

the inhabitants of the great southwest were compelled to take refuge within doors. The ravaging blast was hourly doing irreparable damage to the growing crops. The sun went down, but the scorching wave continued. Its wilting breath shriveled up every growing thing—everything except the native buffalo grass, the cacti and the sunflower. On the first day the thermometer registered 102 degrees in the shade. The following day it ran up to 108 degrees. The next day it registered 114 degrees, while on the fourth day of this terrible heated blast of parching, burning wind, the mercury indicated 119 degrees in the shade.

**Desolation and Ruin.**

It was a suffocation, indescribable, dealing relentless death to the agricultural hopes of the great southwest. It was like an intense heat driven from a thousand furnaces.

For a hundred hours this stifling, burning breath belched forth from the jaws of calamitous destruction; utter devastation followed.

On the first day the fields of growing corn seemed to shrink in timidity; on the second day the proud plumage of tassel drooped on the stalks; on the third day the blades whitened and shriveled and became like some aged and decrepit thing; while on the fourth day the tassels, blades, and even the stalks were snapped off in their parched brittleness, and scattered by the winds of this terrific tornado of heat. The fields were swept of every vestige of growing grain. The entire country became a desolate waste. For a hundred miles in every direction, no living vegetation planted by the hand of man survived. The hopes, the labors and achievements of the farmer were all swept into the vortex of absolute ruin, and these ranchmen in the southwest beheld the great American desert as depicted by the earlier geographers in all its primitive awfulness.

Farmers became mendicants, business men paupers, while notes and bonds in the bankers' hands turned into worthless paper. A cry went up from the starving thousand, and once more, trainloads of provisions came from the east for the relief of the Kansas sufferers. Since that time I believe, there has never been a full crop harvested in the territory tributary to Meade, Kansas. The cattlemen have again come into their own. The gray wolves have scratched the varnish from the front door of the town hall. Homesteads without number have been purchased for grazing land, in some cases the price being less than one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre, the amount paid by the farmers to the government. When the farmers refused to sell, the ranchmen had, usually, to wait until there was a foreclosure by one of the numerous mortgage loan companies, which, prior to the "great hot wind," operated

in this country to the sorrow of their stockholders. Land is now held at a higher valuation, but there was a time some ten years ago, when the management of these loan companies, having been compelled to buy in farms, placed the properties on sale at such terms, and for such prices as the purchaser might name. Anything saved from the wreck, the idea seemed to be, was all profit.

**Dollars Vanished.**

Not less than eight millions of dollars were lost on farm mortgage loans in the Seventh Kansas congressional district, which included about all of the southwest quarter of the state. Primarily of course, losses were due to crop failures, but the cupidity, if not dishonesty of loan agents, led to the placing of loans at absurdly high valuations and an equally high rate of interest. Seemingly everyone wanted to borrow money, and the high rates of interest loosened the "cash strings" of the east, and a deluge of money for investment in Kansas farm mortgage loans flowed like a river into the great southwest.

**"Boom" Growth.**

The Kansas people are a wonderful people. They are tenacious, and they fought hard and manfully to maintain their invasion of the Great American desert. Intermittently there would come crop failures from drouth, hot winds, chinch bugs or grasshoppers. One year, I have forgotten now which, the state of Kansas broke all records for the production of corn, but unfortunately prices were low, and the entire crop was marketed at the average price of 12 cents per bushel.

There were but two industries, viz; cattle raising and farming. The country had been a range from time immemorial. Towns and railroads were unnecessary to the cattlemen. Then the farmer came, and the country boomed solely on the fact that a wonderfully rich soil had been discovered, and some wonderfully gullible easterners were willing to loan money on these newly discovered lands at an extortionate interest rate. Then with an enthusiasm which distinguishes all Kansans, indigenous or acclimated, the southwesterners, about 1885, set forth to boom their country, and they boomed it beyond compare. Railroads were extended everywhere, banks established on eastern money, mortgage loan agents became fabulously wealthy in a short time, hotels and opera houses, costing thirty, forty and fifty thousand dollars, were built in towns which had not been on the map six months, and which, two or three years later at farthest, lost all that part of the population which had industry sufficient to look elsewhere for more promising conditions.

Most of the towns, which, for a time, were all but depopulated, are now slowly

improving. Meade, Kansas, fell off in population from some three thousand souls to three hundred. At this time, I understand, it has a population of one thousand people. But there are many towns in the Seventh Kansas congressional district that have been entirely deserted, and probably will not again become the abiding place of man. Grass and weeds grow in the streets, while sunflower stalks stand, sentinel like, barring entrance to the door of the city hall, now the home of bats and vermin.

During these boom times everything was bonded. Township bonds were issued, county bonds were issued, school bonds were issued, courthouse bonds were issued, city bonds were issued, while railroad bonds were floated to the fullest limit.

**The Wichita "Boom."**

Wichita, Kansas, is not, properly speaking, in the great southwest. It lies near the Oklahoma line, and is a few miles east of a line, which, running from north to south, would divide the state. Wichita, however, was a metropolis for us, of the western counties, and it was the spectacular spirit of Wichita's magnificent madness that infused itself into the boom of every hamlet, clear out to Richfield, Morton county, the southwestern county of the state, where \*Hon. Bernard McCaffrey held forth as mayor of that city. The boom in Wichita—the most remarkable real estate inflation in American commercial history—may fittingly be mentioned in these recollections of the southwest, and I will write of enough of it to indicate the maniacal frenzy which overswept Kansas.

Wichita boomed on the strength of the false presumption which brought all southwestern Kansas prominently before eastern investors. Before its boom, Wichita was a thriving, country town of some twenty thousand people doing a little wholesale business and enjoying a reasonable measure of prosperity from the surrounding, farming country which was not nearly so sure of crop failures as are the lands farther to the westward. Its people were of remarkable enterprise and were clannish to the interests of their municipality; they would go earlier and more often into their pockets for the good of the town, than any other people with whom I have come in contact.

The speculative madness—the absolute lack of accurate fore-sight—which was responsible for the creation of unnecessary counties and the building of abortive towns, took this thriving little place, and in a year made of it a city. Four years later—when the boom was over—the town lost all it had gained, and fifty per cent of its original popula-

\* Mr. McCaffrey is now a partner of Mr. Emerson's, and lives at Denver, Colorado.