor arrived from Kansas in 1908 or 1909 and lived until 1912 with her two young sons on their 160-acre farm southwest of Simms. Rose Russell was one of perhaps only two or three women who came to the Fort Shaw division without friends or kin. In 1916, at the age of fifty, she came from Illinois and bought an improved claim south of Fort Shaw. She lived alone on her farm until 1947, when she moved to Fort Shaw. A trained physician who made her house calls in a horse and buggy, Russell was the division's chief medical consultant and deliverer of babies as well as a farmer.33

Ties of friendship and kinship affected many other settlers. Of the twelve heads of households who came to the Fort Shaw division from the Bitterroot valley, four were from a single family and four others were friends who came to the project together. It seems likely that the remaining four persons from the Bitterroot also knew some or all of these people. At least eleven extended families—parents and one or more adult children with their families—settled in the Fort Shaw division before 1916. Also during this time at least
eight groups of siblings or cousins came to the division together. Regardless of the size of the group, the common practice was for each single person who was eligible to file on a homestead. Married couples usually claimed only one unit, in the name of the husband if he was eligible, in the name of the wife if he was not. In some cases a husband and wife each claimed a farm unit, but it was more common for wives to acquire farm units in their names by purchase after the family had improved the husband's claim. Ties of kinship or friendship made possible the sharing of work and equipment to improve farms and undoubtedly enhanced settlers' chances of success. Whether they were related or not, the single men who came together were less likely to persist, but most of the extended family groups that came to the project remained in the division for the entire period being considered.

Obviously, establishment of a paying farm operation did not happen overnight and many people suffered severe hardships during the first four or five years after making a claim. Historians have noted that F.H. Newell, first director of the Reclamation Service, expected the winnowing process that took place in the first years of the operation of a reclamation project. Unfit settlers would not persist in the face of physical hardship and financial distress, but the work they began could be continued by others who were better suited.
In 1909, Henry A. Wallace, who during the 1930s would become secretary of agriculture and vice-president of the United States, was a cub reporter for his Iowa family's newspaper, Wallaces' Farmer. On a special summer assignment he visited transplanted Iowans in the newly established reclamation projects in the West and recorded their experiences for the readers back home. The Sun River project was not on his itinerary, but he did visit several projects in the Northwest: the Umatilla project in Oregon, and the Boise-Payette and Minidoka projects in Idaho. In these places he found the circumstances of settlers to be very similar to those who came to the Fort Shaw division. People were investing large amounts of labor and all of their capital but had little to show for their efforts besides cleared and leveled land and some small crops. Some settlers were discouraged, but most had hope for the future and planned to stay. Few people thought a newcomer could make it through the first few years with less than $2,000.35

The decade of the 1910s brought many new people to Montana. While most came to take up dryland homesteads and aspired to become wealthy wheat farmers, the people who came to the Fort Shaw division were also part of the United States' last great movement to take up free or inexpensive land and start a new life. Events in the world, in the nation, and in Montana during the time period of 1910 to 1940 made establishing a new
irrigated farm an exercise in self-discipline, persistence, and plain stubbornness.  

During the 1910s, as the hopeful new settlers established themselves in Montana, the economic roller coaster of American agriculture was beginning a steep ascent. Although settlers in the Fort Shaw division complained in 1913 that there was no market for their produce, by 1916 they were working to increase their production in any way possible for prices were moving up rapidly. The farmers of the Fort Shaw division concentrated on alfalfa and grain production, since both commodities were easily marketed and in high demand. To compensate for labor shortages that increased as men left to serve in World War I, the Fort Shaw farmers began to mechanize their operations. The value of equipment in the division increased from $38,220 in 1916 to $84,409 in 1919. Besides farm machinery, they bought automobiles and enjoyed their prosperity by taking trips to California in the winter. During World War I, increased prices for farm commodities made farm land more valuable; severe drought in the late-1910s increased the value of irrigated land even more. Some of the original settlers in the Fort Shaw division seized this opportunity to sell their land at a profit and leave. Others stayed, bought their departing neighbors' land, and increased their production even further.
The economic roller coaster ride reached its zenith in mid-1920, then plunged almost vertically for six months, leveling out at a low that lasted for five years. The good times ended in the closing months of 1920, when government purchases of agricultural commodities and European demand decreased dramatically. Alfalfa that had sold for forty-four dollars per ton in May was going for ten dollars in December. Wheat dropped from $3.00 per bushel to $1.25. The price of oats was halved, from $1.10 in June to $.52 in December.38

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s prices for alfalfa and wheat, crops on which the Fort Shaw farmers depended for cash, seldom went above the prices at which they closed in 1920. Most of the time they were considerably lower. People who had saved some money during the good times and people who practiced belt-tightening managed to keep their farms and support their families. Unwilling to see large-scale depopulation of the federal projects, the Reclamation Service permitted some relief from payments of construction and O&M charges, so that people remained on the land who might not have been able to do so otherwise. However, some lost not only the machinery they had bought on time, but their farms as well.39

The early 1920s were a time when many people left Montana's farms. Table 1.1 compares the changes in rural population in Montana, Cascade County, and the Sun River valley during this time. It shows that while the rural popu
Table 1.1. Rural Population

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
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<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>242,633</td>
<td>376,878</td>
<td>356,570</td>
<td>419,944</td>
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<td>14,885</td>
<td>14,715</td>
<td>12,324</td>
<td>12,153</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun River Valley</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>1,022</td>
<td>1,222</td>
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</table>

lation of Montana and the Sun River valley increased similarly between 1910 and 1920, by approximately 36 percent, rural Cascade County as a whole did not experience such growth. During the exodus of the 1920s, though, the decrease in population in Cascade County nearly matched the 9 percent decrease statewide. In spite of this larger trend, during the 1920s the Sun River valley did not experience a decrease in population. Table 1.2 shows that from 1920 to 1930 the number of farms in the state and the county declined by approximately 8 percent. Again, the Fort Shaw division remained stable. Later discussion will show, however, that while the total population and number of farms changed little in the Fort Shaw division, the persons on the land did, as the winnowing of settlers continued through the early 1920s.

The people who remained in the Fort Shaw division experienced a brief period of better economic times in the late-1920s. Purchases of automobiles and trucks increased significantly and people spent money to improve their farmsteads. Resilient as they were, though, the Fort Shaw farmers did not escape the effects of the Great Depression. The years from 1931 to 1934 were particularly hard and no one refused the Bureau of Reclamation's offer of relief from construction payments. The wheat program was the only commodity program of the New Deal that affected many of the farmers of Fort Shaw though some benefited from the corn-hog and sugar beet pro-
Table 1.2  Number of Farms$^a$

<table>
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<th>1910</th>
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<th>1930</th>
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<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>26,214</td>
<td>57,677</td>
<td>47,495</td>
<td>41,823</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cascade County</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>1,703</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>1,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Shaw Division</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

grams. Acreage in pasture grasses increased with the advent of soil conservation programs. Feed and seed loans and employment through various work programs also helped people to subsist. Electricity came to the division in the late-1930s through the aid of the Rural Electrification Administration. By the late 1930s people were once again feeling a small measure of prosperity. They were able to wire their homes, buy electrical appliances and purchase even larger items. The number of tractors in the division doubled from 1935 to 1940 and the number of trucks increased by sixty per cent.

As happened in other rural places in the United States during the 1930s, the population of the Fort Shaw division increased. Table 1.1 shows that the state of Montana and the Fort Shaw division experienced increases in rural population that approached 20 percent. The rural population of Cascade County as a whole, however, declined by 2 percent, evidence of the hardships dryland farmers faced during the decade. Some of the population increase in the Fort Shaw division probably was due to younger families purchasing the farms of persons who either had died or were retiring from farming. Others undoubtedly moved into the division because irrigated land seemed to present a better opportunity during the time of drought.

It is unlikely that the people of the Fort Shaw division who had stuck it out, built homes for themselves, and were
enjoying a modicum of prosperity in 1940 gave any thought to the role the business interests of Great Falls had in their accomplishments. Many, in fact, probably would have said that they had achieved these things in spite of the business people of Great Falls, not because of them. The fact remains that it was the enlightened selfishness of the people of Great Falls that made the project possible. The next chapter examines the role the business community of Great Falls played in creating the opportunity for emigrants to establish farms and homes in the Sun River project.
ENDNOTES


2. Ibid., p. 371.


5. Ibid., pp. 10-11.

6. Picton and Picton, pp. 4-5; Cascade County Historical Society, Stone Age to Space Age in 100 Years: Cascade County History and Gazetteer (Great Falls, Montana: Cascade County Historical Society, 1981), p. 16. (hereafter Stone Age to Space Age)


8. Stone Age to Space Age, p. 18.


10. 1910 Project History, pp. 50-51, Reclamation Bureau Project Histories, 1902-25, Sun River Project, Montana (National Archives File Microcopy). (hereafter Project Histories)

11. Stone Age to Space Age, pp. 22, 29; Project Histories, 1910 Project History, p. 5.

12. The Carey Act, passed in 1894, permitted the federal government to grant to each of the western states up to one million acres of desert land. The land had to be used for reclamation and settlement and no individual would receive more than 160 acres. Under the provisions of the law, states could sell this land to private compa-
nies for fifty cents per acre. By purchasing some of the desert land, a company assumed the responsibilities of constructing an irrigation system and selling the land to settlers. After a ten-year period to repay the cost of construction to the irrigation company, an association of water users would take control of the system.

13. The Desert Land Act of 1877 allowed settlers to claim 640 acres of desert land (later reduced to 320 acres) for $1.25 per acre. Each year for three years after filing a claim, the settler had to expend $1.00 per acre for improvements and at the time of applying for patent, had to show proof of having put water on the land.


15. Ibid., p. 53.


17. Great Falls Daily Tribune, December 31, 1904, p. 8; April 13, 1906, p. 8; Form letter providing information about the Sun River project, undated, signed by S.B. Robbins, in Binder 232 G.PP, Box 1008, RG No. 115, Records of the Bureau of Reclamation, Engineering and Research Center Project Reports, National Archives, Denver, Colorado.
(hereafter RG 115, NA/Denver); Project Histories, 1910 Project History, p. 52.

18. Ibid., p. 99.


20. Project Histories, 1910 Project History, p. 5.

21. Slagsvold, p. 12. Slagsvold defines the soil classifications as follows: Class 1, best land from standpoint of soil and topography; Class 2, productive land but adverse topography; Class 3, second grade land, good topography; Class 4, second grade land, poor topography; Class 5, waterlogged land, hard to drain.


24. Data for settler origins come from the 1910 federal census, newspaper articles, and Jane Stuwe's Valley Ventures (n.p.: by the author, c. 1967), a collection of reminiscences written by people whose families lived in the Sun River valley. Data regarding ages come from the 1910 census.


27. See brochure, "Sun River--Reclamation Project (Irrigation)" at Cascade County Historical Society Archives. (Though the cover is missing, this appears to be the brochure the Great Northern Railroad agents used around 1909.)


29. In letters to Senator Thomas J. Walsh, written in April, 1913, many settlers said they had been told the O&M charge would be reduced within a short time after completion of the unit. Subject File A (Montana) "Sun River Irrigation Project," Box 137, Thomas J. Walsh Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter T.J. Walsh/LC).

30. J.J. Crepeau to Senator Thomas J. Walsh, April, 1913, Box 137, T.J. Walsh/LC; Project Histories, 1911 Operation and Maintenance Report, Sheet 7 and p. 7; Great Falls Daily
31. W. S. Kirlin to T. J. Walsh, Box 137, T. J. Walsh/LC; Project Histories, 1911 O&M Report, p. 6 and Sheet 7; Stuwe, p. 59; Fort Shaw Division, Classification of Consenting Lands, May 17, 1927, Box 1354, General Correspondence Files, 348-D Sun River, RG 115, NA/Denver.

32. George E. Tuck to T. J. Walsh, April 15, 1913, Box 137, T. J. Walsh/LC; Project Histories, 1911 O&M Report, p. 6; Great Falls Daily Tribune, January 31, 1910, p. 6; December 11, 1917, p. 13.


38. Prices taken from "Prices Received by Montana Farmers and Ranchers 1910-1952," Bulletin no. 503 of Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station (Bozeman, Montana: Montana State College, 1954), pp. 26, 30, 34.

39. Theodore Saloutos' The American Farmer and the New Deal (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1982) is a thorough account of the agricultural depression following World War I and the measures of the New Deal designed to aid agricultural recovery. Hargreaves' and Howards' works also describe the economic conditions on the Great Plains and in Montana during the 1920s.
"ENLIGHTENED SELFISHNESS":
GREAT FALLS AND THE SUN RIVER PROJECT

If Great Falls can supplement her water power and mineral advantages, with the establishment of an extensive agriculture upon the tributary country, her growth and supremacy will be assured.
Paris Gibson, 1900

With little fanfare, in the spring warmth of a day in early May, 1908, the Reclamation Service opened to settlement the Fort Shaw division of the Sun River project. While no throng of landseekers waited at the door of the Reclamation office that day, it was nevertheless one of great importance for people in nearby Great Falls who had worked for nearly five years to make the project possible. Unlike some of the other early projects of the Reclamation Service, where the people who owned the land that would benefit were the ones who sought a federal reclamation project, the Sun River project was the child of the business community of Great Falls. This child was to be insurance for the city's economic future, for they expected that as it matured it would return their investment many times over.

"Enlightened selfishness" was the phrase the boosters of Great Falls used to explain their willingness to contribute time and money to secure approval of the project, located some
thirty miles northwest of the city between the Sun and Teton rivers. True to the progressive ideals of the time, the business people had decided to manage the resources around them, rather than tolerate continued use that they considered to be wasteful. Raising livestock in the river valley and benchlands west of the city seemed inefficient to members of the business community. Extensive ranching operations left the area thinly populated, unimproved land contributed little to the county's tax base, and livestock the ranchers raised went to eastern markets.

During the early 1900s, dryland farmers began to move into the county, taking up former grazing lands to grow grain. While the boosters considered this to be a definite improvement, the supporters of irrigation believed it would be far better to have this land tributary to the city settled in small, intensively farmed plots. They envisioned the farmers using irrigation to produce food for urban consumers and sugar beets for urban processing. The business people of Great Falls believed that by seeking a federal reclamation project for the area, they were creating an opportunity for other people, but in doing so the city also would benefit. People who otherwise might not have been able to own farms of their own could do so in a reclamation project. Their residence in the county and the produce they marketed would benefit Great
Falls by lowering the cost of living, increasing business and industry, and improving tax bases.

To understand the vested interest that the people of Great Falls had in the Sun River project, one must go back at least to 1900. At that time the population of Great Falls was about 15,000. It had grown dramatically during the 1890s, nearly tripling in size, but the growth had leveled off in the latter years of the decade. Paris Gibson, the town's founder and leading booster, decided something needed to be done.  

Gibson's connection with Great Falls began in 1882, when with the financial and personal support of James J. Hill, he started acquiring as much land as possible in central Montana along the falls of the Missouri River. Gibson imagined utilizing the power of the falls and building a city that would rival Minneapolis. By 1900 his vision was partially realized; the falls provided power for smelting copper and lead-silver ores, refining copper, making flour, powering trollies, and lighting of city streets.  

Unsatisfied with the leveling off of growth he observed, Gibson began a crusade to bring more farmers to the area. As city father, influential Democrat, and U.S. Senator from 1901 to 1905, Gibson had ready access to the town's Democratic newspaper. Using the pages of the Great Falls Tribune, and the podiums of meetings of many organizations, he told the people of Great Falls that farming, not mining or stock-rais-
ing, had to become the most important industry for Montana and for Great Falls. While mining decreased the mineral wealth of the state "with every outgoing train," farmers who took up land and built homes on it added to the state's permanent wealth, using their profits to invest in improvements or make deposits in local banks. Gibson opposed the laws that permitted enlarged homesteads, believing that these laws led to speculation, not home-building. He wanted the public domain to be distributed in parcels that encouraged the establishment of permanent family farms.  

Gibson's crusade was partial to neither dryland or irrigated farming. He had experimented with dryland techniques himself on his farm near Great Falls and was satisfied that good yields of grains could be obtained in most years. However, he recognized the value of irrigation and praised those who were investing in private canal systems in the region. For Gibson, any type of cultivation would be more advantageous to Great Falls than the extensive stock-raising operations that dominated the area during the nineteenth century.

Robert Sutherlin was another important booster who helped to capture the attention, energy, and money of the Great Falls business community, and engage its support for the Sun River project. Sutherlin, editor of the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, a widely read farm journal, did not agree with Gibson about pushing dryland farming, but he believed strongly in the
potential of irrigated agriculture in the state. During the first decade of the twentieth century his newspaper became an ardent advocate for the Sun River project as well as other reclamation projects proposed for Montana.\(^7\)

Finally, the contribution of S.B. Robbins to securing the support of Great Falls for the Sun River project must be recognized. Robbins was an engineer for the Reclamation Service, but more important, he was a long-time resident of the Great Falls area before he joined the Service in 1902. Robbins had concluded that upwards of one million acres of land in the vicinity of Great Falls could be irrigated from the Sun and Teton rivers. In 1893, he and several associates had incorporated a canal and colonization company to undertake irrigation of the benchlands west of Great Falls, but the economic panic of that year ended the company’s plans.\(^8\)

Although Robbins had a lower public profile than Gibson or Sutherlin, his ability to influence the thinking of the people of Great Falls was significant. They trusted his expertise as an engineer and recognized the importance of his connection with the Reclamation Service.\(^9\)

During 1903 and 1904 surveyors and engineers from the Reclamation Service and U.S. Geological Survey were at work in the Sun River watershed. The government parties were reconnoitering a U.S.G.S. survey made in 1889 that had determined the Sun River valley and adjacent benchlands were suited to
irrigation. The Great Falls press was quick to report these activities, along with the latest rumors about the extent of lands that would be irrigated. The editors also began speculating about the effect of such work on Great Falls.\textsuperscript{10}

The boosters of Great Falls wasted no time in using the promise of a federal reclamation project to their advantage. Early in 1905 the Commercial Club of Great Falls updated the brochure it sent to people who requested information about Cascade County. It contained a section titled "Government Irrigation" and suggested, after some disclaimers about the club's limited knowledge of the government's plans, that "...it is merely a question of a few years when Great Falls will be the center of an irrigation system, comparable to the great government irrigation works in India."\textsuperscript{11}

At the same time that the Reclamation Service was considering the merits of the Sun River project, it was also looking at another project in northern Montana, on the Milk River. At times, the people of Great Falls who were lobbying for the Sun River project worked with those persons who sought approval for the Milk River project. Such cooperation occurred in April, 1905, when a committee representing the interests of both projects traveled to Washington, D.C., to try to speed the evaluation processes. A Great Falls attorney who accompanied the committee, A.H. Gray, reported that he spoke personally with President Theodore Roosevelt, F.H. Newell, head of
the Reclamation Service, and C.D. Walcott, director of the Geological Survey, about the Sun River project. All had assured him that they believed the Sun River project to be one of the most practical and simple of those being considered.¹²

During the summer of 1905 the Great Falls Commercial Club sponsored a meeting to which they also invited people from other nearby towns for the purpose of apprising the state’s U.S. Senators, William A. Clark and Thomas H. Carter, and Representative, Joseph M. Dixon, of the desires and needs of northern Montanans. Approval of the Sun River and Milk River projects were key items on the agenda that evening. Senator Carter, speaking for the Congressional contingent and responding to the demands for federal reclamation, assured the assembly that the delegation supported irrigation and that he would do all he could to push the Sun River project to approval. He also urged the Commercial Club to see that people currently owning land in the Sun River valley be organized into water users’ associations, so that when the project was approved they would be able to negotiate with the government regarding their water rights. He noted that S.B. Robbins had already begun this task, but suggested that it was unfair to allow him to shoulder the entire burden.¹³

Some ten days later the board of engineers in charge of surveying the potential reclamation projects gave their stamp of approval to the Sun River project. They announced, howev-
er, that before construction could begin the water rights to
the river had to be adjudicated, that is, a legal determina-
tion made of the amount of water existing landowners could
take from the river by right of prior appropriation. The
amount of water remaining would be the amount that would be
available for settlers in a federal reclamation project on the
Sun River. Also, the Reclamation Service wished to have some
indication that there was a demand for an irrigation project
and that the land would be taken up by "bona fide" settlers.14

The Sun River valley and the benchlands to the north of
the river were not unpopulated. Quite to the contrary, the
valley was home to a number of pioneer ranching families who
had their own opinions about the usefulness of a federal
reclamation project in their neighborhood. While most of the
ranchers used water from the river to irrigate gardens and
perhaps some hay fields, and several small canal companies had
been incorporated, few ranchers believed that dividing the
valley and benchlands into forty-acre irrigated farms was a
desirable development. Besides being reluctant to see their
way of life change, some thought the market in Great Falls was
not large enough for the existing agricultural community, much
less an expanded one.15 For the ranchers in the vicinity of
Hepler, some thirty miles up the Sun from Great Falls, the
best they could say about the proposed reclamation project was
that the construction crews and draft animals would provide a
nice local market for their garden truck, hay, and oats.\textsuperscript{16}

The benchlands north of the river had been settled more
recently under the Desert Land Act, which required settlers to
establish some irrigation works on their land. Little had
been done in the way of construction by cooperative canal
companies, but a federal reclamation project had implications
that some settlers disliked. If their land became part of a
federal project, farm units could be no larger than 160 acres.
Settlers would have to relinquish land they had claimed in
excess of this amount, a requirement that caused some to view
the project dimly.

With good reason, the boosters in Great Falls were uncer­
tain that the ranchers of the Sun River valley and the bench­
lands to the north would respond to the requirements of the
Reclamation Service. To circumvent any problems, the editor
of the \textit{Tribune} immediately picked up the government's chal­
lenge and outlined what the people of Great Falls needed to
do. Adjudication was an unknown process--the laws of Montana
made no provision for legally determining water rights--and
the editor hopefully suggested the aid of the state engineer
could be enlisted. He also called for water users' associa­
tions to express their desire for the government works but
went on to say, "...the city will also greatly benefit by a
population of thousands of families of farmers...when this
irrigation project is once realized, and so it is entirely proper and wise for the Great Falls Commercial club and Great Falls business men to take a practical interest in the matter of the prompt meeting of the government requirements." Within a few weeks the Commercial Club had organized committees to carry out the work of satisfying the Reclamation Service.17

Up to this point, the desire of the business people of Great Falls to secure a reclamation project in their vicinity had required little more than attendance at meetings and enthusiastic testimony to their support for the idea. However, when the Commercial Club decided to involve itself in the adjudication process, the members found it necessary to dig deeply into their pockets. By late 1905 they had spent more than $7,000 to initiate a suit in district court known as Kenneth B. McIver vs. C.H. Campbell et al. Fletcher Maddox represented McIver, the plaintiff, who actually was the Reclamation Service and the people of Great Falls. A.H. Gray, already an active player in the campaign to secure the project, was the referee who took testimony from the defendants.18

Engineers from the state engineer’s office had begun the work of compiling evidence several months before filing of the adjudication suit. They surveyed the Sun River basin and made maps showing for each defendant the amount of land owned, size and length of ditches, amount of irrigable and irrigated land,
and the types of crops raised by each. The Reclamation Service established stream gauging stations to determine the amount of runoff that was available. The Service also metered the water being diverted into ditches and in the presence of the land owner made special measurements when the ditches were running full to overflowing to determine their maximum capacities. All of this information plus the testimony of the defendants formed the basis on which the judge would assess the appropriateness of each land owner's claim to water from the Sun. Fifteen years later, as Montanans considered revising the state's water right code, adherents of reform often cited the Sun River adjudication process, calling it in many respects a model of its type.19

With the adjudication process underway, during the winter of 1905-06 another contingent of people from Great Falls and Chouteau, the rural community nearest the benchland settlers, went to Washington to urge final approval of the Sun River project and appropriation of funds for construction. Representing Great Falls were a merchant, a banker, the editor of the Leader, Fletcher Maddox, and Paris Gibson. Representing Chouteau were an attorney, a druggist, a banker-merchant, and one man identified as a "land owner." Anyone representing the established agricultural interests of the Sun River valley was conspicuously absent. S.B. Robbins, who by then was the
project engineer, made the trip to Washington with the group.20

In Washington at the end of January, 1906, Senators William A. Clark and Thomas H. Carter and Representative Joseph Dixon joined the committee to visit Secretary of the Interior, E.A. Hitchcock. Undoubtedly accustomed to the supplications of such delegations, Hitchcock told the Montanans that while he favored the Sun River project, the $900,000 necessary to begin such a large project just was not available. However, after further discussion, the committee secured the Secretary’s promise of $250,000 to begin construction of the Fort Shaw division. A day later, he increased the amount to $500,000.21

Hitchcock’s promise of an appropriation for the Sun River project had a string attached to it. He would allot the money only if the bill to repeal the Timber and Stone land law, which had been introduced in Congress, was killed. Repeal of the law would have meant a reduction in receipts going into the reclamation fund. Although the bill died in committee a few days later, Hitchcock reneged on his bargain and declined to make the appropriation, claiming that receipts from the sales of public lands were not as great as he had expected. S.B. Robbins received orders to close down his engineering operation on the Sun River and to prepare to move to another project.22
The boosters in Great Falls applied to Representative Dixon for his help. When Dixon confronted Hitchcock with the situation, the Secretary could not remember his promise of $250,000 for the Sun River project and stated that the reclamation fund was insufficient to begin another new project. Dixon contended that there was more money in the fund than in the previous year and accepted Hitchcock's challenge to prove his statement. He enlisted the help of the Land Commissioner, who permitted clerks of the Land Office to tabulate the receipts for the first six months of the fiscal year and compare them with the previous year's receipts. They found an excess of $1,000,000 over the same period for the previous year, and $600,000 for the month of January, 1906, alone. Late in March, with this evidence and the additional support of the director and chief engineer of the Reclamation Service, Dixon convinced Hitchcock to make the $500,000 appropriation to begin construction of the Fort Shaw division of the Sun River project.

Besides the boosters of Great Falls and their Congressional allies, the Great Northern railroad company also played a role in the history of the Sun River project. Historians have documented the powerful role of railroads in the development of the American West, their financial role in securing passage of the Reclamation Act, and their long-term promotion of the irrigation projects of the West. The absence of rail
service through the proposed Sun River project was the one thing that dampened S.B. Robbins' great enthusiasm for the potential of irrigated agriculture along the Sun River. A branch of James J. Hill's Great Northern served Great Falls, but that was the closest rail link to the Sun River valley. This did not mean, however, that the railroad company was not interested in the Sun River project. Agents of the Great Northern followed closely the progress of negotiations concerning the Sun River project and were ready to cooperate with the Great Falls business community soon after the Secretary of the Interior approved the first funds for construction.

Attracting settlers was the forte of the Great Northern. In May, 1906, an immigration agent for the Great Northern proposed to the Great Falls Commercial Club a joint venture to advertise the resources of Cascade County, focusing on the Sun River project. If the Commercial Club would assemble the necessary information, the railroad would publish and distribute 100,000 of the booklets. Two years later, as the Fort Shaw unit was ready to be thrown open to settlement, the Great Northern again worked with the Commercial Club and the Reclamation Service to produce and distribute a twelve-page illustrated circular to advertise the project. It showed estimated expenses and returns that could be expected from forty acres farmed under irrigation and suggested what financial resources settlers might need. In August, 1908, the railroad offered a
special car from Chicago to Great Falls for prospective settlers of the Sun River project. The reduced fare of $42.50 permitted the traveler to return any time within a three-week period.\(^{28}\)

Although the Great Northern was certainly interested in bringing home seekers to the Great Falls area, the company had made no commitment to building a rail line through the project. In an effort to eliminate qualms potential settlers might have about taking up land twenty to thirty miles from a depot, in the summer of 1908 two entrepreneurs from Great Falls secured permission from the county board of commissioners to build an electric railway up the Sun River valley.\(^{29}\)

Within a year, however, the Great Northern made this extensive and expensive local operation unnecessary. Beginning surveys in 1909, the company announced in January, 1910, that it would soon start construction of a fifty-eight-mile line from Vaughn, just northwest of Great Falls, to Gilman, near the head of the Sun River valley.\(^{30}\) With this commitment to the Sun River project, during 1910 and 1911, Louis Hill, who replaced his father as president of the railroad company, became more directly involved with the efforts to secure funds to extend the project to the benchlands.

By the summer of 1909, settlers occupied nearly one hundred farms in the Fort Shaw division and more newcomers arrived weekly. However, if this steady flow of new settlers
was to continue for more than the next year, the people of Great Falls had to persist in their efforts to secure funds for expansion of the project onto the benchlands. Early in 1909 the board of directors of the Commercial Club met with H.N. Savage, the Reclamation Service's supervising engineer of the Montana projects, and S.B. Robbins, the Sun River project engineer, to lay plans to secure $1,500,000 for extension of the irrigation system to the benchlands, the part of the project known as the Greenfields division.31

The people who came to settle in the Fort Shaw division were both partial fulfillment of the plans of the boosters of Great Falls and an unexpected force with which they would have to reckon. The boosters quickly learned that these newcomers, most of whom came with the intent of making permanent homes, had their own opinions about the work of the Reclamation Service. They would not be content to let the business community of Great Falls speak for their interests. For the next few years, the settlers of the Fort Shaw division played a crucial role as the Reclamation Service assessed the results of its work and considered whether to build the next phases of the Sun River project. The boosters in Great Falls found they needed the Fort Shaw people as evidence of the success of the project, but they also howled in frustration as the settlers refused to behave the way they wished.
The first test of these newly developing relations came in August, 1909, when the Senate Irrigation Committee and the Secretary of the Interior visited the Sun River project. On the national scene, federal reclamation was under fire from people who feared creeping socialism. The Committee's purpose was to evaluate the projects that were already in operation so that they could better decide how or even whether to legislate regarding irrigation in the future. Before coming to Great Falls the Committee visited the Huntley project, located near Billings, and heard expressions of dissatisfaction from some of the settlers. The editor of the Great Falls Tribune wrote off the opposition in the Huntley project to "natural born kickers." He also implored the "satisfied and prosperous settlers on the Fort Shaw unit," not the kickers, to be the ones to whom the senators spoke when they visited the Sun River project.32

The Fort Shaw settlers probably disappointed the editor of the Tribune and set off the first howls of the boosters because they did have complaints to bring to the committee. After community meetings at Fort Shaw and Simms, they had appointed five men to present their responses to the questionnaire that the Committee sent prior to its visit. The complaints of the settlers focused on the conduct of Project Engineer Robbins, who they thought spent too much time on his own interests; the cost and quality of the irrigation works
the government had built; the small size of the farm units; the insufficient period of time allowed for payment of construction costs; and the lack of schools, transportation facilities, and a market.33

Apparently the senators' visit was merely a fact-finding mission, because it created no problems for the boosters. By January, 1910, the Commercial Club was mounting another delegation to Washington to seek funds for the Greenfields division. In Washington, with help from Senators Carter and Dixon, the delegation met with the Secretary of the Interior, R.A. Ballinger, and Director of the Reclamation Service, F.H. Newell. Both of the officials assured the Montanans that the Sun River project would receive a construction allotment as soon as Congress appropriated funds.34 By 1910, federal reclamation was costing more than the reclamation fund could provide. Congress began lending money to the fund in 1908 and in 1910 made a loan of twenty million dollars to it. It was a portion of this loan that Newell and Ballinger expected would be used for the Sun River project.

The summer of 1910 brought the Army Board of Engineers to the Sun River project. Touring uncompleted projects, and mandated by the Taft administration to consider particularly those with the largest amount of available public land and the largest numbers of settlers, the engineers' task was to recommend which would receive allotments from the special loan.
In Montana the Army engineers visited the Sun River, St. Mary’s, Milk River, Huntley, and Lower Yellowstone projects. Senator Carter recommended that the engineers spend most of their time on the first three projects, believing that the latter two could be completed with allotments from the regular fund.  

The Great Northern provided rail transportation for the engineers’ trip from eastern Montana to Seattle and Louis Hill accompanied the group part of the way. The Reclamation Service worked closely with Hill to insure that the trip was a pleasant one for the group and showed the Milk River and Sun River projects to advantage. The Reclamation engineer in charge of Montana projects, H.N. Savage, believed the Milk River and Sun River projects fulfilled the qualifications attached to the special loan money better than any others in the West. Hill corresponded with Senator Carter after the engineers and the director of the Reclamation Service had traveled across the Sun River project. He noted that Director Newell had shown him his memorandum recommending two million dollars for the Sun River project and two million for the Milk River project. Advising Carter that if Newell recommended a total of four million, "...we certainly ought to get over Five."  

As it turned out, Hill was correct; the Sun River project received $3,278,000, to be allotted and spent over the next
four years. The funds came not from the special fund, but from the regular reclamation fund. This was an advantage to future settlers because the special fund was not just nominally a loan, but money on which interest would be charged to the projects for which it was used. Payment of interest would increase the basic construction cost of a project—the cost that settlers had to repay. Construction costs on projects funded from the regular fund were interest-free.38

Less than two months passed before the Great Falls Commercial Club found it necessary to send another delegation to Washington to protect their interest in the Sun River project. Word had reached Great Falls that the annual allocation for construction was to be diverted to another project. Also, the adjudication of water rights associated with the project had come into question. A committee of three, one of whom was S.B. Robbins, who was no longer affiliated with the Reclamation Service, saw Secretary Ballinger and received assurances that the allotment was safe. Ballinger stipulated, though, that the adjudication of water rights, begun in 1905 but never completed, had to be finished and allowed three months in which to wrap up the matter.39

The adjudication process had ground to a halt in 1907, when Fletcher Maddox, the attorney for the plaintiff, left Great Falls to accept an appointment in Washington. He turned over to the Reclamation Service all records of testimony,
maps, and gaugings, considering these things to be as accurate a description of the defendants' water rights as was possible to obtain. The absence of any laws in Montana to define the adjudication process raised questions about just what the Reclamation Service needed to establish and protect its claim to water from the Sun. Ransom Cooper, the Great Falls attorney who agreed to take over Maddox's position, believed that the information the Reclamation Service had was sufficient to uphold the water rights necessary for the Fort Shaw and Greenfields divisions, so immediate adjudication was unnecessary. However, further expansion of the project would require adjudication of the waters of the Deep Creek fork of the Teton, plus a decree regarding the Sun. In March, another delegation from the Commercial Club took this opinion to Secretary Ballinger.40

Ballinger refused to accept attorney Cooper's opinion and insisted upon immediate adjudication. He reiterated his understanding that the work already done was adequate and that he had been told "informally" that many of the defendants were willing to accept the amount of water to which the state engineers had determined they were entitled.41

During the next month, even the most recalcitrant of the old-time ranchers agreed out of court to accept the determinations of the engineers. One remarked, "I want to see this matter settled up so that the people will come in and I can
sell out... Why, a bunch of college graduates are running things up there now. They tell you how much water you can use out of the rivers; how much timber you can cut out of the woods. Do we like taking orders from these immature government officials? I should say not. " On June 13, 1911, a district court judge filed the 232-page report of the referee, giving the force of law to the rights described therein. The adjudication process had cost the business people of Great Falls more than $12,000. An official of the Reclamation Service commended the Commercial Club's "broad and liberal spirit" and its willingness to "aid with their money and influence the progress of the preliminary work demanded by the government." 

One of the Great Falls attorneys who worked on the final decree corresponded with Louis Hill late in May of 1911 to tell him of the progress they were making. A brief mention of the yet-to-be-built rail line up the Sun River valley was an early sign of still more problems with which the boosters in Great Falls would have to wrestle before the Sun River project could begin to fulfill their expectations. The attorney told Hill he hoped the branch would be "pushed," even though it might be "an exception to the rule that it will be a paying piece of road from the start." He added that the Reclamation Service estimated the value of their freight alone at more than $400,000. Hill did not push the Sun River branch and
the situation remained unchanged for a year. And, in spite of Secretary Ballinger's written promise that construction of the Greenfields division would begin when the adjudication process was final, little work was done in 1911.

The situation exploded in May, 1912, when the Washington correspondent for the Great Falls Tribune received and passed on to his editor a copy of a memorandum written by F.H. Newell, director of the Reclamation Service. The source of the report was the new Secretary of the Interior, Walter Fisher. The memorandum said, among other things, that the supervising engineer of the northern division of the Reclamation Service had made no pledges regarding when or if work would begin on the Sun River project. Newell summarized the problems with the project: it was one of the largest the Service was contemplating building and one of the "less favorable from engineering and economical considerations of climate, crop production and water supply." The reservoir sites and a storage dam that would be one of the largest and highest masonry dams ever constructed offered the greatest engineering problems. Newell noted that transportation "had been a controlling and undetermined factor." While a railroad bed had been laid to near Gilman, the Great Northern had made no commitment to extend the line to the location of the storage dam.45

Receiving this news, the editor of the Tribune addressed President Taft in his daily column and asked, "What kind of a
pettifoging, shyster, hair-splitting talk is this, Mr. President, to excuse the breach of promise on your behalf made by your secretary of the interior who represents you, speaks for you and acts in your behalf." In exasperation he called on Taft to find out what was wrong, why seven years' of surveying and the investigations of "high muck-a-mucks in shoals" hadn't told the engineers what they needed to know. He demanded that the work either go ahead or be abandoned so that private capitalists could take it up.46

The editor also addressed the transportation issue. He reminded the reader that no railroad existed when the project had been determined to be feasible. Speaking unofficially, he said that he believed the Great Northern was friendly toward the Sun River project and that the primary reason for not completing its branch up the Sun River was a loss of confidence in the government's intent to continue construction.47

The editor's assumption about the railroad was correct. A few weeks earlier Louis Hill had responded to the inquiries of a resident of the Sun River valley who wanted to know when the line would be completed. Having learned that work on the Sun River project was being held up because engineers doubted the sufficiency of the water supply, Hill had directed no rails be laid on the line during 1912.48

After reading Newell's memorandum, the editor of the Tribune wired Hill to get his position regarding the comple-
tion of the Sun River line. Hill responded immediately to the editor and the Reclamation Service, telling the people of Great Falls that when he received from the government "positive and reliable assurance that if means of transportation is furnished it will forthwith commence actual and active construction," not just surveying, the railroad would finish the line to Gilman.49

Three weeks later, an assistant secretary of the Department of the Interior wrote to Hill to say that a report of the Board of Engineers dated May 22, 1912—one day after the Great Falls Tribune attacked Newell's memorandum--had authorized construction of the diversion dam and reservoir for the Sun River project, on condition that the railroad to Gilman be completed during the summer of 1912. He asked for Hill's statement regarding the probability of this work being done. Hill responded that all that remained to be done was to lay the track, which could be accomplished quickly.50 On June 14 the Secretary of the Interior announced his approval of the Board of Engineers' recommendation to begin work on construction of the diversion dam, reservoir and supply canals. The editor of the Tribune gave first credit to President Taft for forcing Fisher to honor Ballinger's promise, but also gave thanks to Charles Pray, Montana's representative in Congress, and Louis Hill.51
A year later, the Sun River project appeared to be moving along smoothly. In April, 1913, the Reclamation Service called for bids for the canal work associated with the storage reservoir, noting in its announcement that this was the largest amount of work of its kind being done by the Service in the Northwest. Whatever complacency the boosters of Great Falls might have been experiencing was shattered, however, by a controversy that surfaced in May and became so heated that by summer’s end the Secretary of the Interior came to Great Falls to investigate and mediate.

With the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson as President in 1913, Franklin K. Lane became Secretary of the Interior. As he entered office, the Reclamation Service was once again in an uproar. Opponents of federal reclamation were calling some of the projects worthless and the dissatisfaction of the settlers on many of the projects only added fuel to the controversy. Among the complaints Lane had to consider was a letter from the president of the Fort Shaw water users’ association, which outlined the financial difficulties facing the settlers on the Sun River project. As he learned of the problems the settlers said they were having, Lane revisited the decision of his predecessor to extend the Sun River project to the benchlands north of the river. And, to have an opportunity to hear for himself the claims of the disgruntled settlers on all of the federal reclamation projects, Secretary
Lane invited representatives of the projects to a meeting in Washington in May, 1913.

The people of the Fort Shaw division sent H.E. Culver, the president of their water users' association. In his testimony before Lane, Culver focused on the settlers' inability to repay the costs of construction of the project and their perception that the government was not running the project as economically as possible, which added to their financial distress.  

Besides these remarks, Culver made a statement in his testimony that brought howls of indignation from the boosters in Great Falls who were worried now that Lane would decide not to continue the work on the Greenfields division. Based on conversations with his neighbors who lived on the benchlands north of the river, Culver told Lane he didn't believe these people would be willing to pay more than thirty-five dollars per acre to construct an irrigation system. Rumors of construction costs as high as sixty dollars per acre had left some owners on the benchlands thinking the land should be left unreclaimed, especially when they saw how the Fort Shaw settlers were struggling to survive.  

The boosting business community perceived Culver and other settlers on the Sun River project as being the worst kind of citizens--ones who "croaked" about their situations. As tempers flared, the Fort Shaw people countered these criti-
isms by calling the Great Falls commercial community "selfish and self serving." They charged that the only concern of the business people was that the government and the settlers spend as much money as possible in their establishments. They thought the people of Great Falls cared little about whether the farmers failed, as long as new people replaced those who left. Also, the Fort Shaw farmers condemned the bankers' unwillingness to extend credit to them and criticized the weak market for farm produce that existed in Great Falls. The business community of Great Falls responded by sending still another delegation to Washington to counter Culver's claims. Unwilling to have their position misunderstood, the settlers of Fort Shaw invited the Commercial Club of Great Falls to send a committee to the Fort Shaw division to learn first hand the situation of the settlers there.

A few days later, Thomas Shaw, agricultural agent for the Great Northern, L.C. Gilman, vice president of the Great Northern, and Louis Newman, chairman of the irrigation committee of the Commercial Club, visited the Fort Shaw division under the leadership of S.B. Robbins, who was acting as a private citizen in the matter. They spoke with community leaders and made plans for a future meeting at which the water users' association, the Fort Shaw Grange, and the Great Falls businessmen would be represented, to discuss improved marketing methods.
During the next weeks the Tribune editor did his best to build up the superiority of irrigated farming in the Great Falls area. With the rush to take up dryland homesteads largely over, he said he feared "that dry farming literature and speakers—and possibly land locaters—have intoxicated [the benchland farmers] with too much enthusiasm."\textsuperscript{58} Newman, Robbins, Sutherlin and others from Great Falls met with the people living on the benchlands to learn their views and to try to convince them of the error of opposing the reclamation work. The Tribune editor was quick to point out that contrary to the attitude of some of the Sun River people, the people of Great Falls most definitely had a right to become involved in the controversy over extension of the project. He reminded his readers that the project would not have existed without the efforts of people from Great Falls. He estimated that less than five percent of the people living on the benchlands were there when the project was approved.\textsuperscript{59}

Under pressure from President Wilson—prompted by Montana's Senator, Henry L. Myers, who was chairman of the Senate Committee on Irrigation—in August Secretary Lane visited Great Falls and the Sun River project. He met with the people of the Fort Shaw division and asked them to restate their grievances, which had not changed since Culver had spoken in Washington. Then he went to the benchland communities and spoke with the settlers there. He found the people
at Fairfield desirous of having water put on their land but the people at Dutton preferred to continue dry farming. Finally, he met with the business people of Great Falls after touring the city and having been shown its industrial potential. He explained that the farmers with whom he had spoken felt they did not get "proper encouragement from the city of Great Falls." While he said he believed this was not the case, he noted the large quantity of food Great Falls imported from eastern states and pointed out the advantages of using home grown products.

The next month Secretary Lane approved the Greenfields division for construction and released the Dutton lands from the project. In addition, during 1913 and 1914 the Reclamation Service made concessions to the settlers on all federal projects that eased the financial burdens of the people of Fort Shaw and made it possible for many to remain on the land.

After the controversy-filled summer of 1913, which brought about a number of changes to improve their prospects, the people of the Fort Shaw division no longer took an active role in questions relating to the work of the Reclamation Service on the other divisions of the project. However, the business community of Great Falls maintained an active interest in the construction of the remaining divisions, believing that much that could influence the future prosperity of Great Falls was still at stake.
The enlightened selfishness of the business community of Great Falls extended only to the point of providing the opportunity for people to take up land in a federal reclamation project. Once on the land, the settlers were on their own with respect to their relations with the Reclamation Service. Evidence seems to indicate that this is also the way the settlers preferred to handle things. As the charges and counter-charges of the summer of 1913 made clear, the settlers did not trust their urban neighbors. As late as 1917, the editor of the Tribune referred to the strained relations between the farmers of the irrigation project and the Great Falls business community. He said, "...Much foolish talk has been indulged in at times about a hostile interest to that of the farmers existing in the city and finding expression through our Commercial club and other agencies that have sought to promote the Sun River irrigation scheme. As a matter of fact we are actuated by enlightened selfishness and can have no other motive but the prosperity of the settlers because we fully realize that their prosperity means our prosperity and their poverty our loss."\(^6^2\)

Once involved in the campaign to secure the Sun River project, the business community of Great Falls never faltered as it pursued the ultimate goal of having all divisions of the project constructed. The work took place over more than two decades and required large outlays of time and money. The
Commercial Club somehow found the resources to fund the trips of numerous delegations to Washington as well as the cost of the adjudication suit. And, while they lived in a remote hinterland, the business people of Great Falls seemed to have little trouble obtaining personal audiences with people in Washington who were decision-makers. They had solid relationships with their representatives and senators and with the officials of the Great Northern railroad and put them to good use. Refusing to take no for an answer, they persisted until approval or money was forthcoming. The business community of Great Falls achieved its goal—the completion of the Sun River project. Whether the project ever brought the prosperity to Great Falls that the business people had envisioned is an issue that will be addressed in later chapters.
ENDNOTES


3. Great Falls Daily Tribune, August 2, 1913, p. 4; September 15, 1917, p. 4.


5. Ibid.; Great Falls Daily Tribune, February 17, 1901, p. 2, special section.

6. Great Falls Daily Tribune, June 3, 1900, p. 2; March 28, 1900, p. 7.


9. An article in the Great Falls Daily Tribune, June 15, 1904, p. 8, reports Robbins’ role in the survey made in 1904 to determine the feasibility of the Sun River project. See also Great Falls Daily Tribune, June 3, 1905, p. 8 and February 8, 1907, p 2.


15. For expressions of the ranchers' point of view see *Great Falls Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1903, p. 8; March 21, 1905, p. 2; December 16, 1906, p. 24; March 16, 1908, p. 2; April 20, 1911, p. 10.


17. Ibid., August 3, 1905, p. 2; August 31, 1905, p. 2.


19. Ibid., April 23, 1906, p. 8; March 21, 1911, p. 3; *Montana Farmer*, January 1, 1921, p. 1.


23. Ibid., p. 4.


25. M.J. Costello to W.W. Broughton, April 17, 1905, in Box No. 4013, Folder 13, 22 D 14 6F, Great Northern Railway Company Records, Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota. (hereafter Great Northern Records)


28. Ibid., April 2, 1908, p. 5; July 12, 1908, p. 9; August 3, 1908, p. 5.

29. Ibid., August 13, 1908, p. 5.
32. Ibid., August 20, 1909, p. 4.
33. Great Falls Daily Leader, August 20, 1909, p. 4; Great Falls Daily Tribune, August 21, 1909, p. 10.
35. Telegram to Frank Pierce, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Interior, from Thomas H. Carter, July 28, 1910, Box No. 4641, 22 E 8 7B, Great Northern Records.
36. Letter to L.W. Hill, unsigned—from a Great Northern employee, August 5, 1910, Box No. 4641, 22 E 8 7B, Great Northern Records.
37. L.W. Hill to Thomas H. Carter, August 22, 1910. Box No. 4013, Folder No. 4, 22 D 14 5B, Great Northern Records.
40. Ibid., March 21, 1911, p. 1 and 7.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., April 20, 1911, p. 10.
43. Great Falls Daily Tribune, June 14, 1911, p. 10; June 26, 1911, p. 1; Montana Farmer, December 1, 1920, p. 4.
44. William G. Downing to L.W. Hill, May 26, 1911, Box No. 4756, 22 E 9 2F, Great Northern Records.
46. Ibid., May 18, 1912, p. 4.
47. Ibid.
48. L. W. Hill to L.C. Gilman, May 7, 1912, Box No. 4756, 22 E 9 2F, Great Northern Records.
49. Assistant to the President to H.N. Savage, May 27, 1912, Box No. 4756, 22 E 9 2F, Great Northern Records; Great Falls Daily Tribune, May 22, 1912, p. 1.
50. Samuel Adams, First Assistant Secretary, Department of the Interior to President, Great Northern Railroad, June 10, 1912, and L. W. Hill to Samuel Adams, June 19, 1912, Box 4756, 22 E 9 2F, Great Northern Records.


52. Ibid., April 6, 1913, p. 1.

53. Ibid., May 25, 1913, p. 3.

54. H.E. Culver to Great Falls Tribune, June 2, 1913, in "Irrigation and Reclamation," Box 59, T.J. Walsh/LC.

55. Ibid.; Great Falls Daily Tribune June 6, 1913, p. 4; June 7, 1913, p. 4, 8.


57. Ibid., June 12, 1913, p. 6.

58. Ibid., June 7, 1913, p. 4.

59. Ibid., June 22, 1913, p. 3; June 24, 1913, p. 4.

60. Ibid., October 20, 1916, p. 5; August 6, 1913, p. 6; August 7, 1913, p. 12.

61. Ibid., September 10, 1913, p. 1.

62. Ibid., September 15, 1917, p. 4.
CHAPTER THREE
MANAGING THE LAND AND WATER

[Forty] acres won't make the payments and a living for a family under present conditions. . . . I still have faith in this country. I have a nice small orchard started. And windbreak growing. The place is not for sale, we want to make it our home. If the government will give us a little chance to make good.¹

E.F. Miksch, 1913

"...[A] little chance to make good." Those words epitomized the attitudes of most of the people who came to the Fort Shaw division during the early years of its settlement. Alan Dickerman, George E. Radosevich, and Kenneth C. Nobe have suggested that four values dominated federal reclamation policy during the period from 1902 to 1920: liberty, improvement, equality, and stability—in that order.² The people who came to the Sun River project undoubtedly had been influenced by reclamation rhetoric that promised a place for people of small means to build permanent homes. They, too, sought liberty, and an opportunity equal to that of other Americans to improve their lives. This basic agreement between the Reclamation Service and the settlers about the values upon which a federal reclamation project operated did not lead to harmony, however. The conflict came in living out those values.
E.F. Miksch was frustrated when he wrote to Senator T.J. Walsh in 1913. Two years earlier, with his wife, two sons, daughter and son-in-law, he had left his home of ten years in Iowa and claimed land in the Fort Shaw division. Now he was being threatened with cancellation of his claim if he did not bring his payments up to date. In the 1920s the soil of his farm unit would be classified as among the most productive in the division; however, in 1913, Miksch thought that it needed fertilizer before it would produce even average grain crops. Alfalfa would do it, he believed, but planting alfalfa meant losing the produce of the land for a year after seeding, something he could not afford. In his letter to Senator Walsh, he asked for the time of repaying the construction costs of the project to be extended to twenty years.

Miksch was not alone in his frustration and disappointment. Thousands of settlers on other federal reclamation projects had had experiences similar to his and were asking for similar concessions. In this respect, the experiences of the settlers of the Fort Shaw division of the Sun River project add little new information to the history of federal reclamation. However, the way in which the Fort Shaw settlers dealt with the Reclamation Service was part of the process of community-building, and for that reason is significant. In the early years of the project, the Reclamation Service became from time to time an identifiable adversary against which the
settlers could unite. These adversarial actions brought the people together, forcing them to air opinions, to compromise, and to move gradually toward the goal of independent management of their irrigation system. In 1919, a decade after the project opened, the settlers organized the Fort Shaw Irrigation District. This form of local government then became the agency through which the water users negotiated with the Reclamation Service and in 1927 took over management of the irrigation system.

A settler's relationship with the Reclamation Service most often began in a very personal way through direct contact with the project engineer. Besides supervising construction, the job of project engineer included advertising the project, meeting prospective settlers, and helping them choose claims. For newly arrived settlers, the project engineer was the Reclamation Service. S.B. Robbins, sometimes called the "father" of the Sun River project, was project engineer when the Fort Shaw division opened in 1908. This event marked for him the fulfillment of a personal dream that had begun more than fifteen years before. During the early 1890s he had devised a plan to reclaim the land between the Sun and Teton rivers, but poor economic times stymied his work. Though disappointed, he retained his belief in the importance of irrigating Montana's semi-arid land, particularly the land northwest of Great Falls. Joining the Reclamation Service
soon after its establishment in 1902, Robbins took part in the early surveys of the Sun River project and by 1904 was the engineer in charge of the project. He held that position until 1910.

Through the cooperative advertising efforts of the Reclamation Service, the Great Falls Commercial Club, and the Great Northern railroad, people in other parts of the United States learned about the Sun River project. Notices in newspapers suggested that interested parties write to the project manager for more information. Robbins developed several form letters that he used to respond to these requests. One letter emphasized the low cost of the land; productive soil that required no clearing; the close proximity of telephone lines, mail routes, schools, and churches; the planned electric railway; and the moderating effect of chinook winds on the area’s winter weather. Since the advertising campaign targeted Midwestern states with large numbers of dairy farmers, another letter focused on the great potential for dairy farming in the project. Robbins described the inability of local creameries to meet the demand for their products and pointed out the fine wild grasses that grew in the Sun River valley that could be used as forage for dairy stock. In 1910 Robbins developed another advertisement aimed at the smelter laborers in Great Falls. Assuming that a man could both keep his job and improve a farm unit, he suggested that by farming a homestead in
the project, the family of a laborer could "earn their living," leaving the laborer's wages to be "an accumulation for old age and for the childrens' education." As testimony to the project's potential, he emphasized that thirty families from Montana's irrigated and prosperous Bitterroot valley had taken up claims in the Fort Shaw division.

Robbins' enthusiasm for the Sun River project undoubtedly colored the initial expectations the Fort Shaw settlers had for their new homes. When reality did not match expectations, the settlers began attacking Robbins, suggesting he had duped them into taking up worthless land, but their displeasure quickly expanded to include the entire Reclamation Service. The summer of 1909 marked the beginning of an adversarial relationship that existed in varying degrees throughout the entire period of this study.

The problems E.F. Miksch outlined in his letter to Senator Walsh in 1913 had already started to become apparent little more than a year after the Fort Shaw division opened. During the summer of 1909 the Senate Irrigation Committee, accompanied by the director of the Reclamation Service, F.H. Newell, and Secretary of the Interior Richard A. Ballinger, toured the reclamation projects of the West to evaluate the effectiveness of the Service's work. In advance of their visit they sent questionnaires to the projects, soliciting the settlers' opinions about their farms, their economic pros-
pects, and the operation and maintenance of the irrigation systems. The Fort Shaw farmers chose five men to present their responses to these questions in the meeting with the officials.

The settlers' organization and opinions clearly angered the project engineer. Writing more than a year later, in his annual report, he related that there had been several informal meetings of a "few of the farmers" where they discussed forming a cooperative organization to buy farm implements and groceries and to market their produce. These meetings "...finally led to a general discussion, together with various other things they began kicking at the Service, and afterwards drew up resolutions to be presented before the Senate Committee. These resolutions were so radical that some of the fairer minded members severed connections with the meetings. So that when the water users committee presented their resolutions to the Senate Committee they were more or less a farce."6

The night before the scheduled meeting, four men from the Fort Shaw area, perhaps some of the "fairer minded members" to which the project engineer later referred, traveled to Great Falls at the invitation of the Commercial Club to meet unofficially with the senators. They told the gathering that the settlers were "well satisfied" with the way in which the project was being operated. The only criticism they offered
was of the demonstration farm, agreeing among themselves that it should be discontinued because none of the farmers benefited from it and it was costly to operate. S.B. Robbins also spoke to the senators that evening. He said none of the settlers was trying to evade payment of construction costs and that all could raise enough crops to meet their payments. Although he said he thought the demonstration farm helped to show farmers how to deal with some of their irrigation problems, and admitted that it brought revenue to the project, he was non-committal about whether it should be continued.7

The next day the senators toured the Fort Shaw unit, ending up at Reclamation headquarters at Fort Shaw to meet with the official settlers' committee. Before responding to the questionnaire, the committee members announced that they had been chosen as a result of two meetings, one at Fort Shaw at which fourteen persons were present, and one at Simms, which twenty-five attended. (Later in the discussion one committee member allowed that the satisfaction of settlers with their conditions might have contributed to the small attendance at these meetings.) Whether or not the committee represented the opinions of the majority of the eighty-five or so families of the Fort Shaw unit, the five men identified most of the problems that would continue to plague both the farmers and the Reclamation Service for the next twenty years of the division's operation. Their dissatisfaction focused on
the cost of farming in the project, which limited their ability to prosper; inadequate construction of some parts of the system; the small size of their farms; the lack of a market; and the actions of specific Reclamation employees.

The cost of farming federally irrigated land topped the committee's list of concerns and took several forms. They believed the period for repayment of construction costs should be extended from ten years to twenty. Some of the costly construction appeared to be inadequate and would need to be remedied: laterals were too small, some farm units were being flooded when water rose beyond a certain point in the canals, and concrete work had not been protected from the effects of alkali. Also, their small units were not suited to profitable grain production, the only crop for which there was a ready local market. Another economic issue was that the settlers didn't think Robbins was giving them as much construction-related employment as possible—a carrot that had been held out to prospective settlers who had limited financial resources. Finally, as a way to reduce the cost of operation and maintenance, the farmers suggested they be permitted to do repair and maintenance work themselves.8

The committee also responded to other of the senators' questions. Regarding the advertising of the project, the settlers thought that the "methods were not such as the United States should adopt." Contrary to the information they had
received, they lacked transportation, a market, and school facilities. In addition, the farmers had found their farm units were too small to carry very much livestock. They suggested a common pasture might be located on some of the rough land in the division that was not suitable for irrigation. As for the demonstration farm, the committee stated that it had not been in operation long enough to determine its value to the settlers. Finally, the settlers expressed their dissatisfaction with S.B. Robbins. He operated the irrigation system unilaterally when the settlers thought they should be consulted. As a remedy, they suggested that forming a water users' association would facilitate better communication. In addition, they charged that Robbins spent too much time on his private interests—the electric railway and his own ranch—but admitted that his work on the railway might be to their benefit.9

The senators gave Robbins an opportunity to respond to the settlers' criticisms. He had no problems fielding the charges of inadequate construction and offered solutions that had been undertaken or were planned. Regarding employment of the settlers, he said he had used them when they were available but could not hold up construction until they were free from farming duties.10 He also defended his personal interests in the electric railway and his farm on the north bench. He denied spending as much time away from the project as the
settlers claimed, adding that the railway was for their benefit as well as his. Admitting he had leased a ranch on the bench north of the river, he informed the senators that he employed a foreman to run it to "demonstrate to his own satisfaction what could be done on land similar to Fort Shaw land."¹¹

Other than drawing a line in the sand, little came from the encounter in 1909 between the settlers of Fort Shaw and the Reclamation Service. In July, 1910, S.B. Robbins resigned from the Service to manage a private irrigation company in another part of the state. No evidence exists to suggest that he left because of the settlers' complaints. Perhaps he decided that his engineering training had not prepared him to manage people. However, it is clear that Robbins did not abandon his dream. As a private citizen he took part in the successful campaign to extend the project onto the benchland north of the river. Until shortly before his death in 1948 he owned and operated a profitable irrigated farm there, a well-respected member of the reclamation project community.¹²

The farmers failed to form a water users' association and remained unorganized until 1912. It is significant, though, that three of the five men who formed the settlers' committee—H.E. Culver, Fred Sauke, and R.A. Brooking—became community leaders who were active during the next thirty years of the division's history. All were newcomers to the Sun
River valley. Of the four men who spoke unofficially to the
senators at the invitation of the Commercial Club, one, who
lived near the valley prior to establishment of the project,
was active in community affairs for several more years, but
all appear to have left the Fort Shaw division by 1920. What
is more important is that the settlers had, during the first
year of the project's operation, established a way of repre­
senting themselves to the outside world. They chose leaders
and presented their protests in an accepted manner. This
formation of a short-lived and weak association to meet an
immediate problem would become the common way in which the
people of the Fort Shaw division organized themselves.

By 1912 a number of the settlers on the Fort Shaw unit,
like settlers on other federal projects, were behind in paying
their annual construction charges. In March of 1912 the
Reclamation Service attempted to give the settlers some re­
lief. By accepting an increase in construction costs from
thirty dollars to thirty-six dollars per acre, all settlers
could graduate their construction payments, that is, pay less
in the first years and more in the later years of the ten year
loan term. At the same time, the Reclamation Service doubled
O&M charges, from fifty cents per acre to one dollar, and
payment was due immediately, in March, rather than after
harvest, as had been the previous practice. Under strong
pressure from Congress to recoup construction costs, the
Reclamation Service intended that no slackers be permitted to remain on the land.

Protests from outraged settlers forced the Service to backpedal, offering in early July to permit late payment of O&M charges with a ten-cent per acre increase in cost. In spite of this option, late in July of 1912 the project engineer of the Fort Shaw unit refused water to settlers who had not paid the current O&M charges. His action caused considerable crop damage and brought about a meeting of the settlers. H.E. Culver, one of the men who had represented the settlers in their meeting with the Senate Irrigation Committee in 1909, acted as chairman. The group appointed a committee of three to meet with the project engineer to discuss the attitude of the Reclamation Service toward giving the settlers full information about the operation and maintenance of the project. They also intended to learn how the $14,000 that had been collected for O&M in 1912 had been spent. Those in attendance at the meeting approved resolutions condemning the action of the project engineer and the system that would permit one man to cause "distress [and] financial embarrassment" to the farmers. They called on their congressmen to end this kind of tyrannical behavior. Also at this meeting, the settlers appointed a committee to draw up by-laws for a water users' association.
Three days after a report of this meeting appeared in the Great Falls newspaper, a dissenting group of settlers wrote to the editor and condemned the sloppy journalistic practices that allowed such an account to be printed. The letter was signed by four men who were members of the executive committee of the Fort Shaw Civic Club. They denied that the indignation meeting had involved a majority of the settlers, suggesting rather that those present consisted of "the committeemen and an audience of about equal number." The writers pointed out that the Reclamation Service always provided detailed information to the settlers about O&M expenditures, but usually not until the end of the irrigation season. They also charged that the alleged amount collected for O&M had been inflated. Finally, the letter stated that six months earlier, at a meeting of the water users of the eastern half of the Fort Shaw unit, the farmers had discussed organizing a water users' association and declared themselves not in favor of the idea. Since they believed attitudes had not changed in the intervening months, the writers deplored the use of the name of Fort Shaw water users' association for a body they considered to be unrepresentative.16

This incident underlines the weakness of the settlers' organizations and the factionalization of the people who lived in the Fort Shaw division. By 1912, each of the communities in the division--Fort Shaw, Simms, and Sun River--had its own
organizations, most of which were social but acted in civic matters when the occasion arose. The Fort Shaw Civic Club had been in existence since late 1909. In January of 1912 the members had reorganized and adopted a new constitution that gave them "latitude" to act more in the interest of the community. Among the officers the members elected at that time was H. E. Culver, whom they named second vice-president.¹⁷

Culver would serve in many positions of leadership in the reclamation project community from this time until his death in 1937. At the age of thirty-seven he was a newspaper copy reader in St. Louis, Missouri. The close work was affecting his health, so he decided to change careers. Culver came to the project in 1908, filing on land about two miles from the town of Fort Shaw, a claim that had 160 acres of land, 49 acres of which were irrigable. A few months later, his wife and infant daughter joined him. Within three years Culver had most of his irrigable land in production, was buying some livestock, and had added $2000 worth of improvements to his farm.¹⁸ His letters indicate that he was an articulate man and it was probably for that reason rather than any particular status he may have achieved as a farmer that the water users began to turn to him as their spokesperson.

The Fort Shaw Civic Club called a meeting early in September to resolve the differences of opinion that existed among its members over the July turn-off of irrigation water.
Being notified of the meeting a week in advance, many members attended. The members adopted unanimously a number of resolutions that H.E. Culver had drawn up. These included censure of the dissenting officers for their unauthorized and unfounded statements to the press; acceptance of the resolutions that the earlier indignation meeting had adopted; criticism of the Reclamation Service for charging construction costs to O&M; and criticism of the Reclamation Service for changing the terms of the contracts they had made with the settlers (a reference to the Service's demand that O&M be paid in the spring of the year rather than after the irrigation season).  

Three weeks later the Fort Shaw Water Users' Association organized officially, with fifty charter members. They elected two people from Fort Shaw to be officers: H.E. Culver, president, and L.E. Baldwin (the Methodist minister), secretary. However, the other two executive offices and eight of nine director positions were divided equally between Simms and Sun River residents. This minority of people from Fort Shaw and the absence of any of the dissenting water users from the executive board may reflect a continuing factionalization of the division. While the factionalization never reached the point of destroying the water users' association, the people of the Fort Shaw division often seemed to divide along a Fort Shaw/Simms axis.
The project engineer mentioned the water users' organization in his 1913 annual report, saying it was "temporary," "not incorporated yet and all of the water users are not members of this association so they would not in their present form be recognized by the Reclamation Service." In spite of the engineer's assessment, the association worked during 1913 to secure the significant financial concessions from the Reclamation Service that ultimately would be included in the Reclamation Extension Act of 1914.21

The resolutions the settlers adopted in 1912 gained the attention of their representatives in Washington. In February, 1913, Senator Walsh and Representative Thomas Stout visited the Fort Shaw division to hear the settlers' case. The farmers reiterated once again the impossibility of meeting construction and O&M payments. They blamed their lack of money on poor soil, poor markets, and poor management of the irrigation system. To further their campaign, the water users also sent a petition signed by more than two-thirds of the settlers to the secretary of the interior. They asked that the operation and maintenance of the division be turned over to them, arguing that government operation was extravagant.22 They protested the inclusion in their O&M charges the costs of such things as installation of telephone lines for the Reclamation Service, rebuilding of ditches, and publicity and advertising. In addition, the water users believed the Recla-
The Reclamation Service employed more ditch riders than were needed and paid them too much.\textsuperscript{23}

When Franklin Lane became Secretary of the Interior a short time later, the work of the Reclamation Service was under fire. Critics at the national level charged that some projects were merely worthless products of the pork barrel. The Montana projects were among those being criticized. Then, early in April, Lane learned of grass roots criticism of the Sun River project. H.E. Culver, as president of the Fort Shaw Water Users' Association, wrote to Secretary Lane and implored him to give his personal attention to the situation of the Fort Shaw settlers.

In his letter, Culver related that the project engineer had threatened to cancel the claims of all persons who did not pay outstanding maintenance, operation, and building charges by May 2. People were in arrears for two reasons, Culver asserted: they had been deceived by the Reclamation Service about the agricultural conditions and about the terms of repayment, particularly the operation and maintenance charge. He pointed out that a year earlier, under a similar threat, some persons were "frightened into raising the money at a crippling sacrifice." Others had accepted the new contract the Service offered, which allowed them graduated payments if they agreed to increase their per acre construction cost to thirty-six dollars. What particularly angered the settlers
who had taken one or the other of these options was that nothing happened to those who ignored the threat and just did not pay. While the settlers faced the current deadline the Supreme Court had before it a case to determine the right of the government to collect O&M charges and Congress was acting upon a bill to extend the time for repaying construction charges. Culver asked simply that O&M and construction payments be deferred until these matters were decided.24

The people of Fort Shaw were not the only reclamation settlers having problems. Similar rumblings were coming from many other projects. To have an opportunity to hear for himself the claims of the disgruntled settlers on all of the federal reclamation projects, Secretary Lane invited representatives of the projects to a meeting in Washington in May, 1913.

Not surprisingly, the Fort Shaw Water Users' Association sent H.E. Culver. In two hours of testimony he laid the requests of the Fort Shaw settlers before Secretary Lane. Their most urgent need was for a change in the schedule of payments of construction charges. They also urged that those settlers who had agreed to pay thirty-six dollars per acre on the graduated plan be permitted to return to the originally agreed upon price of thirty dollars per acre. The settlers also requested the government to bear the expense of reclaiming all of the waterlogged lands of the unit, about one-sixth
of the total irrigable area, claiming that poor engineering caused the problem. And finally, besides asking for changes in the personnel of the Reclamation Service at the national level, the settlers wished to be consulted regarding administrative matters that affected their welfare, believing this would lead to a reduction in the cost of operation and maintenance. Many years later, reminiscing about her husband’s trip to Washington, Minette Culver recalled the sacrifice he made by representing his neighbors. His absence from home at planting time that spring cost them a year’s crop. She also was amused to remember that her husband said Secretary Lane called him a “shyster lawyer.”

Regardless of what Secretary Lane’s opinion of Culver might have been, he did what he could to provide financial relief for the settlers on all of the federal projects. He immediately reduced construction charges for 1913 to one-third their normal amount and permitted late payment of O&M charges. A year later Congress passed the Extension Act, lengthening the period of time for payoff of construction charges from ten to twenty years, graduating payments, and permitting previously unpaid O&M charges to be added to the pay-off with a two per cent penalty.

The financial concessions the settlers received in 1913 and 1914 relieved the pressure on them to some extent, but O&M costs continued to be a worry until the prosperous years of
World War I. In 1915, when the Reclamation Service announced it would convene a three-man board of review for the Fort Shaw division to examine the validity of past construction and O&M charges, the water users said they preferred that the books go unexamined. Although the issue was one they had raised themselves, and one of the board members would be a water user, they didn’t want to pay the expenses associated with the review. The Service overrode their protests, however, and relieved some worries by fixing board members’ compensation at ten dollars per day plus traveling expenses.28

As their continuing interest in keeping O&M as low as possible made clear, thrift was a characteristic of the Fort Shaw settlers from the earliest days of the division’s operation. A few came to the project with comfortable nest-eggs, but most were people of small means. The low initial investment and easy credit the government allowed had attracted them. The cost of operation of the canal system was an important variable that they wanted to control. Also, some settlers had no intention of making the Sun River valley their home; these speculators, perhaps even more than the home-builders, desired to keep costs low. The concessions the Reclamation Service made in 1913 and 1914 taught the settlers that protest worked, so they continued to dig in their heels and resist change if it meant increased payments. They had learned that the Reclamation Service had a vested interest to
protect and keeping settlers on the project was the best way to do that.

Soon after its organization, the nascent water users' association also gave its attention to another potential expense that threatened the settlers. The Reclamation Service wanted to drain the seeped lands of the project, at the settlers' expense. Seepage—the term used to describe ground water being forced to the soil surface—had begun to show up in the first irrigating season. It occurred primarily in land west and south of the town of Fort Shaw and had increased gradually over a period years. By 1914 it affected approximately 2,200 acres in a total irrigable area of 16,300 acres. Land that was seeped to the point of having water standing on the surface was useless for cultivation. Land that was less seriously seeped drained poorly, and few crops grew well in soggy soil.

The Reclamation Service considered the cost of draining the seeped lands to be an investment in assuring the costs of O&M would be paid. They had already made concessions regarding deficient O&M payments and didn't wish to make more. By 1915, approximately 1,100 acres of the seeped land was in units that already had been taken up, but nearly 800 acres affected by seepage were in forty-four farm units that were unoccupied. The seeped land comprised about one-third of the area of the unoccupied units, so the chances of anyone taking
up these tracts were slim. Since O&M costs were based on the total irrigable acreage of the division, not just the occupied acreage, people who were paying O&M charges in 1914 carried a heavier burden than they would if the division was fully occupied. Increasing unit occupancy meant lower O&M charges for individual water users, and, therefore, a better chance for the Reclamation Service that the charges would be paid.\textsuperscript{29}

The water users did not share the Reclamation Service’s point of view. To them, a drainage project of unknown magnitude meant only one thing, a larger construction cost to repay. Early in 1913, when a rumor surfaced that the Service was about to call for bids on the drainage work, the water users met and agreed unanimously to demand that the work not proceed until definite costs and assessments were established. The project engineer, sensing the strength of the opposition, dropped his plans.\textsuperscript{30}

During 1914, representatives of the water users’ association monitored the extent of the seeped lands, but no other action took place. In 1915 a board consisting of S.F. Hockersmith, who represented the water users’ association, Fred Sauke, who represented the water users, and a junior engineer from the Reclamation Service inspected the seeped lands and approved a list of acreage which would be exempted temporarily from O&M charges. The affected landowners were reluctant to permanently give up the seeped land, even though such a relin-
quishment would have reduced the construction cost they had to pay, because they feared they would get less water for their remaining acreage.\textsuperscript{31}

Also in 1915, while examining the costs associated with the project, the Board of Review addressed the seepage problem. The board, which included Rev. L.E. Baldwin as the representative of the water users, interviewed farmers whose land was affected. Apparently, most of them were in favor of drainage, for in their report, the board members concluded that the drainage issue had been defeated by the more numerous settlers who had forty-acre units and whose land was unaffected by seepage.\textsuperscript{32} They did not mention that most of the forty-acre units were near Simms while the larger units that were affected by seepage were in the vicinity of Fort Shaw. From 1915 until 1919 the Reclamation Service continued to monitor the seepage situation but it did not become an issue for general discussion.

After 1915, the farmers of Fort Shaw gave little thought to such things as perfecting a water users' association. They were absorbed in increasing production to meet the demands of wartime Europe. A dwindling local labor supply forced farmers to put in longer and longer hours. In spite of these pressures, the officers of the water users' association continued to pursue establishing an organization the Reclamation Service would recognize. In 1916 and again in 1917 a committee com-
posed of Culver, Hockersmith, and several of the directors of the water users' association met with the project engineer and the district counsel for the Reclamation Service to discuss the alternative forms of organization that were acceptable. All agreed that the irrigation district form—a municipal organization empowered to tax and issue bonds—seemed superior to a water users' association, but Montana laws regarding irrigation districts were not well adapted to projects that were already constructed. Until revisions were made in Montana law, the water users' representatives agreed to work to secure local support for the district form of organization.\textsuperscript{33}

With little trouble the committee members convinced their neighbors that an irrigation district would be the most advantageous way to organize. By the end of 1917, a petition asking the District Court to order formation of the Fort Shaw Irrigation District had nearly the required number of signatures. The Montana legislature also revised state law so that irrigation districts could operate within federal reclamation projects.\textsuperscript{34}

Progress in 1918 toward formation of the irrigation district was slow. Because of turnovers in land ownership in the Fort Shaw division, some of the signatures on the original petition no longer were valid, so committee members circulated copies of a new petition. By year's end they had the required number of signatures, and in June, 1919, the District Court
issued the decree to order formation of the Fort Shaw Irrigation District. The legal rights and responsibilities adhering to the irrigation district would not go into effect, however, until the water users negotiated a contract to assume management of the irrigation system with the Secretary of the Interior. Until that time, the Fort Shaw Irrigation District (FSID) was little more than a legally recognized water users' association with which the Reclamation Service could deal.

Although the judge appointed five commissioners for the FSID when he issued the decree of formation, thereafter the water users elected one or more commissioners each spring at an annual election. Lengths of terms varied so that the five-member board always had an experienced component. These men comprised the governing body of the district, worked directly with the Reclamation Service, and eventually would set the district's fiscal policy. In 1920, at the first election, the water users elected C.L. Bailey as one of the commissioners. At their first meeting, the board of commissioners selected him to be their president. The board also appointed H.E. Culver, who was not a commissioner, to be their secretary. Culver served in this capacity until 1927, when the FSID hired its first manager. Bailey continued to be re-elected and was the board's president until 1933. Although local politics occasionally intervened and brought a newcomer to the board
for a brief period, most commissioners, like Bailey, remained in office for several terms.

C.L. Bailey had come to the Sun River project in 1910 as an assistant engineer with the Reclamation Service. He had graduated from the University of Maine in 1905 with a B.S. in civil engineering and had previously been employed on the Lower Yellowstone and Flathead projects. He continued to work for the Reclamation Service on the Sun River project until the end of 1917, but in 1911 he also took up a forty-acre farm in the Fort Shaw division, near the town of Fort Shaw. In 1915, he married Gertrude Clark, the daughter of one of the original Fort Shaw settlers. She enlarged their holdings in 1924 by proving up an eighty-acre unit in the same section as Bailey’s forty acres. Besides serving as a commissioner for the FSID, Bailey was a community leader in other ways. By 1940 he had been president of the Fort Shaw Farmers Club, a director of the Sun River Poultry Marketing Association, and represented Fort Shaw on the Intercommunity Council as it worked to bring electricity to the valley. He was one of the Fort Shaw farmers who experimented in the 1920s with sugar beet growing and in 1930 cooperated with the county agent as a demonstration farmer.36 While he may have held the position of president of the board of commissioners primarily because of his professional training, Bailey was also a successful farmer.
During the years of World War I, the farmers of the Fort Shaw division made great financial gains. The annual average value per acre of their crops increased from $17.29 in 1915 to $42.07 in 1919. Encouraged by the extra money in their pockets, the farmers whose lands were affected by seepage reopened the drainage question. They realized they would be able to increase their production even more if they could farm the wet lands. In 1919, these landowners talked with the Reclamation Service about establishing a drainage district, but found that now the government, not the farmers, was unable to finance the work.

Renewed discussion of the drainage issue proved to be the first step in negotiations that would lead to the Fort Shaw Irrigation District taking over management of the canal system in 1927. In spite of the financial situation of the Reclamation Service in 1919, the agency juggled its allocations and proposed late in 1920 a contract in the amount of $250,000, which included draining the seeped lands, adding $12,000 worth of improvements to the canal system, and payment of a $35,000 O&M deficit that had accrued from 1908 to 1914. Under the terms of the contract, the landowners would pay for these charges after they had paid off the original construction cost of the project. Then water users would have an additional fifteen years to pay off the cost of the proposed contract, which would be about eighteen dollars per acre. While the
Secretary of the Interior and the commissioners of the Fort Shaw Irrigation District approved the contract, final acceptance required approval by enough people to represent a majority of the landowners and a majority of the land in the district.\textsuperscript{39}

The proposed drainage contract divided the community once again. The contract provided that assessments to pay off the $250,000 would be uniform throughout the irrigation district; each landowner would pay the same amount, whether or not the individual's land required drainage. As a result, the landowners around Simms, where there was no seepage, opposed the contract and worked actively against it. By early 1921, the project manager believed the upcoming annual election of irrigation district commissioners would reflect the conflict in the community. He predicted that Simms would try to gain control of the board at that time. When the water users had elected commissioners the previous year, they had chosen two men from Simms and three from Fort Shaw.\textsuperscript{40}

The editor of the Simms \textit{Enterprise}, C.S. Hanna, opposed the drainage contract. Hanna, his wife and two sons had come to the project in 1914 from Grangeville, Idaho, where he had been a merchant and homesteader. At Simms, he bought into a butcher business in which he participated for at least a year. He also took over the Simms \textit{Enterprise} in 1914. Around 1918 he purchased a productive eighty-acre farm unit near Simms.
Hanna became increasingly visible in the community during the years before 1921. He sold real estate, was the local auctioneer, and often represented Simms in meetings with the county commissioners and Great Falls Commercial Club about improving the roads in the valley. He was secretary of the Simms Commercial Club. The project manager observed that "Mr. Hanna usually takes a very radical view on most questions affecting the interest of the water users near Simms."  

Hanna opposed the drainage contract for reasons that coincided with the thinking of the opposition in Simms. Cost was the chief issue. He objected to having title to his land clouded for an additional fifteen years. As it was, farmers in the Fort Shaw Irrigation District could not use their land as collateral for loans because the federal government held a first lien against it. The drainage contract would extend the period of that lien. He also argued that O&M would be doubled with the construction of drainage ditches, since twice the number of ditches would have to be cleaned. He did not believe water users could afford to pay that additional cost since O&M in 1920 had reached a new high of $2.20 per acre. Finally, he wondered what assurance the landowners had that the drainage work would be successful. He pointed to the Huntley project, where the land owners asserted that the drainage system the Reclamation Service had constructed was a failure. Hanna worried that once begun, the Reclamation
Service would continue the drainage work on the Fort Shaw division—regardless of the cost—until the land was drained successfully. At an open meeting in January, 1921, of the commissioners, the project manager, and interested water users, Hanna accused the Reclamation Service of "'graft' by offering to put in a drainage system ... in order to collect a bad debt." Hanna had taken over the role of H.E. Culver, the division's first gadfly. Culver left no record of his opinion about the drainage contract.

The election of irrigation district commissioners in early April undoubtedly surprised the project manager, who apparently overestimated the strength of the opposition to the drainage contract. Only one commissioner was not re-elected, and the new man was favorable to the contract, making the board's position unanimous. The water users assembled again in April to meet with a Reclamation Service official to discuss the drainage contract. At that time, the petition to approve the contract had enough signatures to represent a majority of the land in the district, but not a majority of land owners. A bare majority required fifteen more signatures. At the meeting the opponents of the contract once again expressed their belief that the Reclamation Service was operating unfairly by offering the carrot of deferring the O&M deficit if the water users would "swallow" the drainage contract. The Secretary of the Interior had specified that if
the drainage contract failed, the O&M deficit would have to be paid at the rate of $5,000 per year, beginning immediately. When asked whether he would offer an O&M deferment contract without the drainage work, the engineer responded negatively.⁴³

The work of obtaining the additional signatures to approve the contract dragged on through the spring and summer, by which time the farmers of Fort Shaw were living with the reality of plummeting prices for agricultural products. By the end of the year the commissioners decided that the issue should be dropped until the farmers were more stable financially. That time did not come soon. In 1930 the project manager reported that the farmers of the district were still about equally divided over the seepage issue. Not until 1949 did the district agree to finance the drainage of some 1,200 acres near Fort Shaw at a cost of $20,000.⁴⁴

World War I had brought prosperity to the Fort Shaw division, but it vanished quickly as agricultural prices began a downward spiral in 1920. The average crop value per acre dropped from $42.10 in 1919 to $30.51 in 1920 and plummeted to $13.50 in 1921.⁴⁵ As the farmers' economic position became more and more tenuous they began to fall behind again in their O&M payments. By late 1921, all optimism was gone. Alfalfa hay that had sold for more than $30.00 per ton only two years before stood in stacks and could not be sold for $6.00 per
ton. In November, 1921, after a mass meeting of the water users, the FSID commissioners formally asked the Reclamation Service to defer all delinquent O&M charges and the charge that would be due March 1, 1922 until after the primary construction charges were paid off, in effect the hypothetical deal that the Reclamation engineer had rejected at the meeting in April.46

Dickerman, Radosevich, and Nobe have suggested that after 1920 the Reclamation Service became less concerned with promoting liberty and equality of opportunity and more concerned with stability on the federal projects.47 Liberty and equalization of opportunity had led settlers to seek more and more concessions from the government. In spite of those concessions, the prosperous agricultural communities advocates of reclamation envisioned had failed to materialize. By the early 1920s, many projects were in the same position as the Fort Shaw division. The increasingly poor economic outlook for agriculture prompted the Reclamation Service to begin searching for a way to stabilize the situation—and to cut its losses.

Reclamation Service administrators had little desire to deal with annual requests for relief from payments such as the one the Fort Shaw commissioners made in November. Rather, they preferred to have the irrigation district bear the responsibility for deciding who might be eligible for relief and
to have the responsibility for collection of all charges. They had learned that the farmers tended to pay their county taxes first, then pay the Reclamation Service if they had any money left. If the FSID took over operation and management of the system, the charges would be collected as taxes, not as a separate payment to the Reclamation Service. The administrators also believed that the commissioners would be far less lenient about granting relief to individuals if they were responsible for collection and payment of the district’s total obligation to the government. From all angles, it seemed that turning management over to the irrigation district would be a desirable move. The manager of the Sun River project began, therefore, in 1921, to make moves to facilitate the take-over of the irrigation system by the FSID.48

In January, 1922, the director of the Reclamation Service wrote to the commissioners of the Fort Shaw district, refusing the type of relief they requested, but suggesting that they give careful consideration to how much money the water users could save if they managed the system themselves. He provided figures to show that administrative expenses contributed as much as 25 percent of the cost of O&M. He suggested that if the FSID took over the operation and maintenance of the system, the Reclamation Service would consent to deferred payment of the O&M deficit and the 1922 charges.49
At a general meeting held later that month, the water users agreed that they were not financially able to take over operation of the canal system in 1922. Under state law, they had no means of collecting any money until the regular tax payment date in November—if the farmers had any money to collect. They asked instead that the director include the 1922 charges in the deferred payment deal and the District would take over operation of the system in 1923. However, with crops damaged by hail and grasshoppers and farmers' incomes limited, what had seemed possible in January appeared in September to be impossible. The commissioners notified the project manager that the irrigation district would not be able to take over management in January, 1923, as it had promised.\textsuperscript{50}

In January, 1923, as president of the FSID, C.L. Bailey attended a meeting in Salt Lake City of delegates from various federal projects. While there, he learned of the negotiations other irrigation districts were having with the Reclamation Service and came away thinking that perhaps the Fort Shaw district was not being given the same concessions that other districts had managed to extract.\textsuperscript{51}

When the water users met in a general meeting in February, 1923, they heard Bailey's report and became even less eager to assume control of the canal system. They were convinced that the proposed contract did not provide sufficient
financial relief. Unless the government provided for a longer pay-off period for construction costs, they could see no way to pay the amounts in arrears and keep the system going. The water users passed a motion calling for a contract that provided all delinquent payments (both construction and O&M) to be made payable without penalties as supplemental construction, that is, after the pay-off of the original construction costs. They also asked that the joint liability clause of the proposed contract be eliminated. This clause made all unit holders responsible for the total construction cost rather than each being individually responsible for a portion of the cost based on the acreage owned. The presence of this clause in the contract was especially onerous to people who had operated independently, paid their obligations, and expected to be free of debt to the government in the near future.52

Early in 1923 Hubert Work replaced A.B. Fall as Secretary of the Interior. As part of his program to make his department more efficient, he renamed the Reclamation Service the Bureau of Reclamation and appointed D.W. Davis its first commissioner. In September, 1923, Davis visited the Fort Shaw division to discuss the proposed contract with the water users. He was willing to agree to the financial concessions the water users had proposed, but he did not look favorably on eliminating the joint liability clause. He promised to discuss it with Secretary Work, however, and send a definite
answer through the Bureau's district counsel. By year's end no decision had been made and the contract remained merely a proposal. The project manager assessed the situation in this way:

Considerable doubt exists in the minds of many of the water users and particularly the commissioners as to the advisability of the water users assuming charge of the operation of the project. It seems to be a case where they hesitate to assume a definite responsibility and prefer to let the United States look after things and furnish the money for operation and maintenance work.53

Assuming the project manager correctly analyzed the thinking of the water users, by 1924 the water users thought their liberty and equality of opportunity would be impaired if they took over management of the system. In a decade they had made a 180-degree change in attitude. The stability they desired—that of letting the government shoulder the responsibility for financing and operating the irrigation system—was the very instability that the Bureau of Reclamation sought to end. Considering the wide disparity of these viewpoints, it took a surprisingly short time for the two groups to reach consensus. Changes in federal reclamation policy promoted agreement.

Late in 1923 Secretary Work created a special commission to study the problems of federal reclamation. Known commonly as the Fact Finders, the commissioners visited the Sun River
project during their tour of the western states. In 1924 Congress passed the "Fact Finders Act," which codified some of the recommendations of the commission. The act provided for classification of soil within federal reclamation projects. Classification would identify unproductive land and make it possible to relieve such acreage of construction charges. The legislation also provided for construction charges to be repaid on the basis of the productivity of the land. Annual payments would be 5 percent of the average of the gross annual acre income of the district's irrigable land in cultivation for the preceding ten calendar years. In 1926 Congress passed additional legislation permitting the secretary of the interior to write off certain construction costs and deficits. The amount authorized for write-off for the Sun River project was the disputed $35,000 O&M deficit. 54

In spite of these concessions, the question of eliminating the joint liability clause continued unresolved into 1926. The water users had the support of Scott Leavitt, their representative in Congress, for individual liability, but he failed to influence the Department of the Interior. In March, C.L. Bailey represented the FSID and participated along with a Bureau of Reclamation representative in a meeting with the Irrigation Committee of the Great Falls Commercial Club, where they tried to resolve the issue. Six months later, after going to Washington, D.C., to negotiate directly with Secre-
tary Work, Bailey sent a letter and a copy of the proposed contract to all water users, asking their support for the contract as it then stood. The only concession the commissioners had not been able to obtain was elimination of the joint liability clause.

The proposed contract included changes made possible by the Fact Finders' recommendations. By classifying and cutting out unproductive land, the district would be reduced from 16,346 to 13,849 acres and construction charges would apply to only 9,626 acres. All delinquent construction and O&M charges and penalties would be added to future construction charges. Payment of construction charges would be five per cent of the average gross crop value for the previous ten years and would be graduated according to land classification. The amount due in 1926 would be only 30 percent of the full 5 percent amount, increasing gradually to the full amount in 1929 and thereafter. The FSID would take over management on January 1, 1927. Construction and O&M charges would be collected with other taxes by the county treasurer, half in November and half in May. In an election a few weeks later, the necessary 60 percent of the landowners representing 60 percent of the land in the district approved the contract. On January 1, 1927, the water users began managing the irrigation system for themselves.
In spite of delinquencies, deficits, and requests for relief in the years before 1927, after 1927 the FSID operated admirably in meeting its obligations to the government. Donald Swain has suggested that joint liability promoted delinquency in payments. "No matter if an individual paid his share of the debt in full, his title was not clear until the total construction cost had been met. When a large number of the settlers could not pay, those who were able to pay refused because they considered the charge a levy on thrift and industry." This was not the case with the water users in the FSID. While the commissioners did not hesitate to take advantage of the moratoria on construction charges that Congress granted during the 1930s, the district always met the annual charges the Bureau levied.

The commissioners established a collection policy that permitted few exceptions. An incident that took place in 1939 is illustrative. In June, a Bureau of Reclamation official met with the commissioners to assess the financial status of the district and to determine whether or not relief should be granted from the upcoming payment of construction charges. The commissioners were surprised to learn that relief was a possibility and informed the official that they had already collected the required amount in the previous year. They made it clear, however, that this should not obscure the true financial state of the water users. Many had let their county
taxes go delinquent to meet their FSID charges. The commissioners attributed this kind of compliance to their firm position that landowners who did not pay their charges would not receive water. They had accepted crop mortgages as payment for a short time in the early years of the Depression, but had quickly determined they could not be in the business of providing credit.\textsuperscript{59}

While they worked to meet their obligations, thriftiness continued to be the byword for the district. By 1930 the commissioners were operating the canal system for slightly less than one dollar per acre, the lowest the O&M charge had been since 1912. They had even managed to keep costs below assessments and since 1927 had accumulated a surplus of $5,700. By 1940 the surplus amounted to $8,450.\textsuperscript{60}

Keeping costs low often meant paying employees less. Day laborers, most often farmers from the district, did most of the canal work. They were employed on an as-needed basis and received more if they provided a team. The only regular employees were the four ditch riders, who had to furnish and feed their own horses, and the manager of the district, a position created in 1927. Wages remained stable from 1927 until February, 1932, when the commissioners reduced the salaries of ditch riders from $125 to $112 per month. Day labor went from $3.60 per day to $3.00 (or $4.00 if they furnished a team). They also reduced the salary of the manag-
er of the district from $200 to $170 per month. Ten months later they cut wages again, reducing day labor to $2.50 per day, ditchriders to $80 and the manager to $153 per month. A few months later, discouraged by his prospects, the manager quit. The search for a replacement took several months because the commissioners hoped to find a qualified man for no more than $125 per month. Previously, they had been fortunate in having a former Reclamation employee who could handle both the bookkeeping and the operation of the canal system. People with both skills were hard to find.

After receiving few applications, in February, 1934, they hired a man from Fort Collins, Colorado, who accepted their offer of $125 per month plus a house. In 1937 he asked for a raise to $150 per month and the board granted him $140. Early in 1938 the commissioners decided not to renew the manager’s contract, which came due in March. The manager had come into conflict with one of the commissioners whom he had refused to employ to do work for the district, citing the Montana law that prohibited such practices. Telling the Bureau of Reclamation’s chief engineer in Denver about his experience, the ex-manager said he was not sorry to leave Fort Shaw because the situation had become so uncomfortable. He noted that even though the man with whom he had disagreed had "so many enemies there seems no chance of his re-election" in
April, he expected the man's demand that the new manager be "low-priced" would be honored.63

The "low-priced" man the commissioners employed (at $175 per month) was none other than C.L. Bailey, who had been president of the board of commissioners from 1920 to 1933. Bailey had left the board in 1933 when he lost to his challenger by three votes in an election of questionable legality. When the manager's position became available later that year, the superintendent of the Sun River project and the commissioners tried to convince Bailey to accept the job, but he refused.64 Why he was willing to become manager in 1938 is not known. He may have been frustrated with what had been happening with the board of commissioners and thought that a manager from the community would be less apt to be bullied. Perhaps his family needed the extra money his salary would provide. He was 56 years old, his oldest son had entered college in 1935 and he had four more children coming up. Whatever the reason, the commissioners and the district were fortunate to have his services.

Their relationship with the federal government was an issue that the settlers of the Fort Shaw division had been unable to ignore. While other American farmers could operate independently, telling themselves the government had little to do with their farming businesses, the people of Fort Shaw perceived government policies as directly impairing their
liberty and influencing their success. They determined within
the first year of the division's operation that a semblance of
unity would benefit them more than trying to overcome obsta-
cles individually. Thus they began the process of creating an
organization and choosing leaders to represent their ideas and
desires to the government.

For the first decade the settlers' organization had been
weak, functioning only on an as-needed basis, with the offi-
cers providing whatever continuity existed. The government
welcomed the settlers' organization, but encouraged them to
formalize it—to create a legal entity with which the
government's agents could make binding agreements. In 1919
the water users' weak association crystallized in the forma-
tion of the Fort Shaw Irrigation District. Then, in 1927,
after six years of negotiation, the water users finally agreed
that conditions were right for them to take over operation of
the canal system. They had obtained what they believed to be
enough financial concessions to operate their farms profita-
ably and still comply with the requirements of the Bureau of
Reclamation. The stability the Bureau had desired came at a
high price.

The years that followed revealed that the organization
the water users created and the leaders they chose were ade-
quate to the task. It is significant that this association
was the only organization to benefit themselves that the
people of the Fort Shaw division managed to maintain on a permanent basis. Other cooperative associations fell apart within a few years. The difference was that the water users' association had an identifiable entity with which to deal, and identifiable responsibilities to dispatch. And, most important, from the first year of settlement, the cost of the canal system and the presence of the federal government affected every farmer in the division, every year. The cooperative marketing associations that will be examined in the next chapter never had such a wide base of appeal.
ENDNOTES

1. E.F. Miksch to Senator T.J. Walsh, April 12, 1913, Box 137, T. J. Walsh/LC.

2. Dickerman, Radosevich, and Nobe, pp. 20-21, Appendix I.


5. Great Falls Daily Leader, August 21, 1909, p. 4.

6. Determining who wrote this description is difficult. Robbins had left the Service in the summer of 1910 and the report is dated November 30, 1910, well over a year after the meeting took place. Probably, J.B. Bond, who took over as project engineer, wrote from Robbins' notes. Project Histories, 1910 Project History, pp. 169-70.


9. Ibid.

10. In the annual report for 1910, the project engineer (again, it is not clear whose opinion this is) described his experience in employing settlers for construction: "The majority of those living at home [full-time employees lived in the Reclamation camp] were not very satisfactory. If it was a little cloudy the settler would not show up and oftentimes, they would have work which they wished to do elsewhere and stay away so that it was very hard to work a crew economically....Some have an idea that as they are working for the United States they do not have to work as hard as for an individual. It is more satisfactory to use the ordinary 'hobo' and to hire teams with no drivers." Project Histories, 1910 Project History, p. 168.


13. Project Histories, 1912 Project History, pp. 64, 64a.


17. Ibid., January 16, 1912, p. 5.

18. Stuwe, p. 73; Project Histories, 1911 Maintenance and Operation Report, Sheet 7 and p. 5.

19. Great Falls Daily Leader, September 9, 1912, p. 3.

20. Project Histories, 1913 Project History, p. 91.


23. "Operation and Maintenance," Box 59, T.J. Walsh/LC.

24. President, Fort Shaw Water Users Association to Franklin K. Lane, April 3, 1913, Box 59, T.J. Walsh/LC.

25. Great Falls Daily Tribune, May 25, 1913, p. 3; Stuwe, p. 74.

26. Project Histories, 1913 Project History, pp. 87, 90.


28. Great Falls Daily Tribune, January 12, 1915, p. 3; February 20, 1915, p. 3.


34. Project Histories, 1917 Project History, pp. 218, 243.

36. Superintendent (Sun River Project) to Commissioner (of Bureau of Reclamation), February 26, 1938, Box 1354, RG No. 115, NA/Denver; Stuwe, p. 17; Cascade Courier, May 3, 1929, p. 8; February 11, 1932, p. 1; March 12, 1936, p. 1; Fairfield Times, August 14, 1924; Project Histories, RG 115, NA/Denver, 1923 Project History, p. 26.


40. Project Histories, RG 115, NA/Denver, 1920 Project History, p. 139; Minute Book of the Fort Shaw Irrigation District Commissioners, Fort Shaw Irrigation District Office, Fort Shaw, Montana, p. 3. (hereafter FSID Minute Book)

41. Great Falls Daily Tribune, February 4, 1914, p. 5; September 19, 1917, p. 6; January 24, 1918, p. 8; June 21, 1919, p. 3; January 22, 1920, p. 5; Great Falls Daily Leader October 24, 1919, p. 5; February 21, 1910, p. 11; memorandum from Project Manager to Chief Engineer, United States Reclamation Service, Great Falls, Montana, January 5, 1921, Box 1355, RG 115, NA/Denver.

42. The bad debt to which Hanna referred was the $35,000 that the Reclamation Service claimed was an accumulated O&M deficit from 1908-1914. The water users argued that this amount represented charges that should have been part of the cost of construction. Copy of Hanna’s editorial, published December 4, 1920, in Box No. 1355, RG 115, NA/Denver; Project Histories, RG 115, NA/Denver, 1921 Project History, pp. 14-15.


46. Project Manager to Director, Great Falls, Montana, December 23, 1921, Box 1355, RG 115, NA/Denver; Project Histories, RG 115, NA/Denver, 1921 Project History, pp. 160-61.

47. Dickerman, Radosevich, and Nobe, Appendix I.

48. Project Manager to Director at Great Falls, Montana, December 23, 1921, Box 1355, RG 115, NA/Denver.


51. District Counsel E.E. Roddis to Chief Engineer, Denver, February, 19, 1923, Box 1355, RG 115, NA/Denver.


53. Ibid., pp. 155-56.


55. Fairfield Times, March 5, 1926, p. 1; FSID Minute Book, p. 61.

56. In May, 1926, Congress repealed the act providing for the 5 percent repayment plan because it provided no fixed period for the contract obligation. Since the FSID was already involved in the contract approval process at the time of the repeal, it became one of only twenty-one
irrigation districts to repay under this plan. Golze, p. 244.


58. Swain, p. 79.

59. FSID Minute Book, pp. 211, 141.


61. FSID Minute Book, pp. 125, 135.


63. E.J. Gregory to Ray F. Walter, Chief Engineer, Denver, February 9, 1938, Box 1354, RG 115, NA/Denver.

64. H. Genger (Superintendent, FSID) to W.J. Burke, District Counsel, Bureau of Reclamation, April 11, 1933; Memorandum from Superintendent A.W. Walker (Sun River Project) to Commissioner (of Bureau of Reclamation), March 20, 1934, Box 1354, RG 115, NA/Denver.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE SEARCH FOR ECONOMIC STABILITY

After five years' experience here I can say that I think I have been fairly successful. As a newcomer, I had much to learn about irrigation, irrigated land, what to raise, and what could be found a market for. With potatoes, strawberries, cabbage, and other garden truck, together with eggs, poultry, milk and butter, these products have enabled me to have something to sell throughout the year."

Eric S. Lindberg, 1915

F.H. Newell was director of the Reclamation Service when Lindberg, a farmer of the Fort Shaw division, wrote these words for the agency’s publication, Reclamation Record. He would have agreed that Lindberg had achieved a fair amount of success. Newell considered a settler in a federal reclamation project had achieved success by "...establishing a home on the land;...actually living there, or in the vicinity, and deriving practically all of their living from farming operations." Eric Lindberg met the yeoman-like standard Newell set and probably shared Newell’s beliefs in hard work, independence, and personal responsibility. Newell believed the government’s role in reclamation was only to provide the means for individuals to achieve economic independence—the land, the dams and canals—everything else was up to the people who took up the land. In 1916, Newell would be removed as director, largely
because of his philosophies, and because he seemed to be unsympathetic with those who could not succeed as Lindberg had.  

Few settlers could be satisfied with Newell's definition of success. Their financial obligation to the government demanded that they participate in the capitalist economy, but more than that, they wanted the things other American farmers had—radios, automobiles, trucks, tractors, and winters in California. From 1910 to 1940, the settlers in the Fort Shaw division never ceased the work Eric Lindberg said had been necessary for him to achieve success. They continued to experiment to find the right mix of crops, the right rotations, the right soil amendments, and the right amount of livestock to bring prosperity to their lives. The answers were not clear-cut and not the same for all farmers, nor were they the same from year to year. A farmer's choices depended on the type of land in the farm unit, available financial and labor resources, and personal attitudes toward different types of farm management. Choices also depended on the vagaries of the local, national, and international markets.

From the earliest years of the project, finding a profitable market for what they raised was the most frustrating variable affecting farm management for the settlers at Fort Shaw. When the settlers met with the members of the Senate Irrigation Committee during the summer of 1909, they com-
plained about the prospects for marketing their crops. It seemed that the ready market for their produce that Project Engineer S.B. Robbins had said would exist in Great Falls was in fact undependable and also hard to reach.

By 1913, the railroad provided better access to Great Falls, but most settlers still did not find it easy to market their produce there. When Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane visited the Sun River project and Great Falls in August of 1913, he emphasized the need for cooperation between the farmers and the business people of Great Falls. One of the chief reasons the Great Falls business community campaigned for authorization of the Sun River project was to create a situation in which diversified farming could flourish and local producers could provide foodstuffs to the city at low cost. However, during the five years since the project had opened, little change had occurred in the buying habits of the Great Falls wholesalers and retailers. They still imported hundreds of thousands of pounds of butter, eggs, and cheese and millions of pounds of vegetables and slaughter stock from eastern farmers.4

Farmers and ranchers in Cascade County had been complaining about the weakness of the Great Falls market long before settlers came to the Sun River project. In 1897 a rancher wrote to the editor of the Great Falls Tribune, despairing over his attempts to sell his produce. He said: "It is dis-
couraging...to bring a wagon load of potatoes to town and learn at the store (any store) that if they are bought the amount must be traded out. It is discouraging to bring in a lot of eggs or chickens and learn at the meat markets that they have all the poultry they can use--'just shipped in'--and at the grocery store that they can't pay cash for the eggs, but will trade goods for them....Poultry, eggs, pork, lard, and butter being practically unsalable for cash, ranchers are compelled to raise that which will bring cash--cattle and hay, for instance."^5

At a meeting of the Montana Society of Farmers in Great Falls in 1903, after listening to several speeches on the advantages of irrigation, an irate member told the gathering that what local farmers needed was not advice about how to increase their production, but a market for what they already produced. He said, "We raise too much now, and more than we can sell, and the question of a market is the one which we should discuss."^6

In 1905, H.J. Riebeling, a rancher from the Sun River valley, submitted a similar protest to the newspaper editor, saying he and his neighbors found only a small market for their produce in Great Falls. He recently had been "unable to dispose at any reasonable price of a load of vegetables or anything else, for that matter...." He said, "I would let
potatoes rot in the cellar before I would haul them to your city and then have to give them away."^7

A short time later, one of Riebeling's neighbors rebutted his contentions, suggesting Reibeling had more energy than good judgement and raised only "scrubby stuff that looked like 'last summer' and Great Falls don't like that kind of stuff." This writer asserted that the more successful growers of potatoes did not sell them to the local store in the valley, which Riebeling had said paid unfairly low prices, but sold them in Great Falls for shipment elsewhere.^8

A prospective settler from Iowa who came to Great Falls early in 1909 to look over the Fort Shaw division reported that he had heard at a Great Falls hotel less than glowing reports about the local market for farm produce. He had been told of a local man who was forced to sell his potatoes for twenty cents a bushel and also learned that potatoes shipped to out-of-state markets froze in transit. Another homeseeker disclosed he had been warned that no merchant would buy the ranch butter he proposed to sell.^9

In 1904 the business community of Great Falls had begun making token overtures to the farmers of the county. At that time, they discussed establishment of some type of farmers' market in the city, but the discussion led nowhere.^10 The farmer's cash shortage did create problems, but few business people were willing to change their practices to resolve those
problems. Certainly, they saw a farmers' market as competition for consumers' dollars. Also, the Sun River valley rancher who criticized Riebling's produce had correctly identified the merchants' point of view about buying farm produce. They didn't want "scrubby" and ungraded produce, nor did they appreciate large quantities of such things as eggs or cabbage, which farmers dumped on merchants at times of peak production. To make a profit the business people needed orderly marketing procedures, which they found by dealing with the eastern wholesalers. Throughout the entire forty-year period of this study, the call of the Great Falls merchants for orderly marketing by local producers was an unbroken theme. The leitmotif of the farmers of the Fort Shaw division, which ran in counterpoint for thirty years, was the lack of a dependable cash market in Great Falls for little besides grain and forage crops.

It took promoters coming to Great Falls to get the farmers' market idea off the ground. In the fall of 1908 a man came into town and offered to initiate a three-day market that then could be held regularly the first of each month. The cost of the promoter's work would simply be the balance left over from the expenses of putting on the first market. The money for the first sale was to be donated by the local merchants; at subsequent markets the farmers would be charged a fee to sell their produce. The promoter emphasized the
success of such markets in progressive cities in the Midwest.\textsuperscript{11}

The traveling man failed to drum up any business for himself in Great Falls, but he raised the consciousness of the business community and made it an easy job for the Industrial Peace Commission to sell the farmers' market idea nine months later. The commission was a cooperative union agency that was working to lower the cost of living for industrial workers.\textsuperscript{12}

The business community apparently found the Commission's humanitarian approach more appealing than the plan of the promoter-for-pay. In early September, 1909, the new city market opened—a roofed platform eighty feet long and thirty feet wide, available without charge each Saturday to the farmers on a first-come, first-served basis.\textsuperscript{13}

At first farmers brought mostly garden truck, eggs, poultry, and butter, but within a month the vendors also began selling pork, beef, and mutton. They had no trouble disposing of their produce. In mid-October the farmers who used the market place met to establish some rules of operation because a few vendors had refused to contribute to the cost of a delivery wagon the farmers had hired. With the mayor of Great Falls acting as temporary chairman of the meeting, the discussion soon turned to the prices the farmers were charging. The city postmaster spoke up, criticizing the farmers for charging the same as local merchants. He said the promoters of the
market had expected that the farmers would sell their produce at the same or lower price than they received in trade at stores. He predicted that failure to do so would spell the end of the market.\textsuperscript{14}

The farmers, of course, disagreed with the postmaster’s thinking. One asked why he should be expected to travel the distance to Great Falls, spend the entire day at the market, and then sell his goods for less than he would have received at a store. Several other farmers reported that a merchant from the city had sent an employee to the market with cases of stale eggs which he sold for less than the farmers’ prices. Customers later returned the stale eggs to the seller. The farmers worried incidents such as this would give the market a bad reputation. They asked that no city merchant be allowed to sell at the market. After more discussion, the group agreed to establish a committee that would set fair prices each Saturday before the market opened. They selected the mayor to be chairman of the committee.\textsuperscript{15}

From the beginning the farmers had had ideas about how the market place could be made more convenient for both buyers and sellers. By December they were arguing among themselves about usage of the space available. To remedy the situation, they asked the city council to take over government of the market. The organization they had created had no authority to establish and enforce policies regarding such things as
changes to the physical structure of the market. The farmers were even willing to finance improvements to the market structures, but they wanted the city to grant the authority to do so and to ensure that all improvements were uniform. The local representative of the Industrial Peace Commission supported city management of the market and encouraged the council to take over.  

The city did assume responsibility for governing the market and in the next year also invested $200 to improve the market structure. The city engineer oversaw construction of twelve new stalls, which had tight board floors and walls to keep out dirt. Each had a counter in front and a back door that could be closed so that a heater could be used. The first market day after these improvements were made, forty farmers lined up to vie for the stalls. Butchers occupied eleven of the twelve new stalls, but many other meat vendors had to use open facilities. The unsanitary conditions under which meat was being sold had been one of the reasons for improving the market building, but the improvements were clearly inadequate.  

Six months later the farmers were irate. City merchants were using a share of the meager market facilities. Twenty-seven farmers petitioned the city council, asking that town people not be permitted to use the market to sell goods. The city council responded that the purpose of the market was to
lower the cost of living for city people and provide a way for farmers to get cash for their produce. Since no merchant and no farmer paid anything toward the establishment of the market, both were entitled to use it. In addition, the council asserted that since farmers didn’t have "to pay for light, rent, taxes, heat and a hundred other things incident to business in a city, they should undersell the city merchant very considerably."^18

Doubtless the Simms correspondent to the Great Falls Tribune composed the following paragraph before knowing the city council’s response to the farmers’ petition, or its blast would have been even more acerbic: "Our people are in favor of establishing a market of their own, if those of the Great Falls merchants who have been butting in are not butted out by your city fathers. Most of the stock in trade of the small farmer being perishable goods, it won’t survive a return trip of 35 miles, and we’re getting exceedingly weary....If Great Falls don’t give us a fair shake we will go to greener pastures for our trade is being coveted elsewhere."^19

In spite of such problems, the farmers of the county continued to use the market in Great Falls into 1913. However, during that year the voters of the city elected to use the site of the market for a new fire and police station. The market structure was cut apart, with only a portion being left for the farmers’ use. In June, a committee of people from the
Fort Shaw division met with the Great Falls Commercial Club and emphasized the need for a cold storage facility at the market. They reported that the public health officer was harassing them about the length of time their fresh meat had been on sale, thus forcing them to sell at about half the regular market price. A movement began in late summer to establish a permanent public market, which by November had the support of the Merchant's Association, the Commercial Club, the Woman's Club, and some fifty farmers who used the market. By December the city council had purchased land for a new market and in 1914, using funds obtained from a bond issue, the city constructed a facility costing $30,000.

The new two-story market building, built of brick on a concrete foundation, had a forced air heating system and a large refrigerated room where vendors could keep produce not on display. Permanent stalls with broad counters lined the walls on both levels. Each stall had hot and cold running water and a drainage system so it could be easily cleaned. Between each two stalls was a permanently installed scale. In the center of each floor were tables for smaller vendors. Just inside the main entrance was a ladies rest room, a facility farm women had asked for in 1912 and had been provided by the YWCA in its building downtown.

While the new market building made the point of contact between farmer and city dweller a pleasanter place, news items
continued to reflect urban biases against farmers. In 1915 the press criticized the mayor's idea of charging a flat fee to all who used the market, regardless of the amount of produce they sold, to make it a money-making operation for the city. The editor of the Leader reminded the residents of the city of the time when local farmers did not receive cash for their produce but had to take out in trade whatever amount a merchant would give them. As a result, farmers only came to the city in the fall, to market their grain, and the merchants were the losers. He believed the farmers' market increased business in the city because it gave the rural vendors cash to spend wherever they pleased. He feared that charging a fee for market space would mark the return of bad feelings.24

Not long after the Leader's editorial appeared, the editor of the Tribune found it necessary to admonish the people of Great Falls to be "...a bit less chary in showing our real feelings, a little more human..." as they greeted and dealt with rural visitors to the city. He reminded his readers of the "hand of real fellowship" the farmer extends when the "city man rides into the country, as he is wont to do on these Sunday afternoons...," and of the "traditions of the old west, where no stranger was ever turned away, [that] are being kept by the present generation of ranchers."25

Upset by the low standards of cleanliness its members observed at the farmers' market, during the following year the
Woman's Club appointed a committee to investigate conditions there. Some members had seen water covering the floor in the refrigerated room and noted the foul smell that emanated from it. On the day of their official visit, the committee members found the refrigerator "in better condition, evidently owing to the thorough cleaning that the market got early last week, in preparation for a visit from friends....The meat was all hanging up and there were no scraps on the floor." 26

The report of the Woman's Club committee, while making valid points about cleanliness, was written in such a way that it also revealed urban attitudes toward the rural vendors. These attitudes must have been apparent to the vendors, even if they didn't read the report in the newspaper, and probably did little to enhance relations between town and country. The committee noted a woman selling pies, who "...evidently didn't realize that 'in the best circles' it is fashionable to cover the mouth with a handkerchief or the hand when sneezing, for she whooped it up a couple of times, and her pies all unprotected, were helpless before the germ storm." The committee suggested that,

...one particular want that might be furnished by some society or club, bent on doing good for [our] community, would be to furnish a good supply of handkerchiefs, either paper or cloth. There is a sad lack of them. Of course dainty bits of linen or muslin are a luxury, and the market building is big and the world is wide, but some women [customers] are demanding the use of them...."
Regarding the men:

Nearly all of the men in the stalls wore hats or caps, many of them had much worn coats and trousers on, and one fellow who evidently thought it was proper to wear a once white coat and apron, didn't know that butchers are only supposed to wipe their hands on their aprons, but made it perform the dual duty of apron and handkerchief.  

While only a small proportion of the farmers of the Fort Shaw division made use of the farmers' market, its establishment, operation, and controversies provide clues to the obstacles the people of Fort Shaw encountered in Great Falls as they sought to market any of their produce. Urban business people jealously guarded their marketplace and saw the farmers not as potential customers but as competitors. Urban consumers were disdainful of the rural vendors but apparently enjoyed the quality of the produce they sold.

Eric Lindberg was one of the farmers of the Fort Shaw division who did not allow the attitudes and practices of the residents of Great Falls to prevent him from making a living by selling garden truck, dairy products, and potatoes in the city. Lindberg operated a diversified farming operation that conformed to much of the advice the farmers of the Fort Shaw division received from the Reclamation Service and the county extension agents. He came to the Fort Shaw division in 1909 with his wife, Ida, and three young children. Both of the Lindbergs had been born in Sweden and came to the United
States as children. Before settling in the Fort Shaw division they had lived in Iowa, eastern Texas, and most recently, in Idaho.28

Lindberg homesteaded a farm unit between Fort Shaw and Simms with a total of sixty-seven acres, sixty-one of which were irrigable. His first crops were oats, wheat, potatoes, and a large garden plot. By 1915 potatoes, cabbage, strawberries, and other garden truck had become his principal crops. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Lindbergs focused their efforts on garden truck and potatoes. Lindberg preferred growing potatoes to sugar beets, though both required much labor, because they could be marketed all winter long. This permitted him to take advantage of increases in price as supplies dwindled. The family, which by the 1920s included five children, provided the labor necessary for raising and harvesting potatoes. In 1928 Lindberg built a heated and ventilated concrete warehouse that would hold thirty carloads of potatoes. Besides storing his own crop, he rented space in the warehouse to other potato growers.29

Lindberg also took up dairying at an early date. His herd, never more than twenty to twenty-five cows, was large by Fort Shaw standards. It provided a steady cash income, primarily from the sale of cream. Ida made butter, but with her large family, seldom had any excess for sale. Lindberg raised alfalfa, which he used both for his own stock and as a cash
crop. In 1931 he cooperated with the county agent in testing the use of phosphate on alfalfa and increased his yield by 6 percent.30

Like other Fort Shaw farmers, the Lindbergs found their farm unit to be too small to accommodate much livestock. Beginning in 1917 they started to increase their holdings, and by 1920 had bought three additional farm units near their original claim, bringing their total irrigated acreage to 100 acres. For one of the forty-acre units Lindberg paid $175 per acre, a record high price for land in the Fort Shaw division in the years before 1940. In the mid-1930s the Lindbergs added another farm unit of forty irrigated acres to their enterprise. Although they significantly increased the amount of land they held, the quality of their holdings reflected the mixed quality of the soil in the division. Only forty acres of their irrigated land were considered Class 1. Eighty acres were Class 3 and twenty acres were Class 4. They also owned some two hundred acres of non-irrigated land. In 1932 Lindberg also purchased a ranch in Idaho, which he operated on an absentee basis.31

Eric Lindberg considered himself "fairly successful" in 1915 when he summarized his experience as a reclamation project farmer. How he defined success is not known, but he did remark that his farm management strategy gave him an income all year long.32 During the early 1920s, when debt and
low prices forced many Fort Shaw farmers to ask the government for relief from their construction and O&M payments, Lindberg's name never appeared on the Service's relief lists. The average value per acre for Lindberg's irrigated crops is available for only two years, 1930 and 1934. In 1930 his average return was $15.31 while the average in the Fort Shaw division was $18.34. In 1934 his average of $14.82 also fell short of the division's average of $17.21. From this slim evidence one might conclude that Lindberg was not running an exceptional operation, but he managed to make a dependable living. He found a way to sell garden truck and potatoes in Great Falls while his neighbors complained about the poor market there. Somehow he found the financial resources to buy his neighbor's farms as they sold out and the increased acreage allowed him to expand his dairy operation and his cash income.

As they campaigned for authorization of the Sun River project, the people of Great Falls had envisioned every farmer in the reclamation project would operate like Eric Lindberg, but such diversification was not easy to achieve. Garden truck never became an important crop for many people in the Fort Shaw division. Early in the history of the division, the problems associated with marketing such things as vegetables made their production too risky. Most Fort Shaw farmers were in no position to take more risks; they needed a dependable
cash income to meet their payments to the government. Wheat and alfalfa became the chief cash crops of the Fort Shaw farmers.

Wheat was the most easily marketable commodity the Fort Shaw farmers could raise. From the time of the opening of the division there was a grain market in Great Falls, but by late-1912 there was a grain buyer in Simms, and an elevator opened there the following year. Another elevator opened in Fort Shaw in 1915. These local elevators were not just for the grain crops of the Fort Shaw division, but also served the more extensive wheat-growing area on the benchlands north of the river.35

The Fort Shaw farmers planted more or less wheat, depending on prices and their interest in other crops. Wheat acreage in the division fluctuated from a low of 510 acres to a high of 2,100 acres. However, the average acreage from 1911 to 1940 was about 1,000 acres, or 13 percent of the land that was usually cropped. Yields also varied greatly but averaged about eighteen bushels per acre. While this yield is not remarkable, the value per acre for wheat in the division was high relative to many other crops the farmers raised. From 1911 to 1940, its value was less than ten dollars per acre in only three years, 1931 through 1933, and generally was fifteen to twenty dollars per acre. With the exceptions of potatoes and sugar beets, few other crops gave consistently
higher values. The problem, of course, was raising very much wheat on a small farm. 36

Alfalfa, the Fort Shaw farmers' other dependable cash crop, was not new to the Sun River valley. Ranchers near Hepler, a small community just west of the Fort Shaw division, had been growing alfalfa for a number of years before establishment of the reclamation project. Until the Reclamation Service began construction in the Sun River valley, they hauled their surplus hay by wagon to Great Falls. 37 Beginning in 1906, the construction camps, with large numbers of draft animals that consumed quantities of hay and oats, became an attractive nearby market for the Sun River ranchers. The Fort Shaw farmers also sold much of their hay to the Reclamation Service throughout the first decade of the division's operation. 38

Alfalfa proved to be an ideal crop for the Fort Shaw division, but most farmers built up their alfalfa acreage gradually. The difficulty of plowing and preparing the land, much of which was stony, prevented a farmer from putting in a large acreage at one time, but, once established, an alfalfa field did not need to be plowed again for six or seven years. The other factor limiting alfalfa acreage was that one could not expect a good crop the first year after planting. As they began their operations, farmers needed to keep some land in wheat and oats to ensure feed for their animals and perhaps a
small cash income. When established, alfalfa fields yielded two or three cuttings per year, averaging between 1.5 and 2.0 tons per acre. From 1917 until 1934 the farmers planted an average of 4,500 acres to alfalfa, or approximately one-half of the irrigated acreage in the division. Most of this they usually sold to the ranchers in the area and increased their profits by avoiding freight charges. Some, like Lindberg, began dairying operations that utilized their alfalfa crops. And, by the late-1920s a few farmers also were experimenting with their own livestock feeding operations.

By 1914, J.E. Jones, the manager of one of the Simms lumber yards, had become the hay buyer for the Fort Shaw farmers. While farmers had the opportunity to sell their hay directly to local stock growers, Jones appears to have handled much of the hay business for the area. Simms and Fort Shaw became well known throughout the county for the quality and quantity of the hay they produced.

The market for alfalfa was as unstable as the market for other farm commodities during the years before World War II. Prices ranged from five dollars to more than thirty-five dollars per ton. Good market years had cold winters, when stock raisers needed forage for their range animals, or dry summers, when farmers who could irrigate their alfalfa had an advantage. During World War I, when hay prices went above thirty-five dollars per ton, some Fort Shaw farmers got rid of
much of their own livestock. By 1919, those who had sold their stock and focused on selling hay were making more money than their neighbors who had continued their feeding operations.39

The 1920 crop of alfalfa was unusually large. Encouraged by the high prices of 1919, farmers had increased their alfalfa acreage by one thousand acres, or nearly 25 percent more than the previous year. In addition, a good growing season increased yields. By September it was obvious that the division had more hay than local demand could absorb. Seeking a way around this situation, some of the alfalfa growers from the Fort Shaw division, led by C.S. Hanna, organized a marketing association. The members agreed to hold their hay crop until November 1 at twenty-five dollars per ton baled or nineteen dollars per ton in the stack. In the meantime, the association’s agent would seek a market for the entire crop. Since the agreed upon prices were about five dollars above the going rate, the association accomplished little more than retarding the sale of their hay. However, before the winter ended they were able to ship their hay to stock growers in northern Montana and Washington. The association disbanded after this experience, which was the only attempt at cooperative marketing of hay that occurred in the Fort Shaw division prior to 1940.40
Cooperative marketing of their produce was a proposition the farmers of the Fort Shaw division toyed with a number of times, but higher prices or the need for an immediate market always destroyed the organizations they formed. The settlers themselves introduced the idea of cooperation in buying and selling within the first year of the project's operation, but nothing came of their discussion. In future years, project managers and county agents encouraged the farmers to establish various types of cooperative marketing associations but achieved only minimal success.

A period of experimentation with cooperative marketing began in 1913, prompted by the visit of Interior Secretary Lane and his call for a change in the relations between the settlers of the Sun River project and the business community of Great Falls. Heeding Lane's admonition to work with the farmers, a committee of the Great Falls Commercial Club met with the city's produce dealers and discussed setting up a commission market to which the Fort Shaw farmers could sell their produce. What was needed, however, was an agent in the project who would grade the produce and insure that supply kept pace with demand.

The committee of the Commercial Club communicated this idea to the Fort Shaw people and by October the farmers had incorporated the Sun River Valley Producers Association, with headquarters at the town of Fort Shaw. They capitalized the
corporation at two thousand dollars, all of which the farmers had subscribed in amounts of ten to one hundred dollars. Initially the association had planned only to operate a cooperative cheese factory. Cheese factories were common in the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa, from which a number of the settlers had come, so they may have had experience with this type of cooperative. The cheese factory opened in November, but by December the enthusiasm for cooperation had expanded to include the marketing of eggs, butter, livestock, poultry, and vegetables. The association hoped to achieve higher prices for the members by selling local produce in large quantities. The association hired R.B. Trumbull to operate the cheese factory and manage the sale of produce. Trumbull had come to the Fort Shaw division in 1909 from Wisconsin and owned the cheesemaking equipment, which he sold to the cooperative.

Only two months later, in February, 1914, Trumbull announced that he would no longer be handling produce. While the newspaper account of the cessation of this part of the association’s operation said Trumbull was unable to handle both cheese-making and the sale of produce, the project engineer’s report for 1914 said it was because buying and selling produce had not been profitable.

The cheese factory continued to operate on an irregular basis—depending on the supply of milk—until September, 1915,
when it closed for the winter and never reopened. Prices for butterfat and ranch butter were up as much as 30 percent and the farmers had decided that instead of selling whole milk to the cheese factory, it was more profitable to sell either cream or butter to the Great Falls market and feed the skimmed milk to their calves. The stockholders in the cheese factory sold the equipment at a 60 percent loss. In retrospect, it is clear that the farmers had begun the cheese factory in a fit of enthusiasm that had no substantial basis. In 1914, the farmers of the Fort Shaw division were only beginning to establish dairy herds and alfalfa production was still in the developmental stages.

Events in the spring of 1913 may have contributed to the prematurity of the cheese factory and its subsequent failure. At that time, as the farmers of Fort Shaw complained to Secretary Lane about the poor market that existed for their produce and charged the Great Falls business community with not caring about their welfare, the Commercial Club looked for a way to improve relations with the reclamation farmers. Even before Lane’s trip to Montana the Commercial Club had initiated discussions with the farmers at Fort Shaw about a scheme to increase dairying on the irrigation project. With the recent completion of the rail line through the project, farmers could ship milk and cream to Great Falls. The problem was that good dairy stock cost money, between seventy-five and one hundred
dollars a head and the Fort Shaw farmers seemed unable to finance such an undertaking.\textsuperscript{47}

Negotiations and discussions about increasing the project's dairy industry continued throughout the summer and fall. Encouraged by this talk, in November the farmers opened the cheese factory. In December, the businessmen of Great Falls put up $10,000 to be used for loans to the Fort Shaw farmers to buy cows. At a time, however, when farmers with collateral could borrow money at 10 percent, the 13.5 percent terms the lenders offered the people at Fort Shaw were less than desirable. Finding their offer attracting few takers, they reduced the interest rate to 8 percent. By the summer of 1914, Fort Shaw farmers had purchased 40 cows under the loan program and 360 on their own initiative.\textsuperscript{48}

These early contacts between the Great Falls business community and the farmers of Fort Shaw point up the unwillingness of either group to bend very far. The good will of the business people did not extend so far as to lend money at attractive rates, unless it seemed absolutely necessary. Similarly, the farmers chose to operate their own cheese factory rather than allow a Great Falls dairy to profit from their produce. The farmers' decision to finance the largest proportion of their cow-buying themselves further underlines their desire to remain independent from the Great Falls businessmen.
Dairying was just one of the farm management options open to the Fort Shaw farmers and it was pursued in that way. The farmer who chose to handle milk cows made a 365-days-a-year commitment to the operation, something not all were willing to do. Also, selling cream required the farmer to have a separator, an additional expense. Part of the reason the farmers had decided to operate a cheese factory was that it could process whole milk, eliminating the need for farmers to have separators. Numbers of dairy cattle in the division fluctuated annually and during a ten-year period could vary as much as 50 percent. Some farmers sold their dairy stock in the late 1910s because of the high cost of feed, but the number of dairy cattle in the division increased gradually from about 550 head in 1915 to a high of slightly more than 1,000 head in 1924, which averaged to about five cows per farm. By 1919 the dairies of Great Falls received most of their milk and cream from the farmers in the valley.49

Like most other farm commodities, the value of dairy cattle declined and remained low during the 1920s. After 1924, farmers began reducing the size of their herds and dairy cattle numbers dropped to a low of 680 head in 1929. After that, dairy cattle numbers climbed steadily to settle between 800 and 1,100 head in the late-1930s. During the hard economic times of the early 1920s, the quality of dairy stock in the division declined with the quantity. The project manager
noted in 1923 that he wasn’t sure how to classify many of the cattle in the Fort Shaw division for his annual report because farmers were milking beef cattle. Clarence Bloom, who was a young man working on his father’s farm in the 1920s, recalled that they had Holstein bulls but milked "anything that would stand still long enough to milk." However, by 1925 dairy farmers had begun rebuilding their herds with purebred sires. Participation in the county cow testing association also helped Fort Shaw dairy farmers cull and improve their herds.  

With three breeders of purebred Holsteins and one breeder of purebred Jerseys in the division, friendly rivalries existed between the supporters of the two breeds. A long-time resident of Sun River recalled an exchange between the division’s first Methodist minister, L.E. Baldwin, who milked Holsteins, and the division’s first Congregational minister, N.E. Hannant, who had purebred Jerseys. Hannant told Baldwin how he identified a thoroughbred Holstein: "'Drop a dollar in the bucket and when you finish milking, if you can still see the dollar you’ve got a thoroughbred Holstein.'" Baldwin considered, then replied slowly, "'The way to tell a thoroughbred Jersey, is to drop a dollar in the bucket and when you finish milking, if there’s enough milk to cover the dollar, you haven’t got a thoroughbred Jersey.'"  

Two problems impeded the growth of dairying and livestock-raising in the Fort Shaw division: lack of capital to
acquire stock and shortage of pasture. During the period under consideration the farmers never found a satisfactory solution to the problem of capital. Lenders simply were not interested in financing small livestock operations. However, the farmers did find several ways to increase their pasture land.

Within a year after the Fort Shaw unit opened, some of the original settlers began leaving. If the claim was simply relinquished, a newcomer could take it up. Sometimes the departing party rented his or her land to another settler. By 1914 it was becoming increasingly common for established settlers, particularly those who had forty-acre units, to buy the claims of persons who were leaving. At that time improved farm units sold for fifty to seventy dollars per acre. Widespread drought in Montana in the latter years of the 1910s and increased demand for farm products during the years of World War I brought about a rapid increase in land prices in the Fort Shaw division. By 1918 they reached $100 per acre and in some cases went as high as $175. Most of the farmers in the division who were going to expand their operations did so before the end of 1920. While inflated prices for farm products gave them the capital to do so, they also paid the highest prices for land in the Fort Shaw division prior to 1940. During the 1920s, foreclosures and increasing tenancy were the rules. Tenancy reached 50 percent in 1923, then
leveled off to around 30 percent during the 1930s. Sales or assignments (if the land was not patented) of farm units ground to a near halt during the mid-1920s, but then resumed late in the decade and continued during the 1930s as original settlers retired from farming or died.\

The Reclamation Bureau also helped the farmers obtain more summer pasture land. The agency realized that if the farmers were to follow the advice of the Bureau’s agricultural advisor and the county agricultural agent and increase the amount of livestock they kept, they needed more pasture. In 1919, as farmers coped with a drought of unprecedented severity that dried up all range grass, the Bureau opened the land around the project’s Willow Creek reservoir to grazing. This reserve was some fifteen miles west of the western end of the Fort Shaw division, had been fenced several years before and, therefore, had not been grazed. Farmers paid $1.35 per head per month and sent 450 head of cattle and horses to the reserve that summer. Until 1929 the farmers of Fort Shaw were able to summer their livestock on the Willow Creek reserve. During the difficult economic times of the 1920s the Bureau lowered rental rates 50 percent. However, by the end of the decade the agency decided maintaining the improvements on the reserve was costing the government too much money, so the Bureau arranged with the Fort Shaw and Greenfields irrigation districts to rent the reserve on a bid basis to an association
of livestock owners that would be responsible for maintenance and supervision. While one stockman from the Fort Shaw division, J.E. Jones, became active in the new association, after 1929 stock raisers from the Greenfields division were the primary users of the pasture. The reason for the decline in use by Fort Shaw farmers is not known because the number of cattle in the division remained relatively high until the late 1930s.53

Besides dairying and small-scale raising of beef cattle, the farmers of the Fort Shaw division also experimented with hog-raising. In the summer of 1913, as communication increased between the farmers and the Commercial Club of Great Falls, the farmers emphasized the need for a packing plant in Great Falls. Soon after, the Great Falls Meat Company announced it would add a pork packing department, capable of handling one hundred hogs per hour. Encouraged by this development, in the next year the farmers of the Fort Shaw division increased the number of hogs they kept from 1,500 to 3,200. They soon learned, however, that the availability of a packing plant did not assure a market for their hogs. A state-wide increase in hog numbers created a glut on the market and in the fall of 1914 the Fort Shaw farmers could not sell their hogs in Great Falls. A buyer for the Great Falls Meat Company told J.E. Jones, who was feeding 160 hogs, that he "did not know there were so many hogs in the world as are being offered
for sale in Montana right now." A month later the hog feeders of the Sun River valley shipped eleven cars of hogs to Seattle.  

With this experience, most farmers of the Fort Shaw division chose not to produce for the unstable hog market. After 1914, hog numbers on the Fort Shaw division dropped gradually, reaching a low of 283 in 1920. Besides the uncertainty of the market in Great Falls, the high cost of grain during World War I discouraged hog feeding. In 1920, the Great Falls Meat Company bought most of the hogs it processed from the Dakotas. Hog feeding increased somewhat among the Fort Shaw farmers from 1922 to 1924 when pork prices were good and grain prices were down, but it never became a major source of income for the division.  

In 1914, soon after Congress passed the Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension Act, the Great Falls Commercial Club convinced the commissioners of Cascade county to hire a county agriculturalist. The job of the county agent, as people soon began calling the man, was to share with farmers and stockraisers the results of research done by the state agricultural college and help them make decisions about improving farm management. The business people hoped the agriculturalist would help the farmers improve their marketing methods and encourage them to raise products that would benefit Great Falls. Some farmers in the county resisted being given advice
by a young ag college graduate, particularly one who seemed to have connections with the Commercial Club. During his first year in Cascade county, the agriculturalist spent much of his time convincing the farmers that his position involved no graft, nor was he going to try to impose his ways or ideas on them.  

The farmers of the Fort Shaw division did not share the negative views some of their neighbors held about the county agent. They seemed to appreciate his help and looked forward to his visits. The only evidence that the Fort Shaw farmers ever hesitated to support the work of the county agent occurred in 1929, when the county commissioners considered whether to hire an associate county agent for the Sun River project. The water users at Simms were "not at all favorable" to bringing in another agent if they had to pay for his expenses in traveling from the northern divisions of the project to the Fort Shaw division. An agreement between the commissioners of Lewis and Clark county (in which the northern divisions of the project are located) and the Cascade county commissioners to split the associate agent’s travel expenses resolved this issue.

Once they became acquainted with the county agent and his purpose, the farmers of the Fort Shaw division discussed the agent’s recommendations and adopted those that seemed economically feasible. In line with the advice of the agent, farm-
ers took up dairying and stock-raising to the extent that their capital allowed. They also used various means to build up their soil, and the use of phosphate became widespread by the late-1930s. However, the county agents had far less success in convincing the Fort Shaw farmers of the profitability of a crop that by the early twentieth century had become almost synonymous with irrigated agriculture in Utah and the western Great Plains: sugar beets.

Sugar beets had been on the minds of the boosters of Great Falls who had campaigned for authorization and construction of the Sun River project. Perhaps the most coveted result the Commercial Club hoped to have come out of the reclamation project was sugar beet production on a scale that would require establishment of a beet sugar factory in Great Falls. Tantalizingly close was the example of the Huntley project where beet-raising had increased land values from $35 per acre to $200 and Billings profitted from its busy Great Western sugar factory.59

As early as 1901 the idea of sugar beet production in the vicinity of Great Falls had seized the imagination of the town’s entrepreneurs. The newspapers regularly contained stories of Cinderella-like transformations of languishing communities after the arrival of beet factories. By 1904, several farmers near Great Falls had experimented with beets on a small scale and had produced crops with a high sugar
content, fueling the belief that local land was well-suited to high-quality sugar beet production.

In 1905 a beet sugar company briefly considered but passed over Great Falls as a location for expansion. The same thing happened in 1909. During the next five years the hopes of the Great Falls boosters rose and fell as sugar companies or contractors came to investigate but always found the farmers unwilling to cooperate, preferring to grow wheat or alfalfa on their irrigated land.

In 1916 it seemed assured that the Great Western sugar company would build a factory at Great Falls if farmers in the surrounding area could be convinced to raise one thousand acres of beets. Enthusiasm for beet growing infected the farmers of the Fort Shaw division. They planted eighty-one acres of beets, a dramatic increase from two acres the year before but still hardly enough to encourage establishment of a processing plant. In addition, dry weather and the high prices being paid for grain during World War I were against the sugar concerns. In 1917 Great Western advised the Great Falls Commercial Club that it would be a grave mistake to continue to encourage farmers to plant sugar beets at a loss just to get the factory built.

The economics of sugar beet raising did not make sense to the Fort Shaw farmers. After 1916, no one in the division planted any beets until 1923. Part of the problem was the
type of land sugar beets required. According to the agricultural science of the time, beets produced best on land that had been planted first in alfalfa or clover, or had been heavily manured. The land also had to be deeply plowed, no easy task on old alfalfa ground and particularly where the soil was stony, as much was in the Fort Shaw division. Also, sugar beets required far more attention during their growing period than did alfalfa, wheat, or even potatoes. Besides having to be thinned and cultivated, they needed careful and regular irrigation. Unless one had a very large family—or cultivated a very small patch of beets—harvesting required hired labor, a cash outlay few Fort Shaw farmers could afford. However, in 1923, encouraged by lowered freight rates to the beet factory in Billings, eleven growers in the Fort Shaw division produced ten carloads of beets. Their crop brought seventy-two dollars per acre, a high yield for their labor in a year when the average value per acre in the division was less than thirteen dollars.62

In 1924 beet acreage at Fort Shaw doubled, reaching a total of sixty acres. Some growers used laborers from the Rocky Boy Indian reservation, who they paid twenty-five dollars per acre for thinning, hoeing, and topping. As a result, returns in 1924 were much less than the previous year, only forty-seven dollars per acre.63
The following year, word that the newly opened beet factory at Chinook would pay all but thirteen cents of the per ton railroad freight charge on beets brought many more growers into the picture. Farmers of the Fort Shaw division planted 255 acres of beets. The Utah-Idaho Sugar Company (U&I), which owned the factory at Chinook, and the Great Falls Commercial Club split the salary of a field man for the irrigation project—an expert who would be available to help inexperienced growers. For this position they selected George Barlow, who had been growing beets on his irrigated farm in the Chestnut valley south of Great Falls. Increases in beet acreage also took place in the Greenfields division of the Sun River project and in other irrigated areas in the county, prompting U & I representatives to assure the Great Falls business community that it would have its own beet factory within two years if the acreage increases held up in the coming year.\textsuperscript{64}

But nature worked against the beet growers in 1925 and snatched the dream of a sugar factory from Great Falls once more. Hail in late July set back beet growth, and snow at harvest time forced growers to pay premium wages to keep beet pickers in the fields. In addition, planting on poorly prepared ground, and improper thinning and cultivating decreased per acre returns to thirty-seven dollars. The county agent later remarked that 1925 was probably the worst year for beet growing that one could imagine.\textsuperscript{65}
After 1925 farmers in the Fort Shaw division planted fewer than one hundred acres of beets each year until 1931. In 1930, under the guidance of the county agent, a few farmers tried using phosphate on their beet ground. The soil of the Fort Shaw division was deficient in this mineral, which particularly affected the yield of root crops. The cooperators found that using phosphate increased beet yields as much as 400 percent. In spite of this breakthrough, beet acreage in the Fort Shaw division continued to fluctuate widely from year to year until after 1938. In 1932, Fort Shaw farmers harvested only eighty-three acres of beets, but a Simms resident noted that beet growers were the only people with money that year. The average value per acre in 1932 was the lowest in the history of the division, $7.75. Beet growers averaged twelve tons per acre and received six dollars per ton for their crop.  

Severus Bloom became one of the most successful beet growers in the Fort Shaw division. The county agent often included the Bloom farm in the annual tour of outstanding farms in the county, so that others could observe his methods. Even before using phosphate on his soil his beet yields averaged nine tons per acre, well above the division average. With phosphate his yields increased to more than fifteen tons per acre. By 1936 he had twenty-eight acres in beets. For his large acreage, Bloom hired Blackfeet laborers to hoe and
harvest his crop, paying them by the acre. Clarence Bloom, son of Severus, attributed his father's success at beet-raising to his ability to ride a cultivator, something he acquired growing up on the family farm in Iowa, and a skill Clarence believed not many western farmers could be enticed to learn.67

In 1908, Severus Bloom and his father, Swan, each had claimed forty-acre farm units in the Fort Shaw division. They moved onto the land with their families the following spring. Severus was thirty-four and had a wife, Minnie, and three young children. They had lived in Nebraska before coming to Montana. He bought one of the surplus Reclamation Service buildings at Simms for seventy-five dollars and moved it to his claim, a ready-made home. By 1911 he had added $2,000 worth of improvements to his farm, had twenty-four acres in oats, twelve acres in alfalfa, and two acres in garden. For unknown reasons, the Bloom family sold out their livestock and equipment at auction late in 1913, rented their property to another Fort Shaw farmer, and returned to Nebraska. However, by 1918 they had returned to the division and soon added another farm unit to their holdings, bringing their total to eighty acres. Their land was some of the best in the division: forty acres were Class 1 and thirty-five acres were Class 2.68

The Blooms lived on a subsistence basis until the mid-1920s, when Severus began growing sugar beets and refused to
let set-backs discourage him. Until that time the cream check had been the family’s main cash income. They milked eight or ten cows and shipped five gallons of cream to Great Falls several times a week. The increased cash income they obtained from the sugar beets permitted the Blooms to buy both a Fordson tractor and a Model T truck in the late-1920s. Bloom had remained faithful to horse power until he had an accident hauling beets and injured one of his team. When the remaining horse refused to pull with another partner he switched to the tractor.69

The use of phosphate on his beet land raised Bloom’s average value per acre well above the division’s average. In 1930, when the phosphate experiments had just begun, the average value per acre in the division was $18.34. Bloom’s average was $18.21. But just four years later, when the division average was $17.21, Bloom averaged $24.37 on his seventy-five irrigated acres. In 1936 he expected to net $3,500 from his twenty-eight acres of beets, or $125 per acre. The average per acre value in the division in 1936 was $21.05.70

Only a handful of farmers in the Fort Shaw division concentrated on sugar beet growing in the way that Severus Bloom did. Not until 1938 did the acreage in the division devoted to beets reach 300 acres, but then it remained relatively stable through 1940.
While adding phosphate to soil in which beets were grown produced increased yields, other factors at work in the 1930s kept most Fort Shaw farmers from viewing beet growing with much enthusiasm. During the early 1930s, sugar prices had been low; later, federal subsidies were limited by sugar quotas. That federal legislation was limiting their freedom to produce awakened the political consciousness of Bloom and other dedicated beet growers of the Sun River project. In an unprecedented action for the farmers of the irrigation project, the beet growers organized in 1938, not to manipulate a market or to increase production, but with the sole intent of changing public policy. The Sun River Beetgrowers sent George Barlow, the former U&I field man, to Washington to work with other lobbyists to seek legislative changes to the 1937 Sugar Act. This effort was unsuccessful and beet acreage remained restricted into 1940. In 1940 the outlook for beet growing was even darker, for it appeared that instead of lifting sugar restrictions, Congress would limit beet acreage even further. By that time, the county agent was as frustrated with trying to increase beet production in the county as the beet growers were themselves.\textsuperscript{71}

Besides being reluctant to take up sugar beet raising, the farmers of the Fort Shaw division failed to embrace one other aspect of the county agents' gospel of good farming: cooperative marketing. For the Fort Shaw farmers to adopt
cooperative marketing as a management strategy seemed to the county agents to be so logical that it hardly needed a defense. Here was a group of small producers living in close proximity, with a limited number of products to market. Nearby was a market which, at least ostensibly, was seeking an association of producers from which to buy the very things the Fort Shaw people produced. By pooling their produce and negotiating with the market agents the farmers could stabilize the market and achieve higher prices. What undoubtedly frustrated the county agents was that the people of Fort Shaw seemed to accept the logic of cooperative marketing, for they willingly entered into a number of associations to market their produce, but they too soon forgot the good theory and fell back into individualism and independent action.

As discussed previously, the farmers of the Fort Shaw division formed an organization in 1913 to make and market cheese and to cooperatively market some of their other produce. Within a few months they had abandoned the produce marketing aspect of the organization, but the cheese factory was still faltering along when, early in 1915, R.A. Blanchard, the county’s first agricultural agent, met with the Fort Shaw settlers to discuss more orderly marketing of their produce. Already involved in one cooperative effort, his suggestions appealed to the farmers and they agreed to set up two associations, one for marketing eggs, the other for potatoes.
Most of the farmers had chickens and the division shipped about forty cases of eggs to Great Falls each week, to be sold to whoever would take them, at any price. To eliminate this haphazard marketing, the "egg club" made arrangements to sell its eggs to the Rainbow Hotel in Great Falls. The association got off to a good start in June, receiving one dollar per case more than the market price for eggs, but at the height of summer crop work farmers became too busy to deliver their eggs to headquarters. The weak supply of eggs could not meet the demands of the market and the association failed.  

The potato marketing cooperative was longer lived. Potatoes were another product that most of the Fort Shaw farmers raised, for their own consumption and also for a cash crop. When he addressed the Fort Shaw people, Blanchard had pointed out that 50 percent of the potatoes sold in Great Falls came from outside the state. The commission men in the city preferred not to buy local potatoes because the diverse varieties the farmers grew eliminated any chance for uniform quality. After hearing Blanchard's report, the farmers agreed that they would send a representative to the commission agents to find out what kind of potatoes they should grow and then attempt to contract their crop to the agents even before it was planted.  

Blanchard undoubtedly knew how ephemeral cooperation could be among farmers, so he made another move to shore up
the idea of marketing a standard variety of potato cooperatively. He organized three potato clubs among the young people, aged ten through eighteen, of the Fort Shaw division. The seventy-five members of the clubs agreed to each raise one-half acre of Rural New Yorker potatoes. With Blanchard's help, the clubs contracted to sell their crop to the commission agents in Great Falls before they began planting. The most serious obstacle the young people encountered was the refusal of their parents to buy Rural New Yorker seed potatoes. They contended that their seed potatoes were as good as the expensive and scarce Rural New Yorkers. Blanchard managed to prevail and the youngsters successfully marketed their potatoes in the fall.

Soon after the young people's clubs undertook their potato growing and marketing plan, representatives from Sun River, Fort Shaw and Simms met with a special committee of the Commercial Club and agents of the five commission houses in Great Falls to discuss potato marketing. Led by C.A. Tuck of Simms, the potato growers outlined their plan—to grow only two or three varieties (among them the Rural New Yorker), to engage a sales manager, purchase a potato cleaner and grader, and put out a uniform grade of potatoes in 100-pound sacks. The commission agents said that they would be happy to buy a local product of uniform quality, such as Tuck had described.
Unlike their children, the adult potato growers did not sell their crop before it was planted. In the fall, potato prices in Great Falls started off strong, but went down quickly to fifty cents per hundredweight when the market became overloaded. The producers held about 75 percent of their crop until late winter to achieve a more nearly normal price of eighty or ninety cents per hundred.\textsuperscript{76}

During 1916 the potato growers' association continued to function although potato acreage in the Fort Shaw division decreased by one-third. Due to the smaller crop, returns for potatoes in 1916 were higher, also by about one-third. Whether the association operated in 1917 is not known, but by 1918 the project manager noted in his annual report that: "The [potato] crop is sold soon after harvesting when prices are low, no premium is received for well graded potatoes, and the growers are at the mercy of the commission men of the nearby cities. A potato growers association is needed to standardize varieties grown, promote a market for well graded potatoes, provide storage at the shipping points and insist on close grading of product before marketing." The work of County Agent Blanchard had secured no permanent change in the farmers' habits.\textsuperscript{77}

During the early 1920s the manager of the Sun River project continued to lament the state of marketing in the Fort Shaw division. In 1921 he wrote:
The city of Great Falls should offer a good market for practically all farm products, but at the present time the retail merchants are not satisfied with the methods that have to be used in making purchases from the farmers. If they could place orders with a responsible organization who would stand behind the products furnished it would be of great assistance and result in increasing local sales. The principal defect, from the farmers’ viewpoint, in present operations is the lack of a good cash market, and if this could be provided the water users would produce more potatoes and other vegetables.  

Three years later the situation remained unchanged. The project manager reported that the county agent had tried to set up a marketing organization but the farmers took no real interest. The Great Falls merchants continued to demand a responsible association with which to deal rather than individuals.

The way in which potatoes were marketed remained virtually unchanged from the turn of the century. A farmer would take a truckload of potatoes to Great Falls and the wholesaler, if he was so inclined, could offer to buy them for any price he chose. Many merchants continued to take potatoes only in exchange for merchandise. In Butte, where the state law requiring potatoes to be graded was enforced, a single commission agent regulated the distribution of potatoes in the city. He paid a set price for graded potatoes and notified local producers when his supply needed replenishing.
After the demise of their first organization in the mid-1910s, the potato growers of the Fort Shaw division remained unorganized until the 1930s. In 1928 Eric Lindberg built his potato warehouse, in which he proposed to rent storage space to his neighbors, but no records exist to show how much use the potato growers made of that facility. Late in 1930, through the efforts of the Cascade county agent and his assistant on the Sun River project, the potato growers of the Sun River valley organized the Sun River Valley Potato Growers Association and elected officers who would be in charge of the marketing operation. Shortly after, and contrary to the wishes of most of the members and the advisory board, the president, N.G. Malin, and a minority of the members undertook construction of a potato warehouse, financed by a loan of $600 from the Sun River Valley State Bank. The obligation of paying back the loan rested on Malin and four other members who signed the note. This action divided the membership and made the organization largely ineffective.81

Late in 1933, with New Deal programs beginning to function, some of the potato growers from the Fort Shaw division met with commission agents in Great Falls in an attempt to establish a code of fair practices. Negotiations soon broke down when retailers and wholesalers refused to give the local growers any price advantage over growers in the Helena valley. Wholesalers also wished to add a handling charge of fifty-five
cents per hundred pounds to local potatoes, which would be deducted from the then current price of $1.35 per hundred-weight. With market conditions unchanged, the Fort Shaw potato growers reorganized in 1934 and selected as their president C.S. Hanna, who in 1920 had led the short-lived organization of hay growers. Hanna managed to restore good will among the members and gain their support for cooperative marketing. Guided by the county agent, Hanna also tested using phosphate on his potato ground and encouraged other growers to use this fertilizer when he saw the results. However, local market conditions in 1935 prevented the organization from benefiting from cooperative marketing. Due to a shortage of potatoes, retailers in Great Falls were willing to pay more than local wholesalers and more than the Chicago market, so the farmers once again sold the valley's potato crop piecemeal.

Two years later the potato growers of the Sun River project united with potato growers in other Cascade county communities to organize the Farmers Union Trading Company of Great Falls. The purpose of the organization, which was capitalized at $100,000, was to buy, sell, and process all types of farm products, but the initial focus was potatoes. The stockholders, numbering more than one hundred, selected a board of directors, which then elected George Barlow of Simms to be president. By October, 1937, the organization had
rented a warehouse in Great Falls and was receiving potatoes to market under the Farmers Union brand.\textsuperscript{84}

Records do not show how enthusiastically the Fort Shaw farmers patronized the Farmers Union cooperative, but potato acreage in the division declined by more than 40 percent from 1937 to 1940, dropping to only 144 acres in 1940, the lowest acreage since 1916.\textsuperscript{85} Other evidence seems to indicate that the Farmers Union warehouse had little impact on the local market. Early in 1939 a farmer from the Fort Shaw vicinity made news when he gave away a truckload of cabbage in Great Falls rather than let it spoil in storage. He did so to draw attention to the wholesaler who had recently shipped in four tons of old cabbage from outside the area, making local cabbage unmarketable. Later that year, producers, wholesalers, and retailers met in Great Falls to discuss establishing a program of orderly marketing of agricultural produce. S.F. Hockersmith and C.S. Hanna of the Fort Shaw division spoke at the conference.\textsuperscript{86} Again, it seems that little was accomplished, for in 1940, George Sanford, a long-time manager of the Sun River project who had moved on to become chief irrigation engineer of the Bureau of Reclamation, spoke in Great Falls at a national reclamation conference. His words echoed those spoken by Franklin Lane in 1913. "...[O]ne additional element is needed to assure [the Sun River project's] progress and that is closer cooperation between the farmers and the
business men of Great Falls. And I believe such closer cooperation will be forthcoming. It certainly will be to the advantage of all concerned."^87

Besides these efforts to create an effective organization to market potatoes, one other cooperative marketing venture operated during the 1930s. Bolstered again by the work of the young people of the division, in 1928 the poultry growers of the division came together to market turkeys. That fall, the instructor of the Simms' high school agricultural education class proposed that his students manage a turkey pool in November and December, to get the local poultry growers to market their crop cooperatively. The students arranged to sell the turkeys in Chicago for fifty-five cents per pound, when the Great Falls market was offering only thirty-six cents. By building the shipping crates themselves, the students helped to reduce shipping costs, and producers were able to net forty-two cents per pound.^88

In 1929 the Sun River Poultry Marketing Association, which had been operating for a short time in adjacent Lewis and Clark county, invited the turkey growers of Cascade county to join their organization. A number of the Fort Shaw producers did so, and in 1930 and 1933 the organization elected William Love of Fort Shaw as its president. The members continued to market their turkeys cooperatively until 1937, when turkey production in the Fort Shaw division dropped off
by more than 50 percent due to scarcity of feed and low prices. By 1938 the Fort Shaw poultry growers had returned to marketing on an individual basis.\textsuperscript{89}

That the cooperative marketing efforts of the Fort Shaw farmers were short-lived is not surprising or unusual in American agricultural history.\textsuperscript{90} Across the nation, and increasingly after the turn of the twentieth century, farm cooperatives failed regularly due to inexperienced management and lack of dedication to the cooperative ideal. However, the failures of the people of the Fort Shaw division may be considered significant for students of federal reclamation history because they show that farmers who shared a dependence on an irrigation system—who had to cooperate to operate and maintain the system—did not find it any easier to function in a cooperative marketing program than did farmers whose operations were quite independent. Prior to passage of the Reclamation Act in 1902, proponents of federal reclamation had claimed that one of the positive aspects of life under the ditch was that it seemed to generate cooperation, and used the experience of California fruit growers as evidence.\textsuperscript{91} By 1930, those who still believed in the virtue of federal reclamation argued for an even more paternalistic system of guidance for reclamation settlers if they were to develop cooperative enterprises.\textsuperscript{92}
The failure of cooperative marketing in the Fort Shaw division might be attributed to the way in which the farmers tried to stabilize their farming operations. Agricultural economist Roy E. Huffman has suggested that the "major importance of irrigation...lies in promoting stability and flexibility in production rather than adding to the quantity of goods produced." In the Fort Shaw division, acreages devoted to specific crops varied markedly from year to year, as did yields. Similarly, numbers and types of livestock fluctuated widely. By making their operations flexible the farmers sought to circumvent income fluctuations that resulted from dependence on a single crop or product. This flexibility made commodity-specific marketing cooperatives, the type the Fort Shaw people most often formed, difficult to maintain.

Another reason for the failure of the cooperative efforts may have been the business community of Great Falls. While the commission agents regularly called for marketing associations with which to deal, a divide and conquer ethic also may have been at work. A strong marketing association would be able to demand higher prices than the agents paid to individuals. Marketing negotiations, particularly for potatoes, seldom got far, and, at least once the Great Falls retailers were willing to outbid the wholesalers and buy from individuals. Also, the wholesalers of Great Falls had access to
produce from Idaho, which they seemed most willing to purchase when the price was right.\textsuperscript{95}

As the people of the Fort Shaw division experimented with different crops, crop rotations, and livestock to find combinations that would yield a satisfactory living for their families, they were integrating irrigated farming into the agricultural system that already existed in central Montana. In his analysis of the economic feasibility of irrigation, Huffman described types of integration that occur between irrigated and dryland operations. The simplest type of integration involves an irrigated farm that also has some grazing land (presumably dry land). A more complex type of integration, and a model that better suits the Fort Shaw division is one in which there is little actual combination of irrigated and dry land. In this type, irrigated areas provide sources of hay for dryland stock raisers, but feed grains move both ways. During periods of drought, dryland operators will turn to irrigated farms for grain. In times of favorable weather, operators of irrigated farms may engage in livestock fattening and will find the nearby dryland farms to be the cheapest source of grain.\textsuperscript{96}

As they integrated their operations into the larger grain- and stock-raising economy of the area, the farmers in the Fort Shaw division realized the value of concentrating on alfalfa as a cash crop, but engaged in either dairy operations
or livestock feeding when their capital permitted them to do so. By the late 1930s they were growing more wheat, oats, and barley on their irrigated land than they had in the previous decade. They also increased the amount of land devoted to pasture grass and corn and decreased the acreage of sugar beets and potatoes, creating more flexible operations that could work dynamically within the local system.  

One could say that after a generation of experimentation, the people who had endured were enjoying relative prosperity and stability. John Bennett, a social scientist who has done much research on the agricultural communities of northern Montana and southern Alberta, has suggested that in the adaptive process by which people established farms on the semi-arid plains, survival was as important as profit. In fact, people in the region gave a positive social value to survival. The people who endured were most often "cautious and consumption-deferring personalities" who could be content with life in a place with marginal resources. James Malin, who studied the frontier farmers of Kansas, reached a related conclusion. He observed that the amount of cash that a farmer could hope to accumulate, unless the farm was larger than normal, was small. Since annual cash returns were never large, crop losses caused by adverse weather or insect damage were often more financially devastating than fluctuations in prices for commodities. While neither of these studies included irrigat-
ed farming, it seems clear that the experience of the farmers of the Fort Shaw division during the period in which they were developing their farms were not unlike those of dry land farmers on the Great Plains. From 1920 to 1940, the average annual crop value per acre for the division climbed to a peak of twenty-one dollars per acre only four times. It dropped to twelve or thirteen dollars per acre nine times in the same period. An average return, which in real life seldom occurred, was around sixteen dollars per acre. Running an eighty-acre farm and supporting a family on some $1,300 per year would not have been comfortable living for many Americans, but the more important fact for those Fort Shaw people who had remained on their land was that they had survived and established a home.98
ENDNOTES


2. Congress, Senate, 68th Congress, 1st Sess., 1923, S. Doc. 120, p. 61.


4. Great Falls Daily Leader, August 4, 1913, p. 4.

5. Great Falls Daily Tribune, April 16, 1897, p. 4.


9. Ibid., March 17, 1909, p. 5.


11. Ibid., September 15, 1908, p. 8.

12. Ibid., June 17, 1909, p. 4.


15. Ibid.


18. Great Falls Daily Leader, August 30, 1911, p. 4.


20. Great Falls Daily Leader, June 15, 1913, p. 3.

22. Ibid., December 3, 1913, p. 4; July 13, 1914, p. 2.

23. Ibid., August 18, 1912, p. 4; July 13, 1914, p. 2.


25. Ibid., July 9, 1915, p. 4.


27. Ibid.

28. 1910 Manuscript Census, Cascade County, Montana (National Archives microcopy). (hereafter 1910 Census)


34. Cropped areas and values for 1930 on the Fort Shaw division, Box 1354, RG No. 115, NA/Denver; Crop return—Year 1934, Box 1354, RG No. 115, NA/Denver; Project Histories, RG 115, NA/Denver, 1930 Project History, p. 101, and 1934 Project History, p. 87.

36. All data and averages compiled from project history annual crop reports, 1911 through 1940.

37. Great Falls Daily Tribune, February 4, 1905, p. 3; June 14, 1905, p. 3.


41. Project Histories, 1910 Project History, p. 169.

42. Great Falls Daily Tribune, August 29, 1913, p. 6.


44. Great Falls Daily Tribune, October 6, 1913, p. 7; October 21, 1913, p. 3; December 11, 1913, p. 14.

45. Ibid., February 4, 1914, p. 5; Project Histories, 1914 O&M Report, p. 32.


47. Great Falls Daily Tribune, May 30, 1913, p. 8; July 5, 1913, p. 6; October 31, 1913, p. 6; December 4, 1913, p. 14.

48. Ibid., April 25, 1914, p. 5; August 20, 1914, p. 10.

49. Project Histories, 1915-1940, Annual Crop Reports; Project Histories, 1919 Project History, p. 32.


51. Annual Narrative Reports, Cascade County, Montana, Agricultural Extension Agent, RG No. 33 (National Archives Microcopy) (hereafter RG 33, Cascade County Annual Re-
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52. Project Histories, 1914 O&M Report, p. 31; 1917 Project History, p. 27; 1919 Project History, p. 143. Project Histories, RG 115, NA/Denver, 1920 Project History, p. 97; 1924 Project History, p. 27-28; 1925 Project History, p. 39; 1927 Project History, p. 55; 1928 Project History, p. 55; Annual Crop Reports, Project Histories, 1920-1940; Cascade Courier, March 3, 1928, p. 8; January 11, 1929, p. 8; March 1, 1929, p. 8; March 29, 1929, p. 8; May 31, 1929, p. 8; October 25, 1929, p. 8; September 6, 1929, p. 8; November 8, 1929, p. 8; March 28, 1930, p. 8; April 18, 1930, p. 8; October 3, 1930, p. 1; March 6, 1931, p. 3; April 10, 1931, p. 4; April 24, 1931, p. 8; April 21, 1932, p. 8; September 8, 1932, p. 5; May 6, 1937, p. 8; Fairfield Times, April 26, 1939, p. 4; June 23, 1939, p. 8.


54. Great Falls Daily Leader, June 15, 1913, p. 3; Great Falls Daily Tribune, August 29, 1913, p. 12; November 18, 1914, p. 3; December 15, 1914, p. 3.


56. RG 33, Cascade County Annual Report, 1914, p. 2-3.


59. Great Falls Daily Tribune, March 10, 1909, p. 3.

60. Ibid., March 4, 1902, p. 5; August 1, 1903, p. 2; November 20, 1905, p. 8; May 5, 1906, p. 3; February 7, 1909, p. 12.


64. Fairfield Times, February 26, 1925, p. 4; March 12, 1925, p. 1; April 24, 1925, p. 1; June 28, 1925, p. 1; March 29, 1929, p. 1.


67. Bloom interview.

68. 1910 Census, Helper School District 39; Project Histories, 1911 Maintenance and Operation Report, p. 8 and Sheet 2; Great Falls Daily Tribune, November 8, 1913, p. 10; November 16, 1913, p. 4; December 25, 1919, p. 17.

69. Bloom interview.


73. Great Falls Daily Tribune, February 9, 1915, p. 3.

74. Reclamation Record 6 July (1915): 304.
75. Great Falls Daily Tribune, April 2, 1915, p. 5.


77. RG 33, Cascade County Annual Report, 1916, p. 2; Project Histories, 1918 Project History, p. 30.

78. Project Histories, RG 115, NA/Denver, 1921 Project History, p. 27.


81. RG 33, SRIP Annual Report, 1933-1934, p. 102; Examiners' Reports, Sun River Valley State Bank, February 27, 1931 and August 22, 1936, Folder #163-10 and #163-11, RS 105, Montana State Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

82. Fairfield Times, November 22, 1933, p. 4; November 29, 1933, p. 1.


87. Fairfield Times, October 10, 1940, p. 1.


89. Ibid., December 6, 1929, p. 8; December 13, 1929, p. 4; RG 33, Cascade County Annual Report, 1930, p. 44; RG 33, Cascade County Annual Report, 1936-1937, p. 126; RG 33, Cascade County Annual Report, 1937-1938, p. 72.

90. Shannon's The Farmer's Last Frontier has a chapter on farmers' cooperative movements. Besides discussing the frequent failure of such efforts, he provides a good
overview of the development of cooperatives into the early twentieth century. It was probably their experience with the types of cooperatives Shannon describes, as much as the work of the county agents, that inspired the Fort Shaw settlers. See also Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982) on the role of cooperatives during the farm crisis of the 1920s and during the New Deal.


95. Benson Landis, in *Social Aspects of Farmers' Cooperative Marketing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), describes varying attitudes business men had toward the cooperatives he and his aides investigated. Opinions of the business men were fairly evenly divided among favorable, divided, and hostile to the cooperatives. The largest group, however, was 'timid in indorsement' or 'little interested.' Pp. 18-19.

96. Huffman, pp.130-131. By 1942, Carl Kraenzel, a rural sociologist at Montana State College, had determined that "diversification" as practiced on Midwestern farms was not well suited to the Great Plains. However, in areas where irrigated and dry land were in close proximity, farmers had achieved diversification by owning or controlling some of each type of land, even though their holdings might not be contiguous. Kraenzel, "New Frontiers of the Great Plains," *Journal of Farm Economics* 24 (1942): 586.

97. Mary Ellen Glass, historian of the Newlands project in Nevada, observed that in 1970 most farmers in the project were growing alfalfa for feeding stock, the same type of farm management that had existed prior to establishment of the reclamation project. In 1940 the farms of the

CHAPTER FIVE

CONFLICT, COMPETITION, AND COOPERATION: THE COMMUNITIES OF THE FORT SHAW DIVISION

As a whole the farmers do not organize and cooperate in their buying and selling, they are rather suspicious of each other and tend to act independently rather than as a body. There are several organizations however....

R.M. Snell, Project Manager, 1914

Developing their farm units was, of course, the primary work of the people who lived in the Fort Shaw division between 1910 and 1940. But they also gave much energy to building communities to which they "belonged" and which gave them identity in the wider world of central Montana. In 1914 the manager of the Sun River project was not particularly impressed with the cooperative efforts he had observed among the settlers, but he noted, with fairness, that they had begun to organize themselves.

The development of strong rural communities was one of the projected benefits of federal reclamation. As the twentieth century began, the rural population of America was rapidly diminishing. Agrarians feared that the loss of rural communities would destroy the moral and spiritual basis of American civilization. They believed that rural life perpetuated such American virtues as hard work, independence, and conserva-
tism, all of which seemed to be in short supply among urban dwellers. Proponents of federal reclamation had argued that the more dense rural population of an irrigation project, created by keeping the size of farms small, would enhance social intercourse. Also, the shared dependence on the irrigation system would foster a spirit of cooperation. Together, these factors would lead to a strong rural community.

One of the primary focuses of this study is to examine community-building in the Fort Shaw division and to determine whether the communities that developed there exhibited any qualities that would set them apart from their nearby dryland neighbors. In this chapter, three communities will be considered: Fort Shaw, Simms, and Sun River. The people who have been considered to be members of these communities are those who live in the town for which the community is named and on farms near that town. These community lines correspond closely to school district lines, which were also federal census divisions.

Rural sociologists have identified neighborhoods as being important building blocks of rural communities. In the Fort Shaw division, neighborhoods, in the sense of a number of families identifying themselves as a group because their farms are near each other in an area of open country, are not well defined, probably because of the close spacing of farms and their nearness to a town. The Square Butte neighborhood,
approximately four miles southeast of the town of Fort Shaw, is an exception. It retained its rural school and neighborhood identity for much of the period of this study. Also, neighborhood-like bonds existed between Fort Shaw and Sun River. Many social activities included people from both communities. Also, because the Sun River school district did not have a high school, its students could choose which high school they wished to attend. About half of the Sun River students went to Fort Shaw and half went to Great Falls.

From another perspective, it is possible to consider each of the three communities as a neighborhood within the Fort Shaw division, for at times the people abandoned their local identities and worked together as members of the larger community of the division or the irrigation district. This identity emerged most notably when they had dealings with the Bureau of Reclamation, the county, or organizations in Great Falls. However, it seems clear that when people identified the place they "came from," it was one of the three communities, not the Fort Shaw division. People who lived in nearby communities also identified Simms, Fort Shaw, and Sun River as distinct social--and sometimes political--entities.

Historians, as well as political and social scientists, have found the idea of community and the process by which it emerges and develops to be worthy of extensive research. In 1954, Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick opened a discussion
that continues to the present day. Seeking to find historical evidence to support Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis that frontier situations gave rise to political democracy, Elkins and McKitrick started with a contemporary model of community-building. In a newly built housing project, as residents sought to solve problems related to deficiencies in construction and planning, many persons shared the responsibilities of leadership. Out of this democratic participation the residents developed a sense of community. As Elkins and McKitrick examined published histories of communities in the Old Northwest and New England, they found historical examples that fit the contemporary model. They concluded that in the absence of a ready-made structure of leadership, frontier communities developed out of the cooperation that was needed to solve immediate and pressing problems in their "time of troubles."³

A few years later, Allan Bogue challenged Elkins and McKitrick. His research indicated that cooperation was not the primary building block of frontier communities. Rather, development often took place in the midst of discord as people jockeyed for positions of leadership and power in emerging communities. Within a short time, Robert Dykstra’s study of five cattle towns in Kansas, where economic competition was rife, provided more evidence for the Bogue point of view. Appearing in 1978, Don Doyle’s study of nineteenth-century Jacksonville, Illinois, further strengthened the Bogue camp.
He found economic and cultural clashes having profound effects on the town's development. The tide turned, however, in the mid-1980s, when John Mack Faragher published his analysis of an open-country community in Illinois and found evidence to support the theses of both Bogue and Elkins and McKitrick. Faragher suggested that at Sugar Creek, interpretation varied depending on which people one studied. Paula Nelson's recent work on the early twentieth-century towns in western South Dakota provides further evidence to support Faragher's assertions.

Other historians have taken the existence of both cooperation and conflict in community-building as a given and have examined the role of boosterism in the development of a community. In 1966, Page Smith published his analysis of the town in American history. He suggested that American towns have been of two types, either colonized (a later version of the New England covenanted community) or cumulative. Homogeneous groups of people, united by their ethnicity, religion, kinship, or ideals formed the colonized towns, which were usually conservative, rural, and not particularly concerned with growth. The cumulative towns were unplanned and resulted from individuals acting independently and in competition. Boosterism was the mechanism by which the economic interests of the cumulative towns came together and promoted growth. In cumulative towns, the early emphasis on material values persisted
as the towns matured. Writing at about the same time as Smith, Daniel Boorstin also noted the influence of boosterism in the development of nineteenth century frontier towns and emphasized that the boosters acted not from civic pride or concern, but from their desire for personal material gain.\textsuperscript{5}

More recently, Robert Hine and John Hudson have done studies of frontier towns on the Great Plains. Hine's findings point to a synthesis of Smith's types. While the open country communities he studied were usually cumulative, a bond of endurance tied the people together and created conformity to a group ethic. Hudson's work revealed different characteristics for such communities as railroad towns, that emerged full-blown, and open country communities that grew slowly and were based more on social than economic needs. Dependent on boosterism for growth, the former tended to retain their materialistic orientation as they matured. Later, though, that same boosterism became the mechanism that blurred the differences between the open-country and town neighborhoods and drew farmers into the latter.\textsuperscript{6}

In 1979 Elvin Hatch's study of a small agricultural community in California appeared. His work addressed the question of how communities express their values. Like Hine and Hudson, Hatch preferred a synthesis of the models of covenanted and cumulative communities, but he found boosterism assuming a new form in the early twentieth century. He sug-
gested that by that time, participation and boosterism replaced the covenant in community-building. In Starkey, the community he studied, he found a "folk theory of community" was at work. This folk theory was based on the shared notion that independent individuals should and would act together with "...a degree of cohesion and cooperation in events and undertakings of common interest." Boosterism created the cohesion. However, this boosterism was different from the type historians have described as shaping nineteenth-century towns. Like the members of Smith's covenanted community, Starkey's residents had no concern with commercial development. They perceived their community as a farm community rather than as a business community and their boosterism was directed toward improving the non-commercial aspects of the town. Little interested in attracting newcomers, they wanted to make their community a better place for those who already lived there. So, unlike the cumulative towns of the nineteenth century, where economic growth motivated the spirit of improvement, in Starkey shared social values provided the motivation. This did not lead, though, to a homogenous community of individuals who always acted cooperatively. In fact, the town was factionalized and conflicts occurred, but the folk theory of community created the impression of a united front to the outside world and shaped the perception that the outside world had of Starkey.7
The communities of the Fort Shaw division exhibit characteristics of both covenanted and cumulative communities. Also, as they matured, they experienced cooperation, competition, and conflict. Cooperation was most evident as the settlers established schools, churches, and nascent civic and social organizations within their communities. Competition and conflict most often occurred between the communities of Fort Shaw and Simms. While men stepped forward voluntarily to assume positions of leadership in situations that lacked an established structure, a certain amount of competition took place. The discussion in Chapter Three of the formation of the water users' association reflects this kind of competition. The issue of drainage of the seeped lands of the division also brought about conflict that was rooted in self-interest, much as Bogue has described. Also, some commercialistic boosterism marked the first decade of the development of Simms, and a certain amount of commercial competition took place between Fort Shaw and Simms, but by the 1920s the communities of the Fort Shaw division, like Starkey, had accepted their status as farm communities and adopted folk theories of community similar to that which Hatch described. After the mid-1920s, Fort Shaw and Simms competed in only one area—the development of their school districts. The aggressive policies of the Simms district would lead to open conflict several times during the years before 1940.
The examination of community-building in the Fort Shaw division will concentrate on Fort Shaw and Simms. Sun River did not experience the same type of development that Simms and Fort Shaw did in the years after 1910. In 1908, when the reclamation project opened, Sun River was a long-established town with the essential businesses and institutions that made it a rural market and social center for local ranchers. The business people of Sun River enjoyed increased activity during construction of the Fort Shaw division and later, when settlers began to arrive and needed provisions and temporary shelter, but this small boom did not lead to the boosterism that Fort Shaw and Simms would exhibit. Perhaps the people there, most of whom had been in the community for a generation, remembered their unsuccessful aspirations to eclipse Great Falls as the focus of the county. By 1910 they had settled comfortably into their peripheral status as an agricultural community and had no interest in boosterism that was bound to accomplish little. From 1910 to 1930, already established social organizations and church congregations continued to function and accepted newcomers who wished to join them. Throughout this time period, the leaders of the Sun River community came from the old, established families and were people who were satisfied with the status quo.

During the late-1920s, however, the social life of Sun River experienced a renaissance as new people moved in and
advancing age reduced the ranks and vigor of the old guard. Through the efforts of the religious and social organizations of the community, the historic but deteriorating Methodist church building was renovated and became a non-denominational facility. The parents of the school district organized a PTA and created a library in one of the rooms of the post office building. Two new families, who came to Sun River from an active rural neighborhood near Cascade, were instrumental in expanding 4-H club work, particularly for girls. In 1936, other newcomers took the lead in establishing the only Farmers Union local in the Fort Shaw division. The organization grew and gained enough support to begin operating a cooperative oil and gas station. Also during the 1930s, the Neighbors Holding Company, established in 1905 as an adjunct of a fraternal organization, sold its lot and meeting hall to a private party. The formation in 1935 of a new, over-arching community organization, the Sun River Community Club, may have prompted the dissolution of the Holding Company, for the Community Club had quickly garnered enough support to build its own hall. Another flurry of organizing activity took place during the 1930s among the women of the community. They formed a home demonstration club, a Ladies Aid, and a Woman’s Club, complete with club house. In fact, such a proliferation of new organizations had occurred in Sun River that in 1938 the county home demonstration agent declared the community "over-organized."8
So many associations existed that they were dying from redundancy. This eager and short-lived involvement of people in many new associations was characteristic of communities in formation, or, as in this case, communities that were experiencing a rapid turn-over of population.

Throughout the period of this study, a nexus existed between Fort Shaw and Sun River that did not exist between Fort Shaw and Simms. Two circumstances contributed to this connection: the social life of the Sun River valley in the years before 1910 and the proximity of the Square Butte neighborhood to both communities. Since the 1870s, when ranchers had begun to move into the area, the entire valley, from Augusta to Vaughn, had comprised a community that was divided into smaller neighborhoods of people who lived near each other. While most socializing took place among the families of a neighborhood, activities such as dances often drew people from greater distances. The Indian school at Fort Shaw was a part of this community. Besides being located near the center of the valley, the old fort's facilities could accommodate larger gatherings of people. As a result, the Fort Shaw neighborhood, comprising the teachers of the school and their families, often sponsored community activities, with the children who attended the school providing entertainment in the form of basketball games and musical programs. Since the Indian school continued to operate until 1910, it was natural
for the residents of Sun River to continue their associations with the people at the fort even after the establishment of the reclamation project. Also, the Reclamation Service had located its headquarters and staff housing at Fort Shaw, which added to the population of the neighborhood a largely male contingent that looked forward to opportunities to socialize.

The Square Butte neighborhood, located approximately midway between Fort Shaw and Sun River, but a few miles to the south, provided the other link between the two communities. (See Figure 5.1.) The people of Square Butte, most of whom arrived during 1909 and 1910, turned first to nearby Sun River to fulfill their economic and social needs, and, as a result, established long-lived connections with that community. However, most of the people of the Sun River community were ranchers, not farmers of irrigated land, like the people of Square Butte. As time passed, the fifteen or so families at Square Butte turned increasingly toward the developing community of Fort Shaw, where they could meet with other irrigation farmers and form organizations that addressed their interests and concerns. In fact, the Square Butte neighborhood provided much of the leadership for the Fort Shaw community during the period of this study. These leaders and their families, who "crossed over" socially between Fort Shaw and Sun River, contributed to amicable relations between the two communities.
Figure 5.1. The neighborhoods of Fort Shaw, Square Butte, and Sun River (adapted from The Historical Map of Cascade County, Montana, by Michael Bugen-stein, 1987)
Although the engineers of the Reclamation Service planned Fort Shaw and Simms to be physically identical, the towns developed quite differently. While the Fort Shaw community, to which the people of Square Butte gravitated, flirted briefly with the idea of becoming something more than an agricultural village, commercial boosterism there never reached the level that it did in Simms. Indicative of the community's developing self-image as an agricultural community—and nothing more—are the organizations the people of Fort Shaw formed. By 1911 Fort Shaw had a civic club, which was discussed in Chapter Three. In 1913, as its members tried to disengage the club from conflict with the water users' association, it reorganized and existed briefly as a commercial club, the slogan of which was "good roads." Neither the civic club nor the commercial club accomplished anything of significance. During the years from 1912 through 1915, the organization at Fort Shaw that accomplished most was the Grange. It sponsored annual harvest fairs for which the community gained some local reputation, but even this organization died during the years of World War I. Of the men who held offices in the civic club and the Grange during these early years, only H.E. Culver continued to be a leader of the Fort Shaw community.9

Fort Shaw remained without an over-arching community organization from 1916 until 1927, when, with the help of the county agent, the Farmers Club was formed. This organization
would be a vital part of the community throughout the 1930s. Soon after the formation of the club, its members renovated space in a building at the fort to use for a meeting hall, where they held monthly social meetings and programs on agricultural topics. During the 1930s, the club also had charge of the community’s exhibit at the Northern Montana State Fair, for which it usually won high honors. During the first years of the club’s operation, S.F. Hockersmith, John Hancock, and Olive Allinson, all from the Square Butte neighborhood, were its executive officers. Subsequent leaders were other successful farmers and their wives from both Fort Shaw and Square Butte. The club met the social and educational needs of an agricultural community and was a strong expression of its self-image as such.10

In the early years of the division’s operation, a congeries of circumstances gave Simms the boost it needed to surpass Fort Shaw as a commercial center and furnished hope to its business people that Simms might become more than a rural hamlet. The ascendancy of Simms may have surprised the planners of the division for evidence suggests that they expected Fort Shaw to become the principal town in the division. When the three-man board of appraisal, which included an employee of the Reclamation Service, appraised the first lots to be offered for sale in the two townsites, they assigned the lots at Fort Shaw values that were nearly double those of similar
lots in Simms. Perhaps the appraisers thought that the already established populations of the Indian school and the Reclamation Service adjacent to the townsite of Fort Shaw would give it an edge in development. Whatever the appraisers' reasoning, the high values they attached to the lots in Fort Shaw inhibited their sale and began a trend of slower growth that would not be reversed.

Lots in the townsite of Fort Shaw may have failed to sell as rapidly as those in Simms for another reason. The farm units near Fort Shaw were among the largest in the division, which reduced the number of families who might want a house in town. The more numerous 40-acre farm units near Simms placed four families on the same amount of land as one 160-acre unit near Fort Shaw. Also, as has been noted previously, the small farm units, which were located mostly in the western end of the division, were the first to be claimed. This meant that from an early date, Simms presented a more attractive market to people who came to investigate business prospects. Late in 1913, when three-quarters of the townsite of Simms had been opened, and sixty-nine of eighty-one lots there had been sold, at Fort Shaw only seventeen lots had been sold.12

The population of the townsite of Fort Shaw increased gradually, however, and by 1919 enough lots had been sold to warrant opening the second quarter. However, when those lots went on the auction block they found no buyers. At a time
when farm units in the division were selling for the highest prices they would attain before 1940, local people again charged that the appraisers had over-estimated the value of lots in Fort Shaw. The lots remained a drug on the market into the mid-1920s. Then, in 1928, the Bureau of Reclamation permanently altered the face of Fort Shaw and underscored the town’s self-image as an agricultural community. The engineers changed the lines of the remaining lots in Fort Shaw, enlarging each to three to six acres, so that residents would have room to keep livestock in town during the winter. These lots had greater appeal and sold gradually over the next few years. During this time the town’s profile changed even further as the business people of Fort Shaw abandoned the area in the townsite that had been designated for commercial development. After a series of fires destroyed five buildings, their owners either quit their businesses or rebuilt on the highway that ran along the south side of town. Three others moved their buildings to the same vicinity, where they hoped to attract more business.¹³

Other circumstances also contributed to the more rapid growth of Simms. As early as 1911, the members of the Fort Shaw community had been aware of Simms’ status as a rising star and their town’s subsequent eclipse. In its most aggressive move, the Fort Shaw Civic Club tried to divert the county’s plan to build a bridge over the Sun at Simms. Al-
though each town had a place near it where horses or wagons and teams could ford the river, high water would make these fords unsafe or unusable. The nearest bridge was at Sun River. The population of the benchlands north of the river was growing and the homesteaders there looked to Fort Shaw and Simms as marketplaces and social centers. A bridge at Simms would mean the north-siders probably would take their business there.

Though only in its first year of operation, the Commercial Club of Simms, which was dominated by merchants, was better organized than the farmer-led Civic Club of Fort Shaw. A move by the homesteaders who lived directly across the Sun from Simms had made clear to the merchants the advantages of a bridge. Inconvenienced by being cut off from Simms by high water, the north-siders had cooperated to suspend a cable-mounted foot bridge across the river. Soon, north-siders from much greater distances were parking their teams on the north bank and walking across the bridge to shop in Simms. In a short time, members of the Commercial Club began an aggressive campaign to have a permanent wagon bridge built adjacent to Simms. Rumor had it that the commissioners of Cascade County were in favor of such a bridge, so in March, 1911, the club sent a contingent to the commissioners of Teton County, which adjoins Cascade County at Simms, to discuss the possibility of sharing the cost of a bridge at Simms.
The people of Simms did not keep the news of the ongoing negotiations to themselves. When the people of Fort Shaw learned that the county commissioners were considering building a bridge across the Sun, they arranged for representatives of the Civic Club to meet with them to discuss the merits of building the bridge at Fort Shaw. The boosters from Fort Shaw argued that the bridge was necessary for the convenience of the Reclamation Service, which was beginning construction work north of the river. They also hinted that the government might be willing to pay a portion of the cost of the bridge if it were located at Fort Shaw. (The commissioners of Teton County would have had little interest in sharing the cost of a bridge at Fort Shaw. At Simms the southern boundary of Teton County leaves the river and jogs sharply north. The river crossing at Fort Shaw is well within Cascade County.) In addition, the Civic Club submitted a traffic count that showed four times as many teams passing the ford at Fort Shaw in a forty-eight-hour period as passed at Simms, due to the denser settlement north of Fort Shaw.\(^{15}\)

The arguments of the people of Fort Shaw were to no avail and the offer of the Teton County commissioners to pay one-third of the cost of establishing a bridge at Simms decided the issue. Completed late in 1912, the bridge gave the boosters of Simms one more reason to think that their town might become something more than a quiet rural village. The people
of Fort Shaw had to wait until 1915 before the county and the Reclamation Service cooperated to build a bridge there. The construction of five new commercial buildings in Fort Shaw during that year, to house such basic businesses as a grain elevator and a hardware store, indicates how important this transportation link was to the economic growth of the community and underscores the advantage Simms gained by securing the first bridge.16

By 1915 the profile of the business communities of Fort Shaw and Simms had been established and would change little—except to contract—in the next ten years. Each had the basic businesses of a rural community: a mercantile operation, butcher, hardware store, grain elevator, blacksmith, lumber yard, hotel, and barber. In addition to these, Fort Shaw had two short-lived cooperative businesses, the cheese factory, which was discussed in Chapter Four, and a cooperative store. Though the businesses were not successful, they are worthy of mention because they are evidence of an early interest among the people of the Fort Shaw community, and particularly the people of the Square Butte neighborhood, in cooperation. At least half of the men who directed them were from Square Butte and became leaders of the Fort Shaw community. Among the officers and directors of the cheese factory were Sam Holmesland, John Koger, John Olson, and N.E. Hannant, all of whom were active in the early water users’ association.
or later were commissioners of the Fort Shaw Irrigation District. John Olson and his neighbor, S.F. Hockersmith, were the executive officers of the cooperative store. H.E. Culver, of Fort Shaw, who also had been a director of the cheese factory, managed the store, which opened in 1915 and ceased to operate sometime during World War I. At that time Culver bought the store’s stock, opened his own business, and was Fort Shaw’s chief merchant until his death in 1937.17

As discussed in Chapter Four, cooperative associations met with little success in the Fort Shaw division, but the leadership of the Fort Shaw community, and in particular, the Square Butte neighborhood, in these two operations is notable. It seems that the farmers of Square Butte developed the cooperative spirit that reclamation advocates had expected to emerge in the projects. However, while the Square Butte people were willing to assume leadership in these cooperative associations, their numbers were not great enough to sustain the operations, and their influence was not strong enough in the wider community to convince other farmers of the advantages of cooperation.

Individual proprietorships and branch operations characterized the Simms business community, which was much larger than Fort Shaw’s. Simms had not just one, but several mercantile stores, one of which was part of a regional chain. The town also had four lumber yards, all branch operations, a drug
store, and the only bank in the Fort Shaw division. The existence of a greater number of business people contributed to a larger permanent town population than Fort Shaw had and a businessman’s organization that continued until the early 1920s to seek ways to encourage economic growth.

In 1918, the boosterism of the Simms Commercial Club enmeshed the community in the epidemic of county-splitting that was taking place in Montana. In many places in the state, farmers and ranchers were seeking to break away from counties that were dominated by large municipalities and form counties that would be predominantly rural. The rural dwellers were aided and encouraged in their campaigns by a self-styled professional named Dan McKay, who made a career of county-splitting.18

Disgruntled farmers and ranchers in Cascade County believed that Great Falls was benefiting disproportionately from the taxes they paid. While rural roads in the county often were impassable in winter and spring, and even main routes were poorly maintained, Great Falls enjoyed new bridges across the Missouri and improved roadways near the city. Also, rural dwellers charged that the county failed to provide deputy sheriffs for areas outside of Great Falls, making law enforcement non-existent in many rural places. Believing they could better manage their own tax monies, during 1918 rural people petitioned the legislature to carve three new counties out of
Cascade and adjacent counties. The legislature refused the petitions on the grounds that the proposed counties were lacking in tax bases, population, and square mileage. Sun River County, which would have had Simms as its county seat, was one of the proposed counties. Dearborn County, with its probable seat at Cascade, was another.19

Obviously, the people who lived in the prospective county seats had much to gain from county-splitting. Unwilling to abandon this opportunity, the boosters of Dearborn County, who were centered in the town of Cascade, wasted no time after the legislature refused their petition. They regrouped, met again with Dan McKay, and began campaigning early in 1919 to secure enough territory to bring their proposal in compliance with legislative requirements. In June, C.S. Hanna, speaking through his Simms newspaper for the Sun River County Boosters Club, charged that Cascade was competing with Simms for the position of county seat because the Dearborn boosters were trying to bring land near the Sun River into the proposed Dearborn County. The boosters in Cascade responded with surprise, suggesting that the Simms people were jealous because the Dearborn County proposal appeared to have the additional support it needed while the Sun River County proposal had died. Hanna fired back that the boosters in Simms now wanted to be part of Dearborn County and they also expected to compete with Cascade for the county seat designation.20
The people of Simms worked feverishly to obtain 176 signatures on their petition to become a part of Dearborn county, but their early indecisiveness was fatal. In the fall of 1919, when the county commissioners considered the new petitions relating to Dearborn County, they disallowed the eleventh-hour Simms petition, citing a number of defects. However, they also found the remaining Dearborn petitions deficient, so the boosters in Cascade had to resume their campaign.21

What happened in Simms at this time is not clear. Apparently, the Commercial Club was either divided or completely disagreed with C.S. Hanna's avid support for Dearborn County. Whatever the reason, enough businesses withdrew their advertising from the Simms Enterprise to force Hanna to cease publication during the winter of 1919. By May of 1920, though, the newspaper was back in operation and Hanna again was pushing for county division. In an abstruse editorial comment he said, "In view of the fact that the Simms Commercial club does not look with favor upon county division talk, perhaps The Enterprise should refrain from discussing the matter, but the subject is one of our valley, and we would rather have a high school than a county seat, but as we see the matter county division would settle our school troubles as well as a host of other troubles."22 Hanna must not have prevailed with his associates in Simms, for the final petition
for Dearborn County that the boosters submitted in December, 1921, did not include any of the land of the Fort Shaw division. Hanna was spared any disappointment, however, for the Dearborn proposal failed to be approved and was not revived.23

It seems likely that after the legislature denied the formation of Sun River County in 1918, the members of the Simms Commercial Club gave up whatever hopes they may have had for Simms becoming a county seat. Instead, they directed their energies toward making the commissioners of Cascade County aware of the needs of the rural taxpayers in their vicinity. The primary thrust of their work immediately after World War I was to get county cooperation to improve the roads in the reclamation project and build new ones west and southwest from Simms, which would open the town to new market areas. During the early 1920s, when federal funds became available, the county improved the road from Great Falls to Simms. Whether credit for this project should be given to the Simms Commercial Club, though, is questionable, because the people of the division had been asking for improvements to the road for many years. The Commercial Club had virtually no success in obtaining the roads going west and southwest from Simms, mainly because landowners demanded more compensation than the county would pay. But rejections notwithstanding, the roads committee of the Simms Commercial Club doggedly kept the issues before the Great Falls Commercial Club and the
county commissioners. During the 1930s, again with federal aid, the county began to build the roads the people of Simms had sought, but by then any plans for Simms becoming a busy commercial center were only faded memories.\(^4\)

The Simms Commercial Club claimed to represent both farmers and merchants, and some farmer-businessmen participated in the organization, but it was primarily a town-focused association. The members invariably chose the club’s officers from among the merchants, the banker, the doctor, and the school principal. Building sidewalks and grading streets, activities that might enhance business, or at least make the town look more progressive, were the kinds of local issues that absorbed the club’s attention. In 1920, however, inspired by excellent crops and the heady prosperity that farmers had been experiencing during and after the war, the Commercial Club decided to revive the harvest fair that Fort Shaw had abandoned during the war. C.S. Hanna took the lead in the project. The fair was such a success that the community made plans to incorporate a fair association and build a permanent fair grounds. These plans did not materialize, due probably to the changes in the community’s economic condition during the early 1920s, but the harvest fair became an annual event until 1930. However, by 1926, Simms’ energetic Smith-Hughes instructor had taken charge of fair arrangements because the Commercial Club had ceased to function.\(^5\)
Simms remained without any kind of civic or commercial organization until 1934, when, with the encouragement of the county agent, a community club was formed. The Simms Community Club did not exhibit the same vitality as the Fort Shaw Farmers Club, and met only irregularly to hear speakers or consider projects for community improvement. Perhaps the most effective work of this organization was preparation of the community’s annual exhibit at the Northern Montana State Fair in Great Falls, which during the 1930s replaced the local harvest fairs. Under the guidance of C.S. Hanna, the Simms exhibit usually won the highest honors at these fairs. The demise of the Commercial Club and the formation a decade later of the Community Club mark the turning point in the development of Simms’ self-image. Simms as a progressive and expanding commercial center, a narrowly held image that had been cultivated by the town’s business interests, was replaced by an image with broader appeal: an agricultural community that provided educational and social opportunities for its members.

Although the commercial development of Fort Shaw and Simms and their early self-images diverged, the social patterns they developed were remarkably similar. The organizations and institutions they adopted were those common to rural towns in the West and Midwest. Neither Fort Shaw nor Simms took the lead in forming new organizations. Instead, any
organization begun in one community soon had its counterpart in the other community.

Each established Protestant church congregations within the first year of the division's settlement. Simms became the Methodist headquarters and Fort Shaw the home of the Congregationalists. Both congregations met in temporary facilities until they accumulated enough money to construct buildings. The Congregationalists dedicated their new church in December, 1913; the Methodists dedicated theirs in February, 1914. Although the first pastors, who were also farmers in the division, eventually retired or left, the two congregations were able to attract and support their own ministers into the 1920s. However, increasing financial difficulties throughout the decade made it necessary by 1930 for all of the Methodist parishes of the Sun River valley to unify their operations and share a pastor. Under similar financial pressure, in 1929 the Fort Shaw Congregational Church became a part of the Great Falls First Congregational Church.27 Throughout the period of this study the Ladies Aid of each congregation and the Epworth League of the Methodists were active in their communities, providing recreation and fellowship for their members and performing most of the fund-raising that the churches required.

The Catholics of the Fort Shaw division, less numerous than the Protestants, shared a priest with St. Peter's Mis-
sion, which was about fifteen miles south of the project. The Fort Shaw congregation met in the chapel of the old fort until 1923, when they dedicated their own church, St. Ann's. At Simms, the Catholics met in temporary facilities until 1915, then constructed the church known as St. Mary's. Like the Protestants, these congregations had church-related organizations for fellowship and fund-raising that functioned throughout the period of this study.28

Beginning in 1925, a number of Mormon families moved into the Sun River project. Most of them came from a failed private irrigation district near the town of Cascade. By 1928 the Mormon congregation numbered sixty-five and they were able to construct their own church building at Simms. The Mormons were very active socially and sponsored many fund-raising activities in their large meeting hall. They gained a reputation for putting on good entertainments and the community willingly paid the small admission fees to share in the fun.29

While the churches of both Fort Shaw and Simms were enduring institutions, they did not become the social foci of the communities, nor did they dictate social values. However, the strong stance of the Simms community against liquor may have been a result of the town's Methodist orientation. Until 1914 the town remained dry, due to petitions the residents presented to the county commissioners whenever someone applied for a liquor license. Then, in 1914 the commissioners granted
a saloon license to a man who had a farm unit south of Simms. When his license came up for renewal the dry forces managed to convince the commissioners that a majority of Simms residents did not want the saloon, which they claimed was creating a disturbance in their quiet town. The commissioners revoked the license. The saloon operator appealed the decision to district court, but lost the battle there, too, when twenty-three witnesses arrived to protest his operation. A few months later another Simms farmer, who lived adjacent to the town, petitioned for a saloon license. Forty-seven persons signed the petition of protest and the commissioners once again bowed to their wishes.30

As early as 1912, both Simms and Fort Shaw had local organizations of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and temperance advocates spoke at both Protestant churches, but the people of Fort Shaw did not take the adamant position against liquor that Simms assumed. Fort Shaw had a saloon during the period in which the Simms community worked consistently to remain dry. In 1916, when the Fort Shaw hotel owner sought to renew his liquor license, only six persons appeared before the commissioners to protest. During Prohibition both towns had incidences of bootlegging and in Fort Shaw a man died from drinking moonshine, but illegal possession or sale of liquor was not a significant issue for either community. Although the WCTU reorganized in Simms in 1927, by the latter-
1930s residents allowed a beer parlor to operate there without protest. The owner of the enterprise even seemed to be accepted as a part of the town's business establishment, something that would not have been possible twenty-five years earlier.31

The women of both Fort Shaw and Simms were the first to form social organizations for their communities, and several were long-lived. Fort Shaw had two neighborhood-oriented women's groups by 1911, three by 1915, and added a fourth in 1916. As in other things, the women of Square Butte were the chief organizers and leaders. Not all of these clubs endured for the entire period of this study, but at least two were still functioning during the 1930s. These groups were almost entirely social, except during World War I when they became the basis for organizing the women for war service work. The groups also cooperated each year to sponsor a summer flower show at Fort Shaw, which became a popular community institution.

The Simms Women’s Club began soon after the first settlers arrived in the vicinity. After going through several permutations and reincarnations as a purely social association, the members began undertaking community service projects. In 1912 they established a lending library, which they moved to the drug store and opened to the public in 1914. In 1913 the women cleaned up the vacant lots in town and
recruited some men to fill in an old irrigation ditch that ran through the townsite. They then decided to create a city park and raised $125 for the project by sponsoring a traveling circus performance in Simms. The following spring they gave a local-talent musical entertainment to raise more money, which was used to buy trees for the park. In 1915 the women led the way in initiating work similar to that of a parent-teacher association. During World War I, the Women’s Club organized the community’s war service workers.\textsuperscript{32}

The Simms Women’s Club successfully brought together farm and town women. Since some farmers near Simms did own houses in town, their wives and children usually spent the winter there, if not the entire year, so that the children could attend school. The town population of Simms was never stable, however, changing noticeably in March, when tenant farmers moved from town to the farms they had rented, and again in the fall when they returned to town. These moves gave farm women opportunities to participate in the associations of town women for at least part of the year. Though women who lived in town permanently usually were the club’s officers, and probably did much of the work necessary to keep the club going, the Women’s Club was a community, not just a town, organization.

Early in the 1920s the Women’s Club acquired a club house. The members bought the old building that had housed the saloon and had it moved from the north end of Main Street
to a location donated by the Reclamation Service at the other end of town. In 1928 they remodeled the building and added an up-to-date kitchen. The women also expanded their service work, beginning in 1923 a noon-time hot lunch program for the Simms school children. The women served food that patrons of the school donated and the domestic science class prepared. The service component of the club diminished during the 1930s, as other organizations or agencies assumed its work, but the Women's Club remained a vital part of the Simms community.  

Both Fort Shaw and Simms had other many other associations that existed for varying lengths of time. During the winter months, young single people often formed associations to sponsor frequent dances. During the early years of settlement, both communities had bands that performed regularly at community-wide celebrations, dances, and concerts. Fort Shaw and Simms each had an Ancient Order of United Workmen (AOUW) lodge, established during the late 1910s. The Simms lodge was active enough to build its own meeting hall during the late-1920s. To help pay for the new building, they installed a maple floor, which made it highly attractive for dancing. For several years afterward the lodge held dances that drew people from a thirty- or forty-mile radius.  

The staff of the county agricultural extension office had little success before 1930 in organizing the communities of the Fort Shaw division. Members of the Sun River community
formed a Farm Bureau in 1919, but neither Simms nor Fort Shaw displayed more than brief interest in this organization. Though the Sun River group was active for only a short time, it established a basis for the formation of some 4-H clubs. Fort Shaw and Simms children participated in 4-H club work, also, with leadership provided by interested adults rather than through a Farm Bureau organization. The 4-H clubs of all three communities usually received high rankings from the county agent and some young people who participated in them received national honors for their work. During the 1930s the county home demonstration agent established home demonstration clubs among the women in all three communities. The club at Fort Shaw became more active in civic affairs than the other clubs, with the women taking on the project of beautifying the grounds of Fort Shaw's new school building.

35 As Fort Shaw and Simms abandoned their ideas of becoming busy commercial centers, they focused increasingly on their children and their schools. The accomplishments of the young people, whether in 4-H, vocational agriculture, or sporting competitions, became sources of community pride. Friendly rivalries that had emerged in the early years of the division's settlement, when pick-up baseball teams from Fort Shaw and Simms competed with each other, turned into competition between these communities' school districts. In 1938 a column in a Teton County newspaper noted that the Simms high
school basketball team had defeated the Fort Shaw team. In a model of underatement, the writer went on describe the well-known rivalry by saying, "After twenty-five years the patriotism between these two towns and schools remains the same." What began as competition in sports had escalated in the late-1920s and early-1930s into open conflict as Simms began an aggressive campaign to increase its high school enrollment. The district sought first to attract Fort Shaw high school students and then to absorb the Fort Shaw district.

From the first days of the division's settlement, physical circumstances had forced Simms to move more aggressively than Fort Shaw to establish school facilities. Because of the larger number of farm units near Simms, the school district had more children than the Fort Shaw district. Also, the people at Square Butte had established their own school district, which reduced the population of the Fort Shaw district even further. During the school year of 1909, the Simms district used a vacant Reclamation Service building as a schoolhouse, but the facility was cramped. In June of 1910 the school district passed a $1,400 bond issue to finance the construction of a new building. The settlers helped with construction, hauling train carloads of lumber from Vaughn by wagon, so that the two-story, forty by forty-eight foot structure was ready in the fall of 1911. By contrast, the Fort Shaw district would not construct a school building until
1937. With vacant buildings available in the old fort complex adjacent to the town, and approximately fifty fewer students than Simms, the district was able to use a single government building at the fort until 1920.

Cascade County adopted a county-unit method of school financing in 1919. Under this plan, all landowners paid a county school tax. The county superintendent then divided the available funds among all schools in the county, based primarily on need. The purpose of the system was to provide increased funding to small rural districts that had low tax bases. Under the county-unit system, independent school districts could no longer bond themselves to construct new facilities. Instead, taxpayers in the entire county approved school bond issues, the money from which was used to construct facilities that the county superintendent had determined to be necessary. The people of the Fort Shaw school district had welcomed this change and expected to be able to upgrade their school system and offer high school courses as a result of it.38

The people of Simms had continued to improve and expand their school system in the years after 1911. In 1914 the people of the Fort Shaw division had considered establishing a joint high school. Put to a vote, the issue failed, eighty-one to sixty-nine, with people from Sun River providing enough negative votes to defeat the plan. From that time, Simms
embarked on its own program, offering three years of high school in 1914. In 1918 the district passed a $35,000 bond issue to make possible the construction of a building for the high school. However, adoption of the county-unit system in 1919 prevented the district from selling the bonds. Under the new system, Simms could not build a high school until a majority of voters in the county agreed to finance it. This is the system to which Hanna had referred in 1920 as he advocated the formation of Dearborn County.39

In 1920, the county superintendent of schools moved to reduce the cost of rural schooling by establishing a boarding school at Fort Shaw, using the vacant Indian school facilities. Grades one through ten were offered, with the other high school grades being added as they were needed. This move made possible the elimination of nine rural schools in the county, one of which was at Square Butte. People from these districts could send their children to the boarding school at no additional cost. The Fort Shaw school district administered the school, with input from the boards of the districts that sent students to the school. The county superintendent expected that the school at the old fort would attract students from all parts of the Fort Shaw division.40

While the parents of the Sun River district began in 1920 to send their children to Fort Shaw for high school, the people of Simms were not ready to give up their plans. The
Reclamation Service already had donated land to their district for a school and playground. With funds obtained by popular subscription and labor donated by people in the district, they built a high school. Though much smaller than the facility they originally had planned, the two-story building had three classrooms on the first floor and a "community hall" on the second. It was ready for occupancy in the fall of 1922. The county agreed to provide funds to maintain the new building. Offering four years of high school, which included a commercial course, the Simms school attracted students from nearby districts. The following year, the addition of vocational agriculture to the high school curriculum made it even more attractive to students from other districts. Even though the county-unit system had been abandoned in 1923, in 1928 the district again used popular subscription to obtain the necessary funds to add a gymnasium, complete with maple floor, to the high school. Guided by their instructor and the contractor, the vocational agriculture students did most of the finish work, completing the addition in time for the 1929 basketball season.41

In the fall of 1928, the Simms district made a bid to bring more students to its high school by offering free transportation to students from the Sun River and Fort Shaw districts. Districts received state support based on the number of students they served and the Simms district hoped to in-
crease its allotment. The Fort Shaw district protested, saying their high school was being threatened. They had only recently begun to offer four years of high school and would not receive four-year accreditation until 1929. The county superintendent upheld the protest, but the Simms district appealed to the attorney general, who ruled that Simms' action was legal as long as the cost of transportation was being paid from district funds, not from state or county funds.42

In 1930, the Simms district was finally able to build the school house the community had wanted to build a decade earlier. The new two-story brick structure was added to the front of the existing high school building and created enough space to house three hundred students and all twelve grades. The enrollment of the school in 1930 was 184.43

Hoping to expand its enrollment further, in 1931 the Simms district offered free transportation to high school students from Teton County. Helpless before the attorney general's earlier ruling, the superintendent of Teton county could only protest the action as unethical. However, after the attorney general examined the budget the Simms district had submitted to the county commissioners and found transportation costs included in it, he put a stop to Simms' aggressive tactics.44

In a final move to increase enrollment, early in 1932 Simms initiated a "friendly discussion" with Fort Shaw about
consolidation of the two high schools. The first meeting, which included the residents of the valley and the county commissioners, ended in a decision to postpone any type of action for several months. Shortly after this meeting, the state superintendent of public instruction, who was aware of the animosity between the two districts and the no-action decision of the gathering, recommended consolidation using the Simms high school facility. This elicited an immediate and angry response from the Fort Shaw Farmers Club, in the form of a unanimous resolution passed by the one hundred persons who attended a protest meeting. The resolution voiced strong opposition to consolidation, on the grounds that employees of the Fort Shaw district would be put out of work and that Fort Shaw would not be able to provide transportation for elementary school students if the district was no longer transporting high school students.45

Two weeks later the county commissioners ordered the consolidation of the two high schools, to begin in September, 1932. The consolidated school would be at Simms and the Simms district would be responsible for transporting the Fort Shaw students. The commissioners made their decision based on the recommendation of the state superintendent, which had emphasized the amount of money that could be saved by consolidation. The cost per pupil at Simms was about $125, while at Fort Shaw it was $200. The superintendent also asserted that
Simms provided a "higher type" of education for a lesser cost. One of the county commissioners voted against consolidation, because he could find nothing in the statutes that permitted Simms to finance transportation for the Fort Shaw students. Ultimately, this dissenting opinion prevailed, for one month later the commissioners reversed their order, saying that under existing laws, school funds could not be used to transport the high school students.\textsuperscript{46}

This decision ended Simms' aggressively expansionist efforts, but enrollment in the district continued to grow, reaching 270 students by 1940. Throughout the 1930s the district continued to improve its facilities, adding an athletic field and bus garage and a new room for vocational agriculture classes. WPA workers built a new sewer system for the school. Government programs made possible employment of a full-time school librarian and a cook, who continued the hot lunch program. The school board added band, glee club, and orchestra to the high school curriculum and hired a second instructor for the vocational agriculture classes. The school building also served as the community center and the auditorium became Simms' movie theater, with moving pictures being shown there regularly in the late-1930s.\textsuperscript{47}

Clearly, by the early-1920s, the school at Simms had become the covenant that bound that community together. During a period when many farmers in the division experienced
severe financial problems, people were willing to give their labor and money to provide school facilities they believed were necessary. Over time, their continuing contributions created one of the outstanding educational facilities in the county and became the source of Simms' self-image as a progressive agricultural community. Credit for some of this community cohesion must be given to G.A. Rassley, who was the high school's vocational agriculture instructor from 1923 to 1931. During that time, Rassley acted as a liaison between town and farm and worked through the young people to bring the community together. It was he who in 1925 organized the farmers and merchants and got the cooperation of the county to gravel the main street of Simms. In the next four years he organized the harvest fairs, initiated the farmers' cooperative marketing of turkeys, and contributed the labor of his students to decrease the cost of finishing the gymnasium.48 Succeeding Smith-Hughes instructors also became community leaders and continued what Rassley had begun, but he had accomplished the difficult task of bringing people together to improve their community in ways that benefited everyone.

After 1935 changes took place in the Fort Shaw school district. Children from Square Butte had been attending the school in Fort Shaw since 1921, but the districts remained separate. Negative votes by the people of Square Butte defeated a vote to consolidate in 1933, but in 1935 those who
favored consolidation prevailed. Then, in 1937, with PWA assistance, the Fort Shaw district constructed a $22,000 building to house its twelve grades. Enrollment in 1937 was eighty-eight, half of which were high school students, and the new facility could accommodate approximately twice that many students. Perhaps it was the possession of this new facility, visible proof that the people of Fort Shaw were as dedicated to good education as the people of Simms, that permitted the Fort Shaw district early in the 1940s to finally abandon its effort to maintain a high school and consolidate with Simms.

Throughout the period of this study, the people of Fort Shaw turned away from their planned townsite and focused on the old fort. Often, they did so for utilitarian reasons. The buildings there could be used for little or no cost. They became school rooms, meeting rooms, and housing for students and teachers. Even the new school that the Fort Shaw district built was on the grounds of the old fort and incorporated the previous school building. It was fitting, then, that in the late-1930s the Farmers Club, the PTA, and the high school shop class worked together to renovate another of the old buildings and collect items to display there as an historical museum for the Sun River valley. The people of Fort Shaw, with their close connection to the community of Sun River and the valley
as it existed before the reclamation project, found the expression of their self-image in the past.

Whether the planners of reclamation projects anticipated that competition, rather than cooperation, might grow up among the communities of a project is not known. In the Fort Shaw division, the close spacing of towns resulted in a commercial competition between Simms and Fort Shaw that only one community could win. The population of the division was not great enough to support two commercial centers, much less three, particularly in a time when the automobile made shopping in Great Falls attractive.

The planners' concentration of small farms near Simms also affected all aspects of that community's development and contributed to the competition between school districts. The competition between the school districts of Fort Shaw and Simms certainly did not eliminate socialization, communication, and cooperation among the communities of the division. However, it created friction, and established an invisible line between the communities that made perpetuating separation easier than establishing any division-wide sense of community.

The only issues that prompted widespread cooperative action to complete the needed work were those in which it was clear that everyone stood to benefit equally. By World War I, independent cooperative telephone companies at Sun River, Square Butte, Fort Shaw, and Simms, worked together to create
an effective communication system for the division. An inter-community council representing Fairfield, Fort Shaw, Simms, and Sun River, established in 1935, sought the help of the Rural Electrification Administration to bring electricity to the project. Within three years the council secured the necessary subscribers, obtained financing, built the lines, and in January, 1938, a project-wide celebration marked the day on which the power was turned on.\textsuperscript{51}

The passing of the first generation of settlers, which was taking place throughout the 1930s,\textsuperscript{52} marked the ascendancy to positions of leadership of younger people, particularly in the Farmers Union, the Fort Shaw Farmers Club, and the home demonstration clubs. Many of these people were newcomers to the division. It was probably this change as much as Fort Shaw's finally achieving a satisfactory self-image that permitted consolidation of the high schools in the 1940s. The competition between the communities could be perpetuated only as long as the members of them could see distinguishable differences. By 1940 the three communities of the division had few visible differences. Sun River had experienced enough renewal during the 1930s to put it on an equal social footing with Fort Shaw and Simms. Simms had experienced enough of a decline in its commercial sector to have only slightly more to offer shoppers than did Fort Shaw and Sun River. Each had its churches, each had a school. All three were simply agricul-
tural communities peripheral to Great Falls, and the people who lived in them were content with that status.

2. This definition of rural community was widely accepted by rural sociologists during the 1940s and 1950s, and was based on studies of rural communities that had been done in the 1930s and 1940s. It has been chosen for this study because it seems most applicable to the communities being considered. See Allen D. Edwards, "Ecological Patterns of American Rural Communities," Rural Sociology 12 (1947): 150-61; and Edmund deS. Brunner and Wilbur Hallenbeck, American Society: Urban and Rural Patterns (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955).


9. Great Falls Daily Tribune, September 24, 1912, p. 3; August 4, 1913, p. 3; September 11, 1913, p. 3; September 17, 1914, p. 6; September 17, 1915, p. 3.

10. RG 33, Cascade County Annual Report, 1927, p. 8; Cascade Courier, May 4, 1933, p. 8.

11. Great Falls Daily Leader, August 21, 1911, p. 4.


15. Great Falls Daily Leader, July 10, 1911, p. 8; August 21, 1911, p. 4.


22. Hanna's editorial was reprinted in the Cascade Courier, May 7, 1920, p. 1.

23. Ibid., December 2, 1921, p. 1.

24. Great Falls Daily Tribune, September 19, 1917, p. 6; January 24, 1918, p. 8; April 14, 1918, p. 6; January 22, 1920, p. 4; Cascade Courier, December 15, 1922, p. 1; Fairfield Times, July 19, 1933, p. 1; July 18, 1940, p. 1.


27. **Great Falls Daily Tribune**, January 19, 1909, p. 2; December 18, 1913, p. 3; February 26, 1914, p. 3; **Cascade Courier**, January 11, 1929, p. 8; May 23, 1930, p. 1.


29. Ibid., p. 278.

30. **Great Falls Daily Leader**, July 13, 1910, p. 4; **Great Falls Daily Tribune**, July 26, 1913, p. 6; April 23, 1914, p. 3; May 12, 1914, p. 12; May 13, 1914, p. 8; June 27, 1914, p. 3; June 28, 1914, p. 11; October 15, 1914, p. 12; November 13, 1914, p. 6.


32. **Great Falls Daily Tribune**, February 15, 1912, p. 9; February 22, 1912, p. 9; June 25, 1913, p. 2; April 12, 1914, p. 3; October 17, 1915, p. 3; **Great Falls Daily Leader**, May 28, 1913, p. 5.

33. Sun River Valley Historical Society, pp. 228-30; **Cascade Courier**, November 30, 1928, p. 3.

34. **Great Falls Daily Tribune**, May 3, 1914, p. 4; June 18, 1914, p. 4; June 27, 1914, p. 4; January 13, 1915, p. 6; May 13, 1919, p. 3; **Cascade Courier**, June 3, 1927.


37. Sun River Valley Historical Society, p. 234-236; **Great Falls Daily Leader**, June 22, 1910, p. 3; **Great Falls**
Daily Tribune, September 19, 1910, p. 5; March 18, 1911, p. 4; June 1, 1911, p. 3.


41. Cascade Courier, July 7, 1922, p. 1; September 8, 1922, p. 1; February 1, 1929, p. 1; Sun River Valley Historical Society, p. 236.


46. Ibid., March 3, 1932, p. 1; Fairfield Times, April 8, 1932, p. 1.

47. Cascade Courier, April 16, 1936, p. 1; December, 1, 1938, p. 8; December 21, 1939, p. 8; January 4, 1940, p. 8; August 22, 1940, p. 8; Fairfield Times, April 14, 1939, p. 8.

48. Cascade Courier, December 25, 1925, p. 4; September 17, 1926, p. 1; November 9, 1928, p. 3.

49. Ibid., September 28, 1933, p. 4; August 29, 1935, p. 8; Fairfield Times, February 3, 1938, p. 1.

50. Fairfield Times, June 2, 1938, p. 1; Cascade Courier, June 27, 1940, p. 1.


52. Seventeen deaths occurred from 1930 through 1940 among the original settlers of the division who had remained on their land. Thirteen others sold their farms during this time.
CHAPTER SIX
THE COMMUNITY OF CASCADE

Cascade has for a long time been dreaming of brighter days and her boosters have been most industriously engaged in furthering every scheme which might add to her industrial and commercial expansion. They have been most liberal in their support of every movement which might tend to advance their common cause and they have tackled propositions which would have disheartened communities of much more wealth or of greater numbers.

Great Falls Daily Tribune, 1912

In 1912 the town of Cascade, like Simms and Fort Shaw, was growing and manifested typical signs of commercial boosterism. It fit perfectly the model of a cumulative community that was primarily an economic center for a number of rural neighborhoods. Like the towns of the Fort Shaw division, during the next three decades it would experience economic decline and stagnation and would lose the enthusiastic boosterism of its period of growth. Unlike Simms and Fort Shaw, however, Cascade did not develop a strong non-commercial self-image. Whereas in Simms only a weak distinction existed between town and farm populations, and in Fort Shaw, no distinction seemed to exist, in Cascade farmers and town dwellers comprised distinct groups. Although they interacted economically and socially, the two groups had different enough inter-
ests to prevent formulation of a community-wide self-image. In this respect, the rural-town "community" of Cascade is comparable to the Sun River-Fort Shaw-Simms "community" of the Fort Shaw division, an entity that could be summoned up in times of need, but which had no independent life of its own. Although less overt than the conflict between Fort Shaw and Simms, until the 1930s, an undercurrent of conflict existed between rural members of the community of Cascade and its business people. This conflict was more symbolic than real, more posturing than outright confrontation, and it did not represent a true power struggle, but like the invisible line that existed between Fort Shaw and Simms, it hindered cooperative efforts.

Cascade lies about twenty miles southeast of the Fort Shaw division of the Sun River project. (See Figure 6.1.) It is located on the west bank of the Missouri River, which flows northeasterly in a path of lazy meanders. East of the river, between the mouth of Bird Creek and Hardy, lies the Chestnut Valley, which ranchers began to settle in the late-1860s and early-1870s. Covered with fine grass and bounded on the south by mountains and on the west by a bench that rises gradually from the river, the valley proved to be an excellent place to winter livestock. The climate here, as in the valley of the Sun, is moderated in winter by chinook winds. Perhaps more important, the gently contoured land and the availability of
Figure 6.1. Western Cascade County, showing outlines of the communities of the Fort Shaw Division and Cascade (adapted from The Historical Map of Cascade County, Montana, by Michael Bugenstein, 1987)
water for irrigation encouraged the establishment of permanent agriculture.

From 1880 to 1900, the towns of Cascade and Sun River developed similarly. Cascade, like Sun River, began as a point where travelers could cross the river. However, the wider and deeper Missouri had required establishment of a ferry to make crossing safe. The landing soon acquired a post office and several stores and became the point from which goods were distributed to people in the Chestnut Valley. Although the initial settlement was on the east bank of the river, construction in 1887 of the Montana Central railroad along the west bank prompted a shift in commercial activity to that side. In 1893 a bridge replaced the ferry and brought about the final exodus of the residents and shopkeepers to the west bank.²

Unlike many western towns, Cascade’s location on the rail line had little effect on its early growth. By 1900 the commercial development of the town surpassed that of Sun River only slightly, primarily in the number of places where travelers could spend the night and people could quench their thirsts. Cascade had two mercantile establishments, two hotels, a drug store, a number of saloons, a lodge hall, a sawmill, and a sheep shearing shed. In addition to the commercial establishments were Methodist and Christian churches and a public school. The town population was approximately
three hundred, complemented by another seven hundred persons in the Chestnut Valley.³

In spite of its meager commercial offerings, Cascade, like Sun River, had become the market center for farmers and ranchers within a fifteen-mile radius from the town. In fact, the market areas of Cascade and Sun River overlapped to some extent. However, as stock-raising rapidly gave way to grain-growing and diversified farming operations, enough new people came into the area to support both towns. Besides the Chestnut Valley, by 1900 several other neighborhoods had developed and were part of the larger community of Cascade. Rural schools marked the outline of the community. (See Figure 6.1.) Neighborhoods as far north as Ferguson, as far east as Castner Falls and Schrammack Lake, and as far south as Soldier Creek and Hardy looked to Cascade as their commercial center. To the west lay neighborhoods centered around the south side of Square Butte, Crown Butte, Birdtail, and St. Peter’s Mission. However, as the towns of the Fort Shaw division began to grow, people from these western neighborhoods patronized businesses there as well as in Cascade and participated in the social activities of both communities. For purposes of this study, these neighborhoods west of Cascade and south of the Fort Shaw division, though composed of dryland farmers, will not be considered as being part of the Cascade community, for they could just as well be considered as part of the communi-
ties of Simms or Fort Shaw. The community of Cascade will be considered to include only the rural neighborhoods east of the river, and emphasis will be given to the Chestnut Valley and Castner Coulee, which includes Castner Falls, distinct neighborhoods that persisted throughout the period from 1910 to 1940.

The rural neighborhoods of Cascade experienced much growth between 1900 and 1910 as settlers converged on northern and central Montana, seeking to homestead what remained of the public domain and become dryland farmers. Being on the railroad finally became a distinct advantage for Cascade, for homeseekers could get there easily from the main line of the Great Northern. By 1910 the population of greater Cascade reached 1,500.

This decade of population growth was the point at which the previously parallel developments of Sun River and Cascade began to diverge. The influx of dryland settlers began in 1906, at the same time as the authorization of the Sun River Project. Some land near Sun River would not be open to settlement at all until the first phase of the reclamation project was completed. Although land on the bench north of Sun River could be homesteaded, it was with the understanding that the land eventually would be irrigated and landowners would have to pay the cost of constructing the system. Dryland homesteads in the vicinity of Cascade had no such strings
attached and could be had for the filing fee of a few dollars and fulfillment of the five-year residence requirement. Also, stockmen near Cascade who had large holdings took advantage of the influx of settlers to sell off parts of their ranches. As these changes took place, the town of Sun River was not only eclipsed by Fort Shaw and Simms, but also by Cascade.

The newcomers to the community of Cascade shared several of the characteristics of the people who settled in the Fort Shaw division during the same time period. The majority were in their mid-thirties and most came from the Midwest. Of eighty-nine heads of households whose names first appeared on the federal census for Cascade in 1910, the average age was thirty-seven. The youngest was eighteen, the oldest was sixty-nine. Thirty-seven percent had been born in states bordering the Mississippi, from Minnesota to Missouri. Nineteen percent had been born in states north of Virginia along the eastern seaboard. Fourteen percent had been born in Canada, England, or Ireland. Eleven percent had been born in Michigan, Indiana, or Kentucky. Eight percent had been born in Montana, and the remaining eleven percent had been born in four other states and two northern European countries.4

The rural neighborhoods east of Cascade became prosperous. In 1915, when the newly installed county agent was trying to establish relations with the farmers and ranchers of the area, he convinced one Chestnut Valley farmer to begin
keeping financial records of his operation. At the end of the year the man reported a labor income of $1,836. While the agent did not doubt the veracity of the man's records, he pointed out that this amount was far too high to be considered average in the county. To achieve this level of income, the stock-growers who originally had settled the valley had gradually diversified their operations, adding grain-growing, alfalfa production, poultry, and dairying to their operations. Similar diversification also took place in the Castner Coulee neighborhood.

As the rural population of Cascade began to grow, a small group of prosperous ranchers from the Chestnut Valley invested in new commercial enterprises in Cascade. By 1910 they had formed corporations with overlapping directorates for the Cascade Creamery, Cascade Mercantile Company, First State Bank of Cascade, Cascade Mill and Elevator, Cascade Lumber Company, and Cascade Realty Company, most of which would be mainstays of the town's commercial base into the 1930s.

Establishment of the creamery and mill are evidence of the diversified operations of local farmers. Dairying had become common in the Chestnut Valley by the early 1900s due to Cascade's location on the railroad, which made shipping cream to Great Falls convenient. Although they may have been a few years premature, in 1905 the rancher-investors determined that the community's dairy operations warranted the establishment
of a creamery in Cascade. During its first seven years of operation, frequent changes in management and weak cream supplies limited the success of the business. In 1913, to encourage increased dairy production, the stockholders of the creamery sponsored a cow purchasing program for local farmers. By returning to the creamery half of the amount they received for their milk, buyers were able to pay for their cows over a period of time. By the mid-1910s the creamery was operating profitably and in 1920, its manager, a buttermaker who had achieved state-wide renown, purchased the business from the stockholders.

While dairying appealed to some, spring wheat was the most important source of income for farmers of the Cascade community until the latter-1920s. The establishment in 1908 of the Cascade Mill and Elevator marked the community's dedication to the crop. Although the wealthy ranchers were the corporation's chief stockholders, some forty farmers also bought small amounts of stock in the company. The mill prospered, marketing Pride of Cascade flour as far away as Florida, and the stockholders received dividends nearly every year until 1928. However, from 1928 to 1937 the corporation experienced increasing financial losses due to an untimely expansion of the operation just as a seven-year drought and the Depression were beginning. The stockholders liquidated the corporation in 1937, but another elevator concern purchased
the facility and continued to buy local wheat, though it discontinued the flouring operation. 8

The ranchers who saw economic opportunity in the town of Cascade had an influential partner, Thomas C. Power. Although Power owned a large stock ranch in the vicinity of Cascade, and another in the Sun River valley, his residence was in Helena and he was not considered a "local." Arriving in Montana during its early years of settlement, he had been involved in territorial politics and became one of the state's first U.S. senators. However, after serving his term, he abandoned politics to devote full attention to his wide-ranging investments throughout the state and the Northwest. His investments in Cascade, though large by local standards, comprised but a small portion of his interests. Power was the most skilled businessman among the Cascade investors and, with only minor protests, the rancher-capitalists soon surrendered management duties to him. Until his death in 1923, Power maintained close supervision of the operations of the bank, the mercantile store, and the mill. He operated Cascade Mercantile as part of his chain of stores in Montana, which also included stores near Sun River and in Simms. Cascade Mill and Elevator also operated within the larger structure of Power's investments, which included other elevators. His tight-fisted credit policies and acute understanding of the economic problems that World War I would create for agricul-
ture permitted his operations in Cascade to persist when other local businesses failed. Perhaps more important to Cascade, the managers that Power hired became leaders of the community: August Schwachheim, who managed the mill and elevator; Frank Wheir, who managed the mercantile store; and M. M. Moore, the cashier of the bank. By making these men stockholders in the businesses they managed, Power offered important incentives to create profitable operations, remain in Cascade, and be active in the improvement of the community.9

Schwachheim, Wheir, and Moore, all newcomers to Cascade during its period of most rapid growth, stayed with the community through the economically depressed years of the 1920s and 1930s. Schwachheim served as school trustee for ten years, Wheir was mayor for four years, and all three served as aldermen and were leaders in the town’s civic organizations. Although Schwachheim owned ranch land and Wheir had a homestead on the bench in the Sun River Project, they were primarily businessmen who also had agricultural investments.

Rapid expansion of their business district prompted town residents to begin considering other actions to enhance Cascade’s image as a progressive community. In January, 1911, they agreed to incorporate by a vote of fifty-five to thirty-eight. Within a year the new city officials had established a city water works and had made arrangements to bring electricity to the town. Other improvements during the 1910s that
incorporation made possible included construction of curbs and sidewalks and rehabilitation of the opera house to convert it to a community hall, library, and gymnasium. A bond issue for a sewer system failed in 1920, but an outbreak of para-typhoid later that year convinced the residents to pass the bond in 1921. Most of the councils worked to keep city taxes as low as possible, but the water works presented a continuing problem that forced many expenditures to improve the system, replace it, and improve it again. As a result, the water system, along with fire protection that required a dependable water supply, became the primary foci of town government from 1913 to 1940. While local political factions created interest in town politics during the 1910s, many elections in the 1920s and 1930s had no active candidates and the council members and mayor were chosen by write-in votes. Frustration with the problems associated with the water system undoubtedly contributed to the lack of interest in serving on the town council. Although numerous ranchers owned houses in town, only one ever became involved in the local government.

By 1915 Cascade's commercial community, like those of Simms and Fort Shaw, had attained its maximum size, and was larger than the commercial sectors of either of those towns. Cascade boasted three general stores, a meat market and grocery store, two newspapers, two blacksmiths, an automobile garage, two opera houses, a hardware store, a creamery, a mill
and elevator, three restaurants, a hotel, barbers, two livery stables, two banks, two lumber yards, a drug store, a doctor and a dentist, five saloons, and two laundries. Most of the growth had been spontaneous; that is to say, no particular effort to boost the town had taken place. And, as previously noted, much of the increase in business activity had been the result of investments by a small group of local people. The commercial sector of Cascade contracted gradually during the 1920s and 1930s as the banks merged, mercantile operations closed or became grocery stores, one lumber yard and the laundries closed, one newspaper ceased publication, blacksmiths gave way to auto garages, and several saloons closed by Prohibition did not reopen. By 1940, the business district of Cascade was only slightly larger than Simms'. The infusion of capital during the period of Cascade's most active growth had permitted a greater number of people to profit from commercial enterprises than in the towns of the irrigation project. But, during the economic decline that came with drought and plummeting grain prices in the 1920s, a winnowing of businesses occurred that brought Cascade to a level of commercial activity that was just enough to maintain its position as market center for the rural neighborhoods, but little more.

The economic experience of farmers and ranchers was similar. With larger holdings and more diversified operations, during the good years they stood to make far more money
than did the farmers with small holdings in the irrigation project. However, just as low prices for agricultural commodities reduced the farmers of the irrigation project to subsistence level during the early-1920s, the grain-growers suffered as much or more, for they had begun the downward spiral when drought set in in 1918. Between 1910 and 1920 the population of the community of Cascade dropped from 1,500 to 1,200. It remained at that level into the 1930s, but by 1940 had decreased to about 1,000. Just as in the irrigated communities, some people, particularly those who moved out before 1921, left with money in their pockets. But, during the 1920s and 1930s people left because they could neither pay their taxes nor support their families, or, if they were young, simply because they could see no prospect of making a satisfactory living from the land.

The people of Cascade formed many associations and organizations, just as the people of the irrigation project did. They established Methodist and Catholic church congregations that persisted throughout the period of this study. The community also had a Mormon congregation during the 1920s and 1930s. As in the towns of the irrigation project, the churches served the community's spiritual and social needs, but did not become arbiters of social mores or status. As has been suggested, Cascade was well-supplied with saloons. Although one of the leaders of the county WCTU organization was a well-
known resident of Cascade, she and her local fellows had little influence on the town’s attitudes toward liquor. In fact, one of the town’s early mayors was a saloon owner, a situation that the dry forces of Simms would never have permitted.

Many social associations existed for short periods of time. The boosters of Cascade tried annually to organize a baseball team and had varying degrees of success. One year they even attempted to play in the league with commercially supported teams from Great Falls, but when they failed to draw paying crowds to watch the games, the team had to drop out. The young men of the town also organized a number of ephemeral athletic or amusement clubs, usually during the doldrums of winter, and abandoned them a short time later. The community also had several lodges, including the Oddfellows, Woodmen, and Masons, which provided some social interaction between rural and town members of the community.

Among the women of the town a number of social cliques existed. Besides meeting weekly for social purposes, which in the 1930s included playing bridge, they also entertained their husbands at dinner parties. However, none of these groups played a significant role in the community structure, for their membership shifted with the changes in the town’s population. Unlike the women of Simms, the women of Cascade never
organized a woman's club. The Red Cross and church organizations shouldered responsibility for war or relief work.

In 1910, after several years of commercial expansion, the business people of Cascade formed a commercial club. The club's organization took place only slightly before the establishment of similar groups in Fort Shaw and Simms. Although the quotation at the beginning of this chapter indicates that outsiders perceived Cascade to be a town in which active boosterism drove progress, the Cascade Commercial Club did not provide that leadership. Without a focus or agenda, the club in Cascade generated only weak support and needed reorganizing about once a year. In the fall of 1915, when business optimism was especially high, the club sponsored a successful harvest fair, but that was its most significant accomplishment in five years. In 1916 there was not enough interest among the members to sponsor another fair. Local people seemed willing enough to spend money without needing the enticement of entertainment.

The most visible boosting of Cascade that took place between 1907 and 1917 came from a loose association of business and professional people and ranchers who, besides starting new businesses, worked to form a new county with Cascade as its seat. They met with county-splitter Dan McKay, and during 1913 and 1914 engaged the support of rural people throughout the proposed county, but no action took place.
However, this preliminary work facilitated quick reorganization when the movement was revived in 1918. Frank Wheir, who had been the secretary of the first movement, became chairman of the later organization. Although the boosters of Cascade pursued the creation of Dearborn County until 1922, they never succeeded in obtaining the support needed to break away from Cascade County.

The Commercial Club was inactive from 1916 until 1919, when a combination of stock-growers and business people revived the organization and began a project to aid local farmers and ranchers. Drought that began the previous year had seriously curtailed local hay and grain production in 1919. By late summer ranchers were selling off livestock in unprecedented quantities instead of buying hay for winter feeding at twenty-five to thirty dollars per ton. The reorganized Commercial Club met with some of the local stock-raisers and decided that it would be better to find cheaper hay than to sell off all of the livestock. To that end, the Commercial Club sent a representative to South Dakota to secure hay acreage, which people from Cascade then could cut and bale. By providing the labor themselves, the stock-growers could secure hay for about thirteen dollars per ton.

What appeared to be a simple proposition to aid local agriculturalists became complicated by logistical problems and resulted in conflict that required a legal settlement. Logis-
tical problems arose due to interruptions in rail service after World War I. After fifteen hundred tons of hay had been cut and baled, there were no railroad cars available to transport it to Cascade. In November, when the shortage of feed was becoming serious, the Commercial Club had to send another representative to South Dakota to secure rail cars. Then, the following spring, stockmen who had been involved in the hay deal reported to the Commercial Club that the Cascade rancher who had been contracted to cut and bale the hay misrepresented the acreage he had cut. Instead of cutting seven hundred acres, for which the ranchers had paid, he had cut only five hundred acres. Since the Commercial Club had handled the financial arrangements, the ranchers alleged that there had been a balance of more than $2,000 in the Commercial Club’s favor when the hay was delivered; they wished to receive a refund from the club. However, the Commercial Club had not received a refund from the contractor, and, when he refused to pay, took the case to court. The contractor subsequently filed bankruptcy, and no evidence exists to show that the club ever collected from him or that the ranchers were compensated for their losses.\textsuperscript{13}

The existence of strained relations between the rural and town sectors of the Cascade community was not new. In 1914, a group of forty farmers of the Cascade community formed a cooperative purchasing association and opened a retail store.
Six months later, one hundred farmers bought stock in another new enterprise, the Equity Cooperative Association of Cascade, which had been incorporated for the purpose of operating a grain elevator. In one of his regular columns, the editor of the local newspaper questioned the wisdom of the farmers' organizations. He argued that buying cooperatives created their own middleman and thereby raised costs to the consumer. He also suggested that grain cooperatives were unnecessary because grain could be marketed continuously and farmers could make their own decisions about when to market. Also, he reminded farmers that the credit they had received in the past from local merchants had made possible the prosperity they were currently experiencing, implying that it was poor practice for farmers to turn their backs on those who had helped them.14 While the opinion of the local newspaper editor may not be considered to be the opinion of an entire community, it is an opinion that was aired in a public forum and could be perceived as being widely held. Such negativity about the farmers' cooperative ventures undoubtedly affected the farmers' attitudes toward Cascade's business community.

To the credit of the farmers who supported them, the cooperative ventures of Cascade were much longer lived than those that were organized in the Fort Shaw division. By adopting a no credit policy in December, 1917, three years before other local merchants adopted such a policy, the coop-
erative store of Cascade was able to remain in operation until 1924. The elevator did not succeed as well and was put up for sale in 1918. Remark ing on this event, the editor of the newspaper again criticized the farmers, but this time for abandoning their cooperative venture. He said, "...Enthusiasm did not last long and finally the running of the institution devolved on the directors who are now tired of the job and ready to quit....This is another case of the farmers refusing to stick together for their own welfare, although it is claimed by some of the directors that the elevator...caused a saving of from $30,000 to $40,000 while it was in operation." The editor had no comment, however, when the cooperative association that ran the retail store bought the elevator. It retained this operation, along with the store, until 1924.15

In 1922 the manager of the Cascade Cooperative Association, which owned the store and elevator, approached T.C. Power, suggesting a merger of their merchandise and grain businesses in Cascade. Power sought mill manager Schwachheim's opinion about the situation. Schwachheim's response reflects the strength of the capital behind his mill's operation and also the attitude of local businessmen toward the farmers' cooperatives:

We have to date received from Farmers Wagons 130,000 bushels of wheat on this crop, while [the Cooperative Association] have had about 35,000 bushels, but it costs us money to stay boss of the job. We are considered big business here and the senti-
ment of the public toward big business the country over has been reflected locally. The Cascade Co-operative Association is worse than broke at this time, if they only knew it. How long they will be able to keep on being a menace [sic] to legitimate business, remains to be seen.... For the sake of keeping legitimate competition alive in the Grain business, I would like to interest some one in their elevator, but would not care to put any money in to it ourselves. If they are to continue operating that elevator themselves, I believe we have got them now where we can dictate to them and possibly by another crop make good Indians out of them.16

Schwachheim's assessment of the cooperative's financial status apparently was correct. Later in 1922 the association hired a new manager for the retail store, who, interestingly, was the ever-critical editor of the newspaper. This move apparently was a cost-cutting measure for the cooperative because the new manager continued to operate his own men's clothing store as well as manage the cooperative store. Two years later the cooperative association met to determine what would be done with the elevator and by late in the summer of 1924, new owners had taken over. The retail store closed without public notice at about the same time and a new merchant soon occupied the cooperative's store space.17

In April, 1920, when the conflict over the South Dakota hay deal was beginning to surface, verbal sparring in the Cascade newspaper provided further evidence of strained relations between the rural and town sectors of the Cascade community. In the summer of 1919 the people of Castner Falls had
proposed to the county commissioners that since "...there is nothing much to harvest and it is too dry to plow...," it would be a good time to improve the road between their neighborhood and Cascade. They suggested that if the county would grade and drain the road and provide a supervisor for graveling, the farmers would provide teams and drivers to lay the gravel. Although this type of cooperation had elicited positive responses from the county commissioners in the past, this time they did not take up the farmers' offer. By the spring of 1920 the road had become nearly impassable. To draw attention to the problem, a farmer from the Castner Falls neighborhood wrote to the editor of the newspaper, reiterating the farmers' offer to the county and suggesting that the situation needed the support and lobbying of the business people of Cascade, but he expected they would be "...too engrossed in other affairs..." to respond. The editor retorted that any failure of the businessmen to take up the cause of the farmers would not be due to lack of interest but because they had too often been censured for involving themselves in farmers' affairs.  

After its brief resumption in 1919, the Commercial Club sank into another period of inactivity during the early 1920s and was not revived until 1923. Beginning in that year the club instituted an annual fund-raising event which thereafter became the primary work of the organization. Each March the
members sponsored a two-night program of small-stakes gambling, food, and soft drinks. The purpose of the entertainment was to raise money for civic projects, chief of which was an annual mosquito eradication program. Smaller portions of the profits went to whatever local organizations or events the club members deemed most needy, such as the Boy Scouts, the local baseball team, the county track meet, the community Christmas party, or maintenance of the town park. The "'49ers Nights," as the entertainments were called, became so popular that in 1931 the club scheduled the program for mid-week rather than Friday and Saturday nights, to decrease the number of people who attended. Their plan worked only too well. So few people came that they had to re-schedule the event for the weekend and somehow deal with the crowds that tended to become unruly. Although an influx of four hundred people into the town in one night could certainly cause problems with traffic and parking, some of the objectionable behavior of the crowds may have been due to liquor being available in town. During Prohibition, Cascade gained a reputation for being a place in the county to obtain bootleg liquor. In 1921, when the Great Falls Daily Leader called Cascade the "oasis of Cascade County," the editor of the Cascade paper didn't deny the accusation but simply retorted that if that was the case, Great Falls was the "Lake Superior of the state."¹⁹
In 1929 the Commercial Club diverged from its focus on town issues and made one more attempt to become involved in the affairs of the farmers and ranchers. It arranged meetings of local stock-raisers for the purpose of establishing marketing pools. At this time, the president of the Commercial Club was an officer of a Cascade corporation engaged in lending money to stockmen, so he was intimately acquainted with the financial positions of many local people and had an interest in seeing them obtain the best possible prices for their livestock. After the meeting of the club members in which the idea of forming marketing pools was discussed, the editor of the Cascade newspaper praised the club’s initiative. He also went on for five paragraphs to chastise his readers for their lack of community spirit and ended by asking them to lay aside their "personal jealousies and rivalries" and support the new plan. Whether the editor referred to jealousies and rivalries among the stock-raisers or between the business people and the ranchers is not clear.

While the idea of a formal organization was new, the cattle-raisers of Cascade had been involved in informal marketing pools for many years. Since most cattle were shipped to market at the same time, usually early in the fall, the custom was for one or two ranchers to accompany the combined rail shipment of a number of ranchers to the markets in St. Paul or Chicago. Although the shipment was not sold as a
unit, ranchers at least saved the cost of traveling with their animals and were able to receive the full market price rather than sharing their profit with a consignment agent. The cattle-raisers may have preferred this customary method of shipping, because the association they formed in 1929 through the promptings of the Commercial Club did not function in any meaningful way beyond that season. The sheepmen, however, pooled their wool for two years before disbanding. In 1929 the members of the newly organized wool pool were unable to get a reasonable bid for their fleeces, so they had to sell as individuals to a consignment agent. Probably due to this experience, the following year the pool was only half the size of the previous year and marked the end of the pooling effort. The only permanent result of the effort to establish marketing pools was the installation of a scale at the Great Northern stockyard in Cascade, which members could use without charge and others could use for a small fee. The associations formed in 1929 by Cascade’s cattlemen and sheepmen stood as the only formal efforts local ranchers made during the years from 1910 to 1940 to market their livestock cooperatively. However, during the late-1920s and early-1930s, poultry growers from the Cascade vicinity would become active in the poultry marketing association that had been formed in the Sun River valley.
Throughout the period of this study, the Commercial Club of Cascade was primarily an association of business people, concerned with issues that affected the town. It never established a strong relationship with the farmers and ranchers of the community. Usually, when the club reorganized, its officers would invite rural community members to join, and it is likely that some men did so. However, if rural people were members, they did not assume positions of leadership except in 1919, when the haying operation was organized. The only other evidence of representation of the community’s agricultural interests occurred during the early-1930s, when the high school’s vocational agriculture instructor served as the club’s secretary-treasurer. With its primary emphasis on town issues, the club was similar to the one at Simms. However, the Commercial Club of Simms died out in the early-1920s, and the Cascade Commercial Club managed to survive, largely because it found a focus. The annual fund-raiser for town projects became the organization’s *raison d'être* and underscored its primary emphasis on service to the urban portion of the community.

In spite of the inability of the Commercial Club to incorporate the interests of the rural community into its agenda, the Lions Club, formed in 1929, more successfully integrated the urban and rural sectors of the Cascade community. Although officers of the club were primarily men from
town, ranchers were among them. During 1933 a rancher from the Chestnut Valley was the club's president. From the club's beginning, the Lions worked to create good will among the farmers and ranchers of the community. Soon after organizing, the members sponsored a "Fun Feed"—an afternoon of food and entertainment—for local farmers. A few months later, during the summer, they sponsored a picnic in a rural location, which six hundred persons attended. Later in the summer they worked with the Commercial Club and the Smith-Hughes instructor from the high school to sponsor a community harvest fair. These events became well-attended annual affairs. The farmers enjoyed the Fun Feeds so much that in 1934, when the Depression was affecting everyone in Cascade, attendance at the annual affair was undiminished even though each person had to bring his own food; the Lions Club furnished only coffee and ice cream.22

Drought that began in 1931 marked the onset of the Depression for the farmers of Cascade. That fall, forty farmers of the Chestnut Valley indicated their need for economic help by petitioning the county to employ them in local road work, to "...aid in relieving conditions arising from short crops." While the farmers who needed a way to supplement their income were able to organize themselves to seek help, in 1932 the Lions Club assumed this responsibility and became the primary relief organization in Cascade. A committee of the club
served as the community's liaison with the Cascade County Central Relief Committee. The five-member Lions Club committee, which included a rancher, considered relief applications and worked with county agencies to find employment for Cascade men. Road work, improvement of the town's water system, construction of a system of storm sewers for the town, and construction of a playground at the school provided relief employment for many men of the Cascade community during the 1930s.23

Even though they did not participate in the civic organizations of Cascade to a great extent, the farmers and ranchers of the community organized themselves when it was to their benefit, as the farmers of the Chestnut Valley did in 1931 when their crops failed and they needed additional income. Being the first area settled in the vicinity of Cascade, the Chestnut Valley contained a number of families who by 1910 had lived there for nearly a generation. They were bound together by longevity and, increasingly, by ties of kinship as their children chose spouses from within the neighborhood. In 1912 the women of the valley organized a social circle that proved to be the most enduring of any association in the entire Cascade community. The women sometimes did fund-raising for the neighborhood school, but the organization's function remained primarily social throughout the period of this study. The members of the Chestnut Valley Social Circle entertained
their husbands at dinners and anniversary celebrations, so the club also provided an opportunity for social interaction among the men of the valley.\textsuperscript{24}

The staff of the county extension service had varying degrees of success in organizing the rural members of the Cascade community. The farmers and ranchers of the Chestnut Valley and Castner Coulee formed Farm Bureau organizations in 1918 and 1919, but like similar groups in the Sun River valley, they were short-lived. Although the adults did not find the Farm Bureau to be useful, some of the people who had been members of the organization became involved in 4-H club work and several rural women became long-standing leaders of girls' clubs. Other organizations related to the extension service included home demonstration clubs. In 1934 the county home demonstration agent organized clubs among the women in both the Chestnut Valley and the Castner Coulee neighborhoods. Still operating in 1940, these clubs were largely social, but they also provided a way for the home demonstration agent to communicate with the rural women, and were ready-made agencies for identifying needs and giving aid to people in the neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{25}

Although agents of the extension service had only limited success in organizing the residents of the Chestnut Valley, the Farmers Union received a more enthusiastic reception. In 1937 the farmers of the Chestnut Valley organized a Farmers
Union local. The group met monthly to hear speakers on such topics as federal farm programs or county tax issues, to draw up petitions to be presented to appropriate government agencies, and to socialize. The Farmers Union also had a young people's program which eventually merged with the established 4-H clubs. Symbolic of the vitality of this organization was the members' decision in 1940 to purchase the old Chestnut Valley schoolhouse, which they renovated and expanded for use as a community center.26

In the Castner Coulee neighborhood, the demise of the Farm Bureau may have come about because the organization was redundant. The neighborhood already had an active Grange organization which met its members' social and political needs throughout the 1910s. The people of Castner Coulee used the Grange as their collective voice in the county, particularly when they believed there were grievances to redress. In 1913 they invited the farmers of the county to cooperate to obtain fairer freight rates from the railroads. During World War I, when the county defense committee established the rate that could be charged for threshing, the Castner Falls Grange protested that the price had been set too high. The Grange ceased to function during the 1920s, but in 1935, the people of Castner Falls formed a local of the Farmers Union. An organization of younger people, the first officers were men who were relative newcomers to the neighborhood or were of the
second generation of established local families. The group repaired and restored the old Castner Falls Grange hall to use as their meeting place. Besides providing social activities, the meetings were forums in which legislation affecting the members could be discussed and resolutions adopted to be passed on to their legislators in Helena and Washington.27

The cooperative nature of the Castner Coulee neighborhood was also evident in the residents' continuing support for their rural schools. During 1922, when the county-unit system was still in operation, the superintendent allotted funds to construct a new schoolhouse in the Castner Coulee neighborhood. Desiring a building that could also serve other purposes, the residents agreed to subscribe the money and labor necessary to add a concrete basement to the planned facility. They also built the benches for the classroom. At a time when money was scarce, pie socials, chicken dinners, and dances held throughout 1923 and 1924 finally brought in the last few dollars needed to repay the lumber bill.28

Unlike their neighbors to the north, the residents of the Chestnut Valley gave up their rural school in 1918. Discussion of consolidation of the Chestnut Valley and Cascade school districts had begun in 1916 and was consummated in 1918, with students from the Chestnut Valley attending school in Cascade. Compared with the conflicts between Fort Shaw and Simms, this unification took place easily. Both districts
seemed to view the union as advantageous and loss of their rural school apparently did not signify the death of the neighborhood to the people of the Chestnut Valley. Since their high school age students already went to Cascade to school, consolidation meant they could participate in the district's management. Almost simultaneous with consolidation, the Cascade district passed a bond issue to build a high school, and, unlike Simms, managed to sell the bonds before the county-unit system went into effect. By the fall of 1919 Cascade had a new high school facility that offered a full four-year course, including vocational agriculture and a commercial course. Although students of high school age from other rural districts attended the school in Cascade, in the years from 1925 to 1940, total enrollment there seldom was more than at Simms, and usually fell between 200 and 250. Beginning in the late-1920s, each spring the students of the Cascade school competed with the students of Simms, Fort Shaw, and Sun River in a day of academic and athletic activities. The top honors in both areas passed with regularity among the schools, eliminating the opportunity for one community to obtain special status through its students' accomplishments. The community of Cascade expressed the same kind of pride in the accomplishments of its young people, whether in school or 4-H, that was found in the irrigated communities. But, Cascade did not develop the focus on its school that emerged in
Simms, due perhaps to the considerable number of tuition-paying students from outlying rural districts who were part of the student body.

As the consolidation experience suggests, the people of the Chestnut Valley moved easily between the town of Cascade and their rural residences. Many maintained or rented homes in town where they sometimes lived during the winter. Women from the Chestnut Valley participated in the organizations associated with Cascade's churches. The financial involvement of some of the Chestnut Valley ranchers with local businesses also may have contributed to a closer relationship with the town than people from the Castner Coulee neighborhood experienced. But what seems most likely is that many of the families from the Chestnut Valley simply identified Cascade as their town. It had grown up because they were there to patronize the businesses and build the churches. And, during the 1920s and 1930s, when the permanent town population became increasingly unstable, many old Chestnut Valley families persisted.

That so many of those families remained is somewhat surprising, considering the disruption of the neighborhood that took place during the 1920s. In 1920, nineteen ranchers in the Chestnut Valley applied for and received court approval of the Chestnut Valley Irrigation District. Formation of the district permitted sale of a $140,000 bond to finance con-
struction of an initial phase of the project that contained 4,600 acres. While much of the construction was new, the district comprised the same land that the farmers of the valley had tried to irrigate under an eleven-mile canal system completed in 1902. Though begun with good intentions, the old system had been used only sporadically and had been poorly maintained.

The severe drought that began in 1918 had convinced the ranchers of the valley that irrigation, pursued in a systematic and large-scale way, would ensure the success of their increasingly diversified farming operations. Unfortunately, their timing was poor, for the agricultural depression following World War I so limited the income of many of them that they could not pay their property taxes or district assessments, which threatened the viability of the project. A provision in the bond agreement required the irrigation district to acquire land that was lost to the county for taxes. In an effort to circumvent such a situation, the district worked with the business people of Cascade, the First National Bank of Great Falls, and the Great Northern railroad to recruit new people to take up the land that was being vacated in the Chestnut Valley Irrigation District.

In Idaho, the Great Northern located families who had experience with irrigation but who could not afford to purchase land there and were interested in relocating. During
1922, approximately sixteen of these Mormon families moved to the Chestnut Valley and took up eighty-acre tracts, which they expected to be able to purchase. Under the agreement they worked out with the irrigation district, they could occupy the land for two years by paying the taxes and irrigation assessments. If they chose to remain, payments on the land would begin in the third year and be pro-rated over a ten-year period. However, by 1927 it was apparent that the land the emigrants thought they would be able to buy was going to be tied up in court for an indefinite period of time, so most of these families left the Chestnut Valley and took up land in the Sun River project.

By 1927 the county had taken possession of the land of the district that was covered by the bond and bondholders were suing the county for compensation. Although the county leased some of the land to the former owners during the late-1920s, until 1931 legal complications prevented the county from attempting to sell the land for taxes. In that year, county appraisers set values of the land as low as possible, with the intention that the original owners might be able to regain their land. However, the bond holders dominated the sale and outbid the local people for 8,772 acres. Some time later the Chestnut Valley Land Company purchased the land from the bond holders, but the land was not returned to production. Suits to title of the land continued until 1946, when all titles
were finally cleared and the irrigation district was dissolved. By the mid-1930s, only five of the families who had been involved in the formation of the irrigation district remained in the valley.32

In spite of the social and economic disruptions of the 1920s and 1930s, the community of Cascade continued to function in 1940 much as it had done during the previous thirty years. Three distinct neighborhoods existed—the town, the Chestnut Valley, and Castner Coulee. Each had its own social life and special interests. Among the people of the town, securing a dependable water supply and providing safe recreation for their children were priorities. Neither of these issues was of particular interest to the rural neighborhoods. By 1940, the rural neighborhoods had established community halls that symbolized their separate identities, vitality, and cohesiveness. In these buildings, members could meet to socialize and discuss political issues. Participation in the political process to protect their economic interests had become increasingly important to the rural dwellers. Although the business community of Cascade contributed money to further the legislative agenda of the local Farmers Union, the rural people were the activists. The special interests of the neighborhoods and their desire to preserve separate identities created divisions that both local people and people who lived in other parts of the county recognized. However, the Depres-
sion revealed that the larger community of Cascade could be called into action when necessary, to make possible cooperation to provide relief. Just as the communities of the Fort Shaw division could function to deal with the Bureau of Reclamation or work together to bring electricity to the valley, in Cascade serious economic dislocation prompted cooperative work. In 1940 the town of Cascade, with its school and churches and limited commercial offerings, was similar to the towns of the Fort Shaw division: an agricultural community that had accepted its peripheral status in the county but that continued to serve as a social and economic center for several rural neighborhoods.
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ENDNOTES

2. **Stone Age to Space Age**, p. 42.
4. Compiled from the 1910 federal census manuscripts for the enumeration districts in the vicinity of Cascade.
5. RG 33, Cascade County Annual Report, 1915, p. 4.
6. The Great Falls Commercial Club's cow purchasing program for the Fort Shaw division may have been modeled on the Cascade program, which began several months earlier. The Cascade program had a better reception among the farmers than did the Great Falls plan.
9. Power's contributions to the town of Cascade are documented in his papers, Manuscript Collection 55, at the Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana (hereafter, MS 55, MHS).
12. F.J. Wheir to T.C. Power, August 18, 1919, Folder # 51-19, MS 55, MHS.
15. *Cascade Courier*, November 16, 1917, p. 8; March 8, 1918, p. 1; August 30, 1918, p. 5; March 14, 1924, p. 8; August 15, 1924, p. 4.

16. August Schwachheim to T.C. Power, January 5, 1922, Folder #59-13, MS 55, MHS.

17. *Cascade Courier*, March 31, 1922, p. 1; March 14, 1924, p. 8; August 15, 1924, p. 1; November 28, 1924, p. 5.


22. Ibid., November 29, 1929, p. 1; March 14, 1930, p. 1; June 27, 1930, p. 1; December 21, 1933, p. 5; June 16, 1938, p. 5; April 19, 1934, p. 5.

23. Ibid., September 18, 1931, p. 5; July 28, 1932, p. 1; September 22, 1932, p. 5; December 1, 1932, p. 1; September 28, 1933, p. 1; February 6, 1936, p. 5; October 8, 1936, p. 5; February 17, 1938, p. 5; August 25, 1938, p. 5.


26. *Cascade Courier*, October 21, 1937, p. 1; October 12, 1939, p. 5; January 18, 1940, p. 4; March 28, 1940, p. 5; October 31, 1940, p. 5.

27. Ibid., August 22, 1913, p. 8; August 22, 1918, p. 1; December 12, 1935, p. 1; December 26, 1935, p. 8; January 26, 1939, p. 8.

28. Ibid., August 22, 1913, p. 8; August 22, 1918, p. 1; November 3, 1922, p. 4; October 26, 1923, p. 4; May 9, 1924, p. 1.

29. By comparison, the contract that the FSID concluded with the federal government in 1926 established a cost of
$455,000 for approximately 12,000 acres of irrigated land.


32. Cascade Courier, March 15, 1929, p. 1; April 17, 1931, p. 1; February 8, 1934, p. 4; November 24, 1938, p. 4; Rowe, p. 12.
CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPARISON OF PERSISTENCE OF SETTLERS AND CONCLUSIONS

...[U]nder any given set of general conditions, the farm operators in all parts of
the state reacted in much the same manner, the variations of local physical environment exercising only a secondary or minor influence.

James Malin, 1935

During the 1930s James A. Malin undertook pioneering studies of the historical demography of the rural population of Kansas. By using federal and state manuscript census schedules from 1860 to 1935, he determined rates of persistence of settlers and attempted to correlate them with such variables as rainfall, economic depressions, community age, type of farming, and immigrant or native populations. Since that time, other historians have used similar techniques to analyze population stability in various types of communities.

The studies of rural communities in the United States have commonly shown that during any ten-year period, only a minority of the population persists. Studies of urban communities have revealed a similar tendency for people to move on, with decennial persistence rates as low as 35 percent.

In this study, comparison of the persistence of settlers in the Fort Shaw division and the community of Cascade provides a way to assess whether farming irrigated land contrib-
uted to a more stable population. To examine persistence in Cascade County for the period from 1910 to 1940 it has been necessary to depart from the procedures used in persistence studies that are based on analysis of federal and state census schedules. Because the 1930 and 1940 federal census schedules are not open, other sources of information had to be used to follow individuals after 1920. Also, the 1910 and 1920 federal censuses both reflect unusual moments in the history of Cascade County and do not accurately describe the population. The 1910 census was taken in mid-April, 1910, a time when the county was being overrun with land-seekers, many of whom stayed only a very short time. In 1920 the census was taken in January, when many farmers and ranchers were enjoying a winter vacation away from the state. The high prices for farm commodities that prevailed during 1919 gave people the means to make trips they had not been able to afford previously. Finally, Montana has never had a state census, so one other common source of information for persistence studies was not available.

Other sources of information have been used to compensate for these deficiencies. One supplemental source was the directories for Cascade County that the R.L. Polk Company published in 1911, 1915, 1919, 1923, 1925, 1928, 1930, 1932, 1935, 1937, and 1940. Directory entries identify a person's name, place of residence, occupation, and, through 1925, show
the assessed value of the individual’s property. However, the
directory entries cannot be relied upon as evidence that
someone still lived in the community, for individuals contin­
ued to be listed even after death if property they owned was
still on the county tax roll. The directories were most
helpful in the years prior to 1920 to confirm residence and
land ownership.

For individuals who took up land in the irrigation
project, the records of the Bureau of Reclamation were help­
ful. Annual reports occasionally included lists of the owners
of the farm units or lists of people requesting relief from
payments, so an individual’s continuing residence could be
traced. However, the most important sources of information
about the persistence of individuals in both communities came
from newspapers, particularly the Cascade Courier. During the
period of this study, the Courier was a typical small-town
paper that reported the everyday doings of local folks. Each
edition also included contributions from nearby rural neigh­
borhoods, including Castner Coulee, Simms, Fort Shaw, Square
Butte, and Sun River. Besides providing vital information
about deaths and who was moving in or out of the neighborhood,
these local columns were the most reliable evidence of who
still lived in the communities.

The base year for the persistence study is 1915. This
year represents the point at which most of the land in the
Fort Shaw district had been claimed and the end point of Cascade’s rapid population expansion. The list of residents in each community in 1915 was compiled from the 1910 federal census schedule, Reclamation Service lists of settlers in 1911, county directory entries for 1911 and 1915, and newspaper items that confirmed the continuing residence of people whose names appeared in any of these sources or in the 1880 or 1900 censuses. In a few instances, information from the published local histories of the Sun River valley and the community of Cascade provided evidence for an individual’s date of arrival in the community.

The base lists include only heads of households. In cases where both parents and adult children had established separate households by 1915, more than one representative of a family was followed. However, in most cases, persistence of the family, not the original individual, was what was followed. The base population lists should not be considered to be censuses of every person residing in the communities in 1915. Instead, they represent persons and families for whom evidence existed to indicate that they had taken up land or were employed in the community.

Table 7.1 summarizes the decreases in the base populations that took place between 1915 and 1940. The percentage of people from the base population who persisted in the Fort Shaw division in 1925 was 46.2 percent; in Cascade the per-
Table 7.1. Decreases in Base Population, 1915 - 1940

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<tr>
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<td>88</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>69.9</td>
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<td>Fort Shaw</td>
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<td>34.6</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>38.7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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percentage was 48.9 percent. The difference between these two percentages is not statistically significant. The greatest difference in persistence occurred in 1930, when 34.6 percent remained in Fort Shaw and 38.7 percent remained in Cascade. However, by 1935 the percentages were 31.0 and 32.3 for Fort Shaw and Cascade respectively. By 1940, for the first time, the rate of persistence for Fort Shaw was slightly higher than for Cascade, being 24.4 percent while Cascade's rate was 23.3 percent. Figure 7.1 is a graphical summary of these changes.

Variations in the rates at which people left Fort Shaw and Cascade may be attributed to two circumstances: the high cost of establishing a farm in the Fort Shaw division and drought. The expenses associated with preparing a farm unit for irrigation, the early years with little or no cash income, and the fixed costs associated with irrigation farming probably account for the slightly higher percentage of people who left the Fort Shaw division before 1920 than left Cascade. The years before 1920 would have been the most likely time for persons to leave who were unable to meet the financial demands associated with maintaining their claims. During the 1930s higher percentages of people left Cascade than left the Fort Shaw division. Successive years of drought in the early 1930s and the loss of the lands of the Chestnut Valley Irrigation District are probably responsible for this trend. Thus, specific circumstances that affected only one of the communi-
Figure 7.1 Comparison of Persistence, Fort Shaw and Cascade, 1915 - 1940
ties may account for the differences in the rates at which people left at any given time, but over the longer period these aberrations have little meaning, for in 1940 the persistence rates were virtually identical.

Parallels exist between this study's comparison of persistence in irrigated and dryland communities and the work James Malin did in Kansas. For his persistence study, Malin divided the state into five rainfall belts, from east to west. The easternmost belt received thirty-five inches of precipitation annually, the westernmost belt received twenty inches or less. He found that persistence was nearly the same in all belts, indicating that availability of moisture for farming had little effect on whether people remained on the land. In 1885, twenty-five years after first settlement, the persistence rate of the original settlers in the easternmost belt was 20.7 percent. In 1920, twenty-five years after first settlement of the westernmost belt, 16.6 percent of the original settlers persisted.4

The comparison of persistence in the Fort Shaw division and the community of Cascade supports Malin's assertion that availability of moisture for farming has little effect on the stability of population in an area. In Malin's study, where initial settlement of the two extreme rainfall belts took place a generation apart and farmers operated under different economic conditions, the difference in persistence rates was
only 4 percent. In Fort Shaw and Cascade, where farmers faced the same economic conditions but different physical conditions, the difference in persistence after twenty-five years was only 1 percent.

Further analysis of the 1915 base population also makes possible assessments of persistence beyond twenty-five years. Table 7.1 shows the numbers of persons in the base population who had been present in the communities prior to 1910 and persisted to 1940. Many of these people had been present even before 1900, making the period of their persistence in 1940 forty or more years. In Cascade, 22 percent of the 1915 base population had been present in 1900; in the Fort Shaw division, 7 percent of the base population fell into this category. The lesser proportion of old-timers in the Fort Shaw population is due to the small number of original Sun River valley settlers whose land was included in the irrigation project. However, in 1940 they comprised 11 percent of the persisting population. In Cascade, the old-timers comprised 24 percent of those who persisted in 1940. In Malin's study, the percentage persisting for forty years in the westernmost rainfall belt, which is most comparable to precipitation conditions in Cascade County, was 10.7 percent, almost exactly the same as in the Fort Shaw division. The greater rate of persistence for the longer term in the community of Cascade is the only area in which the persistence rates for Cascade
County farmers vary significantly from Malin's findings in Kansas. This may be due to the extent to which the farmers of Cascade had diversified their operations even before 1920, which gave them some flexibility in times of drought. By the drought of the 1930s, wheat-growing was on the decline in Cascade. However, in the fifth rainfall belt in Kansas, livestock-raising was predominant until World War I, and the real boom in wheat did not come until the late-1920s, just as drought was beginning.

Sociological studies have shown that the probability of leaving a place declines with increasing duration of residence. The evidence from Cascade supports this axiom, as does the generally decreasing rate at which the base populations left both Fort Shaw and Cascade after 1920. Malin observed that in Kansas, with some exceptions, the rate of population turnover tended to stabilize twenty to thirty years after settlement. If the farmers of Cascade and Fort Shaw were like their counterparts in semi-arid Kansas, their communities would have been entering this period of stabilization beginning around 1935. At that time the rates of leaving in the Fort Shaw division reached particularly low levels and in Cascade they were lower than they had been in the previous five years. However, analysis of persistence of people who arrived in the Fort Shaw division and Cascade after 1915 would be necessary before an accurate assessment could be made of
whether the communities had actually achieved population stability in 1940.

Besides Malin's work, John Bennett's study of persistence from 1910 to 1930 of initial settlers in Sasketchewan is also relevant to the study of persistence in Cascade County. Though farther north, the plains of Sasketchewan are also semi-arid and crops and farming conditions are similar to those of Cascade County. Bennett found 28 percent of initial homesteaders left a sample township during their first decade of residence, between 1910 and 1920. This percentage is low compared with other studies of rural persistence and approximately half of the percentages that Fort Shaw and Cascade showed during their first decades. However, during the second decade an additional 34 percent left the Sasketchewan township, leaving 38 percent persisting after twenty years. The persistence rates in Cascade County in 1935, twenty years after the base year, were 31 and 32 percent, figures that are closely comparable with Bennett's findings.

These comparisons show that the farmers and ranchers of Cascade County behaved in ways that were similar to other agriculturalists who lived on the Great Plains during the early decades of the twentieth century. When one compares persistence in the Fort Shaw division with persistence on dry land in Cascade County and at other locations on the Great Plains, it is clear that holders of irrigated land behaved
much as their dryland counterparts did when it came to making decisions about staying or moving on. While the ability to water their land did not induce a larger number of farmers to remain in the Fort Shaw division than remained in Cascade, neither did the costs associated with farming irrigated land drive them away.

The congruity of persistence rates in the Fort Shaw division and the community of Cascade lends quantitative support to earlier assertions that the social and economic development of the two communities was not significantly different. In each community, newcomers had to learn different farming techniques from those with which they had been familiar in the Midwest or East. The farmers of the Fort Shaw division had to learn to manage the water that was available for their land instead of depending after planting on the usual spring and summer rains. The dryland farmers had to learn to choose crops that could survive periods of drought and to use new kinds of equipment and techniques to husband the moisture from the rain that did fall. Also, newcomers to both communities had to learn what products they could market locally and determine how they could fit their farming operations into the local agricultural structure. To obtain the cash they needed to stay on the land, whether it was to pay for the costs of having water with which to irrigate or for the modern equipment necessary for extensive grain-growing,
the farmers of both communities moved toward diversified operations that were similar to those of the Midwest, combining alfalfa and grain production with dairying, poultry production, and livestock-feeding.

Socially, the settlers in both communities established the institutions and associations that had been familiar to them in other places: schools, churches, Granges, and countless short-lived social groups. Early leadership in organizations and associations came from those who had the interest and the time and energy to give. As the communities matured, however, the people who took the initiative to begin new organizations and served in leadership positions tended to be the more "progressive" farmers, those who maintained contact with the county agent and occasionally tried some of his suggestions. By the mid-1930s, leadership in both communities came from second generation families and newcomers.

Organized cooperation took place in each community primarily when need dictated, but Cascade seemed to have a stronger commitment to the cooperative ethic. The farmers and ranchers of Cascade supported local cooperative organizations many years longer than the farmers of the Fort Shaw division. The direction that the Farmers Union organizations of Cascade were taking during the late-1930s seemed to signify renewed commitment to group action to further common goals. The interest in shared political action that emerged among the
farmers of Cascade at this time may have been due, however, to their wide participation in federal agricultural subsidy programs rather than any residual belief in cooperative action. In the Fort Shaw division, some farmers participated in the wheat subsidy program and a few received subsidies for sugar beets, but most of their produce was not subsidized. The Farmers Union local organized at Sun River during the 1930s received division-wide support, but its members were more concerned with cooperative purchasing of petroleum products than political action.

In the final analysis, it is clear that little difference existed between the community of the Fort Shaw division and the community of Cascade during the early decades of the twentieth century. Whether on irrigated or dry land, farmers rode the same economic roller coaster and adjusted their agricultural operations to take advantage of the best markets available. Contrary to the expectations of the proponents of federal reclamation, the farmers of the Fort Shaw division found no high value crop that would give them an economic advantage over their dryland neighbors. They also failed to develop the cooperative spirit that reclamation advocates believed would be a natural outgrowth of shared dependence on the irrigation system. The communities the farmers of Fort Shaw developed were neither more nor less cohesive than the community of Cascade. Pride in their separateness was as
characteristic of the neighborhoods of Sun River, Fort Shaw, and Simms as it was in the neighborhoods of Castner Coulee, the Chestnut Valley, and the town of Cascade.

For all its similarities with the dryland community, one difference may be ascribed to the Fort Shaw division. While the faces of the people in the community changed as often as they did in Cascade, after 1920 and until 1940 the total population of the division remained around 1,000, increasing to 1,200 during the 1930s. Prior to establishment of the irrigation project, the population tributary to Sun River had been about 700. Within a decade, the farmers of the division had worked out for themselves how many people the irrigated land could reasonably support. The number their pragmatic approach derived was less than the reclamation planners had calculated, but it survived the tests that the adverse economic climate of the 1920s and 1930s presented. By contrast, the population of Cascade fluctuated widely, increasing rapidly from 1,000 in 1900 to 1,500 by 1910, but after 1920 declined gradually, until in 1940 it had returned to 1,000. The introduction of irrigation to the Sun River valley permitted a 42 percent increase in the number of persons the land would support. Dryland farming could not sustain the 50 percent increase in population that occurred in Cascade during the same time period. In this respect, then, the Fort Shaw division achieved some of the goals of federal reclamation. It
permitted more people to make a living from the land and in a way that in 1940 appeared to be permanent. Federal reclamation added a small but permanent new population of farmers to Cascade County. It did not, however, as the business community of Great Falls had hoped, create a new direction for agriculture in the county nor did it bring about dramatic changes in the behavior of the people who farmed the land.

At the conclusion of his study of persistence in Kansas, James Malin commented on its relevance to the agricultural policies the federal government was adopting during the 1930s. He concluded that plans for resettlement or land utilization that required operators to remain over a period of years were doomed to failure, because the "group habits of Kansas farmers" ran counter to such plans, and he had "no reason to believe that they differ widely from other farmers of the major agricultural areas." A generation earlier, federal reclamation planners had operated from a point of view that also aimed at keeping people on the land for long periods. They based reclamation policy on the ideal of the independent yeoman, subsisting on a small plot that would be passed from generation to generation. Not only was this ideal an economically unrealistic basis for planning in the twentieth century, it was a scenario that few American farmers of the nineteenth century had desired or lived out. The people who took up land in the Fort Shaw division lived and worked as their predeces-
sors had in the Midwest and the East, breaking the land, improving it, but moving on in ten or fifteen years.

During the first forty years of the twentieth century, federal reclamation brought about no substantial transformation of the economic or social structure of central Montana. As had been the case in other parts of the United States, the farmer mattered more than the farm. The farmers who took up land in the Fort Shaw division accommodated themselves to the conditions they found; success or failure depended more on the individual's method of operation than on the fact that the land was irrigated. Those who succeeded integrated their operations into the existing agricultural economy. Similarly, irrigation had little effect on social relations. Sharing ditches and dams did not create a sense of community nor did it lead to increased cooperation. To live comfortably in a new environment people established institutions and customs they had known. Community grew out of proximity and shared social values, as it had in other places and other times. Cooperation developed slowly and took place to meet specific needs. The anachronistic idealism of federal reclamation could not bring about economic and social change in the twentieth century. Quite to the contrary, the Sun River project provided further evidence of the desire and ability of Americans to adapt long-standing practices and institutions to a variety of environments.
ENDNOTES


3. Dryland homesteaders who took up their land soon after 1910 could have begun their grain-growing operations with much less cash outlay than the settlers who were improving land in the irrigation project. Also, greater than normal rainfall for several years before 1915 increased dryland wheat yields and farmers' profits. Not until World War I, when labor was short and demand for grain was great, did grain-growers begin to mechanize their operations and have needs for cash that compared to those of the farmers in the irrigation project.


7. Malin, p. 344.


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