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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
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1933

KEEPING THE BOYS AND GIRLS INTERESTED IN THE COMMUNITY
by
Julia Kiene
Editor of the Home Department of Capper's Farmer

Before we discuss about the community let us start with the home. I am thankful that my married life up to the time of my husband's death was spent on a farm, and that my two daughters who are now almost young ladies have the heritage of the farm.

Selecting a Location

Selecting a country home is not as simple a task as that of selecting a home in town. Should you wish to settle in a town you and your husband would first of all decide upon the amount you could afford to spend for shelter, for after all that is what the town home evolves itself into. You then would begin hunting for the house that would furnish all your requirements at the price you had decided to pay. You might find that home in a neighborhood not so desirable as you had planned, but that weighed against the home would be negligible, for you would feel you could develop your friends elsewhere. And so the town woman having found the house she wanted, regardless of location would then fall to in her job of home-making in a new locality.

But not so the country homemaker. She, too, has her ideals for her home; she, too, with her husband has settled on the amount they can well afford to spend on the new home--but on a different basis. For this home is not a mere shelter. It is the office for their business, and like all offices, it has to be located in the most logical spot for good business. First of all the potential possibilities of the business must be considered. How fertile is the soil, what are the drainage problems, in what condition are the buildings, how great is the distance from shipping centers and how adequate is the water supply, all come in for their share of serious consideration.

After the general layout of the farm has been analyzed another matter of serious thought must be considered. What is the general attitude of the neighborhood? What social life does the community afford? For no matter how fertile the soil might be, how comfortable the home, how accessible to shipping centers, unless the community is a healthy one you would not select it. Why? Because next in importance to money for supplying the material needs of the family, the community must offer an opportunity for satisfying the family's social needs. The isolation of the farm family makes them dependent not only upon one another but upon the entire community. Without genial community activities the home and farm interests could not function as they should. Its members could not be happy. Without happiness, family life would be shipwrecked on the rocks of dissatisfaction. Unquestionably the origin of the social life depends on the community. It drains the best efforts of the home to make the best community.

The Change in the Size of a Community

How large is a community? Twenty-five years ago the community was not so large. Poor roads and horse-drawn vehicles made it impossible for any community to expand more than ten miles at the most. In those days get-togethers were infrequent. And I'll venture to guess that there isn't a soul here who used to attend those apple coring parties, those barn raising dances, that doesn't think back on them with affection and tenderness. Why? Because when you went to them you put every ounce of energy you had in having a good time yourself and seeing that others did. You, yourself, personally contributed to the evening's fun. There were no paid entertainers, no radio to be tuned in, no canned music to be turned on. From your community, or one very close by, came the fiddlers, and what fun you had all piled into the large horse-drawn vehicle, planning just the various stunts you would do when you got to the party. You helped make the evening a success. And the success of the gathering made the community a better place. You did not have many entertainments, but the ones you did have were glorious adventures in happiness. The modern generation is a little inclined to pity you who farmed so long ago. But it seems to me that you are not entitled to that. You were happy. You were constantly contributing the best you had to the task of living. You worked hard, yes, but it is not the back-breaking drudgery of the farm that kills its people--it is the soul-breaking drudgery. The quickest relief from such drudgery, in my opinion, is an adequate social life.

I speak of an adequate social life lightly, as though a wave of the wand and you have it. But not so. Building a community demands as much consistent effort as many successes, and as many failures as building up worn out soil. It demands the best of every individual member of the family. Again, it depends on the size of the community. Certainly more than the oldtime five-mile radius is involved in the modern day community. Suppose your trading center is fifteen miles from your home. Is it not necessary for you to be very familiar with the social life of that town? Must you not know what type of movies, what type of games, what type of young folks, your young people are going to encounter? If this should happen to be where the young folks will enter high school, must you not know about the school, its teachers, its ideals? And so your community automatically stretches itself beyond its immediate friends into the nearest town or towns as the case may be.

Activities of One Community

In my work as Editor of the Home Department of Capper's Farmer I am constantly meeting with unusual community activities. Not so long ago I found an example of what good roads and automobiles will do towards stretching the community. It was in western Kansas. I was the guest of one of the rural clubs near Goodland, Kansas. Wishing to make several calls on the way out, I drove my car. I arrived in Goodland the night before the meeting, and called the hostess to get directions for coming out the next day. I am amazingly stupid when it comes to following road directions, and since this farm home was off the main highway, I experienced difficulty in getting there. I do not know how familiar you folks are with western Kansas roads, but when you get off the main highways, they are not well marked. This road led me through open prairies, over dry streams, and the further I went the fewer homes I saw. After I had traveled about twenty miles, I began to get disgusted. How could there be a club meeting worth while when there were so few homes, and no people living around there? To have spent so much of my time for seven or eight women was making me feel a little provoked. Suddenly I came to a little hill top and down in the valley I saw a white farm house, and in the yard I could detect many cars. My opinion of myself rose instantly. Because I was to be a guest, the entire countryside for miles around had come. Never do I have such wild bursts of conceit but what they are immediately ejected from me. It so happened in this case. However,

I was correct about one thing. Everyone, from the entire countryside had come, but not to see or hear me. They were interested in something else of far greater importance to them than my visit. I love to tell the story of how I entered this home a little late, for frankly I had lost my way several times. The women were glad to see me, but my being there did not begin to hold the interest for them that the discussion about little red chairs did.

As I sat and listened I learned this very lovely story of community development and expansion. Years ago, way back in the apple coring days, there has been a community center for the families. They had built a little church and used this building for the center of their activities. But as these older folks passed away, and drifted elsewhere, the community died. For ten years or such a matter there had been nothing to interest the young folks. They were getting to be a problem, for young folks must play, and it is the wise parent who always remembers that. Some of the women got together and decided they would establish church again, and use that as the nucleus for community life. Since they had to have some medium through which to work, they decided to organize a club, the object being to promote a better community and social life. It did not dismay a single woman there that at every meeting, someone of those present would have to travel a distance of twenty-five miles in order to come.

A year previous the women had decided to finance church services twice a month, and Sunday School every Sunday. Finding teachers and pupils was rather a task until someone hit upon the bright idea of the little red chairs. The same little red chairs they were discussing when I came into the room. This had been the scheme. There were about twenty-five or thirty smaller children among the families, children in the first seven years of their life. These youngsters were too young to come to Sunday School alone. And so they ^{were} approached in this manner. If eighteen little boys and girls would come to Sunday School for six weeks in succession, then eighteen little red chairs would be bought for these little children to sit in during Sunday School. These women knew if they could sell the children on the idea of Sunday School, the older folks would have to come to bring the youngsters. The plan worked. The required number of children had come for the required number of Sundays, and the little red chairs were about to be purchased.

This has taken me only a few moments to tell. It took those twenty-five or thirty women many weeks to accomplish it. They had all sorts of entertainments in the church to raise money; they gave plays, box suppers, and various social events. It required hours of labor and much extra work of women who already were overcrowded with home activities. But what happened? They gave to their young people a fuller life, for young folks should never be raised without a religious influence. They gave to their young folks a social life that is the heritage of every young person. Could they have done this within the confines of their home without their community? NO. Yet the influence had just as direct bearing on the life of the young people as the influence of the home.

It happened to be a Thursday that I was attending this meeting and on the following night the junior class of the high school at Goodland was putting on a play. I was asked to remain over and go with this group of women who were going en masse to the play. Why? Because one woman had a son and another a daughter who were to take part in this play and they felt that out of respect to the young people they should show their interest by attending. What was the thing this group of women was unconsciously doing? Nothing more nor less than reaching out beyond their community confines and encompassing the town.

The Country Interests The Town

Ten years or so ago when I was a Home Demonstration Agent in Shawnee County, Kansas, I helped organize a club. This group of women lived near a little town called Tecumseh which happened to be some nine or ten miles from Topeka. Unfortunately there was a pool hall and dance hall located just on the outskirts of Topeka, and the young folks of this community in going to town were apt to stop there. The results were that far too many young folks stopped to dance at this rather objectionable place. But the women, being farm women, did not throw up their hands in despair. They got busy instead. A fine old gentleman, who lived in Tecumseh and who sensed the difficulty, said to these women, "If you will put up a building that can be used as a community center, I will deed you a plot of ground that has the most beautiful view of any location I know in the state of Kansas." But he went on to say, "This building must be used for community activities. If the Grange wants to meet there, if the Farm Bureau wants to use it, if the church, or any organization in any way connected with the activities of the farm folks want to use the building, they must be allowed to have it rent free."

That was a pretty big order, especially since it was the spring of the year. But these women went to their husbands and said, "Of course, we know you are busy, the spring work is just starting, but we need your help, oh, so much. If you will give us a week of time, your horses, and scrapers, we will feed you well, and the young folks of the community will repay you later. They sold the idea to their husbands, and before it seemed possible the basement was excavated. The women thought if they could only get the basement started and covered, in time they could do the rest.

The women went to the merchants in Topeka and said, "We want to keep our young folks home, and we would like help from you. If you will give us money to buy the brick for the foundation of our community center, we will turn it over to the people of Topeka once a month, but the rest of the time it is ours for our young folks." The merchant's liked the idea and the money was generously given. The following June the corner stone was laid, and Senator Capper and I helped to lay it. The next fall the building was complete with a debt of several hundred dollars hanging over it.

By this time the older folks of the community were pretty well tired out, for it had been an enormous undertaking. Then the younger members of the community spoke and said, "We'll take over the note on this community building and finish paying it off." They did. A theater movement was organized and the first thing these young folks knew they were giving plays, creditable plays too. And weren't they busy! It took so much time getting properties ready, rehearsing, learning parts, and building scenery, that they did not have time to visit the dance hall on the edge of Topeka. They had found something constructive to do. The note was paid off. The building stands without debt. What are these young folks going to remember when they are older? They are going to remember the fun they had dancing with their parents, the boys teaching their mothers new steps, and the fathers being waltzed around by the daughters. For they have a community dance there every two weeks. They are also going to remember the hours they spent in dramatics. Like our fathers and mothers they have given of themselves to make this community a better place in which to live. It is interesting to know that farms are not for sale around Tecumseh. The families are prosperous and happy, and above all content. Has not the time these mothers and fathers spent doing things outside of the home for the community been of as great importance as the duties they performed within the home? And this community stretched out and encompassed a town of 70,000. It is frequently said that the eyes of youth and old age never can look out the same window, because the eyes of youth are looking through the window of tomorrow and

eyes of old age are looking through the window of yesterday. But it seems to me that these folks at Tecumseh have pretty much focused their looks out the same window.

Bringing Out The Best

Last spring when I was in New York I took a half day off to wander about Allen street, which is in the slum district of New York. I love to drift into unusual looking shops, and I chanced upon an interesting looking shop and I thought it would be fun to go inside. No one was about, but in a show case, and scattered about the room, were many pieces of unusual colored glass. Presently a young chap came out from the back part of the shop, and in a charming foreign accent asked if he might serve me. I asked him what he did with so many pieces of colored glass, and to my delight he asked me if I should enjoy seeing his work shop. I discovered that he made colored glass windows, and since I had never seen any constructed before, I asked him if he would work for me, so I might have an idea how such windows were made. I was intrigued by the way in which he would put an unusually lovely piece of glass beside one not so beautiful. Always the beauty of the one piece brought out the best in the plainer piece of glass, and the result was an exquisite piece of art. In the outer room the various pieces of glass meant nothing, but combined they were an exquisite piece of work. So it is with a community. Individually the people living in it mean but little. But when all the individuals are gathered together, it makes of itself a piece of beauty and an influence on the lives of everyone living within the community.