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VERBODEN: THE PRIVATE LETTERS OF ED EDSON: An American Pioneer in a Dutch Community 1880-1944

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INTRODUCTION

VERBODEN: THE PRIVATE LETTERS OF ED EDSON:
An American Pioneer in a Dutch Community 1880-1944

Ed Edson arrived in Whatcom County, Washington in 1883 at the age of 21, fresh from dreams of the Gold Rush. Born in Iowa and raised in Kansas, he left home in 1876, with nothing more than the notion that he wanted to get out of Kansas. He first saw Lynden in 1883 as a member of a survey crew, sent to lay out the town amongst the massive trees. At the time he was living in Whatcom, where he was apprenticed as a pharmacist. After he completed his training, he returned to Lynden, bought a pharmacy and set up business and residency in the town, which would be his joy and his prison for the next 59 years.

The late 1800’s were raucous years in Washington State and Edson felt heady with all the new ideas brought by numerous settlers who came to Washington to seek their fortune, political or religious freedom, or to work in Washington’s plentiful natural resource industries. Washington was known for its independent thinkers, and diverse population. In 1896, political third parties like the Populist Party fared better in Washington State than anywhere else in the country, labor unions and ideology sparked a keen interest in socialism. The desperate need for unskilled labor brought out diversity in population and fostered a certain tolerance of differences. In Lynden, Native Americans lived, worked and shared with whites. Their skill with canoes and the settlers
dependence on the Nooksack River for transportation made them valued members of society in those early years. Many single men who had come to the area to mine or log, took Indian wives and there were numerous children of mixed blood.

Enveloped in this hodgepodge, Edson developed his unconventional ideology and quirky view on life. He was self-educated and through the years, would pride himself on the scope and breadth of his reading material. A reading of Bellamy’s, *Looking Backward*, struck Edson with the notion of cooperative effort and shared wealth. His views on religion were shaped by what he saw as hypocrisy in the people he had observed; he put more stock in spirits, or ‘spooks’, as he called them. Human frailties and policies on war, medicine, social customs were all targets of Edson’s review. “Whoever dubbed us Homo Sapiens was, I should say, quite premature with his Sapiens.!”

There was a sense of belonging and responsibility in Lynden in those early years. This tone had been set by pioneers such as Phoebe and Holden Judson. Community service and civic duty were expected and Edson certainly did his share. At the age of 29, just 4 years after moving to town, he became Lynden’s second mayor. (Second only to the town’s founder, Holden Judson.) He served on the original school board, established and was the first president of the Fair Board, , sat on the board of the first telephone company, was a partner in the towns first electric company, established and served as the president of a literary society called the Clam Diggers Society (which is still in existence) and donated his building to establish the first reading room and library association.
This was in addition to serving as the town doctor, dentist, bicycle repair expert, town band tuba player and minstrel singer.

In those the early years Edson developed and freely espoused his political and religious beliefs. In the early 1900’s that began to change. The turn of the century brought a Dutch immigration to Lynden which would set a new tone and prove to influence the community from that day forward. The Dutch revitalized the economically depressed area, infusing the region with enthusiasm and an ethic of hard work. Lynden grew and thrived with the influx of these industrious people. At first, as the Dutch assimilated into America and the town of Lynden, all was well. Several factors kept the Dutch within the mainstream in those early years. The newcomers were busy establishing businesses or blasting out stumps for their future farms, the nature of pioneer life required cooperation, and the Calvinist predisposition to remain behind the scenes and quiet, never drawing attention to oneself, kept the Hollanders out of leadership roles.

The order and stability they brought to Lynden was welcome. These newcomers wrote to relatives in the Netherlands encouraging them to join them in this lovely town. During this transition time there was a relative “truce” between Hollanders and the original settlers. In 1917, the establishment of their own private Christian School in which students were taught strict Calvinism as well as the Dutch language and customs, signaled the beginning of what became eventually apparent to all: the Dutch had no intention of integrating into life in this small American town. They were going to establish their separate identity and

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1 Ed Edson Papers. Mollie Edson’s Basement. Ellensburg. #31
eventually there would be two distinct groups who would coexist in the town of Lynden.

Although at times awkward, the division was tolerable and acceptable, until the 1930’s when a new brand of Hollander began to arrive and settle in Lynden. The drought in the plains states brought groups of Plains Dutch to relocate in Lynden between 1930 and 1940. In a town which had grown so slowly, this was indeed a mass migration. These new Hollanders were more clannish than their predecessors and promoted an isolationism never before experienced by Lynden’s relatively diverse and tolerant townsfolk. With numbers grew strength. Nine different denominations of the Dutch Reformed Church sprang up almost as quickly as the houses. Each new sect seemed to be more restrictive and less tolerant than the last. Their doctrine was based on how much the participants should or should not assimilate into American life. But one tenet was common to all: stay Dutch.

Around this time Edson was asked to give the commencement speech to Lynden’s high school graduating class. In this speech, he told the students about working for the common good and the concept of shared wealth. After the speech, as he wrote in a letter to his daughter, he was chided for his socialistic ideas. Someone asked a fellow who had attended the graduation exercises how the event had gone, he responded, “‘Oh all right only Edson made a damn fool of himself.’ He and everyone else knew that I was a good socialist at that time and he was an equally good Republican for no better or other reason than that he had been born and grew up in Vermont and being as ignorant as a Galapagos
turtle of any smattering of sociology or economics he thought me guilty of what would have been the very bad taste of injecting my peculiar politics into the occasion. I’ve had many a good chuckle over it since and he and I are as good of friends as ever though I don’t think he ever knew that his words came back to me and all the happenings in the world during these 30 years haven’t affected him apparently at all; his world is flat and scarcely more than a mile across.”

This was when Edson became publicly silent. Although not unprecedented in the independent thinking of Washington State residents at the time, his beliefs were definitely contrary to most of the tenets of the Christian Reformed Church, and Edson decided it was easier and better for business to remain silent than to try to defend or argue. Although he continued to participate in public life, he served as mayor on two more occasions, he kept his beliefs to himself. He had one or two confidantes in the town of Lynden with whom he shared some of his tamer ideas, but for the most part, he kept his mouth shut.

That is why in 1933, when he relocated an old Kansas friend, now residing in Nebraska, and publishing a newspaper, Edson let the flood-gates open. He and George Burr wrote to each other at least monthly. Their letters were four to eight pages long and written in the evenings usually over the course of a week. Edson kept carbon copies of his letters and kept Burrs responses. Clearly, he thought they were of value. He and Burr shared a decade of correspondence in which Edson told his friend things he had never uttered even to his family. “I believe the letters I have written to you would give a more complete and accurate

2 Ed Edson Papers, #27
3 Edson Papers,#54
measure of me than any biography I could write. I have unburdened my soul (if I have a soul) more freely in these letters than I have to anyone since our boyhood days in old Smith County.”

What makes this set of correspondence remarkable is the glimpse it provides into the lives and thoughts of two men who lived in a volatile time in the development of the United States. Edson and Burr were common men, mostly self educated, who cared deeply about their country and its future. Though not leaders in the national sense, they wrote about the issues of the day as if what they thought mattered—and maybe it did. These men had witnessed mindboggling change in their lifetime. For example, Edson recalled the process of rendering fat for tallow candles that illuminated the sod hut of his Kansas childhood. In contrast, he later wrote of his trek by automobile to Eastern Washington to view the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam! These men had lived to see the potential of what an individual, when working with others, could accomplish.

There will probably not be sets of correspondence such as these produced in our lifetime. First, because of technology. People today talk on the telephone, write occasional letters and now, use email. The idea of composing long letters over the course of several days and waiting weeks for a response is improbable. Secondly, the nature of the correspondence is unfamiliar in today's social discourse. Disagreement and debate is avoided. Edson and Burr disagreed on almost every issue; religion, politics, race relations, social mores

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4 Edson Papers, #8
and even their memory of past events. Not only did they disagree, they told each other so in plain English. There is no ‘political correctness’ in their discourse. They called a spade a spade—literally. They cherished their differences, as Burr wrote in a letter, “…write again soon. There’s a lot you don’t say, but I enjoy what you do say and if we look at matters differently what of it.” In spite and perhaps because of this, they remained cherished friends until death.

SETTING

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON STATE: AN OVERVIEW 1880-1944

To better understand Ed Edson and his letters, it is helpful to know the larger setting in which he lived. When he arrived in Washington State in 1883, Edson exemplified the new brand of citizen drawn to the Pacific Northwest because of the Industrial Revolution. From its conservative, pioneering origins, these new arrivals brought to Washington their own variety of independent and sometimes radical politics and tradition. At the bottom line, people flocked to Washington State because there was money to be made. The state’s vast natural resources required manual labor for the unskilled worker. Lumber, mining, fishing and agriculture workers were always needed. Because the region produced much more than its relatively small population consumed, it was imperative that a transportation system be established to get the product to

5 Edson Papers, 360620
market. Construction of rail lines attracted some of the area’s more colorful and culturally diverse workers. **The first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1883.** In addition to the unskilled laborer, the Pacific Northwest lured the entrepreneur; there were financial opportunities for those who had money to invest. In addition, because of promotional activities by the railroads, many adventurous and restless people were encouraged to come and settle. As a result of the physical nature of the work available, the population was predominantly male. In 1900, women comprised only 36% of Seattle’s population.

**Statehood**

As the territory grew, the Washington legislature petitioned for statehood first in 1878, but Congress did not grant statehood because of border disputes and lack of necessary population. Political issues also interfered. The Congress was controlled by Democrats who believed that Washington would send Republican representatives to Congress and were not eager to grant it statehood.

In 1888 Republicans gained control of Congress and passed enabling acts that permitted Washington to prepare a state constitution, elect officials, and submit a petition for statehood. **On November 11, 1889, Washington became the 42nd state.** Its first governor was Elisha P. Ferry, formerly a territorial governor.

Capital investment in the Pacific Northwest from 1880-1890 transformed Washington’s economic base from subsistence farming to industry and
commerce. To illustrate this, in 1880, nearly 54% of the territorial population depended on agriculture. By 1890 only 34% were actively engaged in agriculture. At the same time the commercial and industrial sectors had grown from 46% in 1880 to 65% in 1890. The dramatic growth of urban population during this decade reflects the change in economy. The entire population had increased by 375% -- from 75,000 to 357,000. An even more remarkable figure is the number of urban dwellers. The census reported a shift from 0 in 1880 to 28% by 1890. This transition affected economic, social and political affiliations.

One of the most important manifestations of this change from agriculture to an extractive industrial economy was the increased number of wage earners in the labor pool. The natural dependence upon an employer, which developed with wage-based industry of course, was not unique to the Pacific Northwest, but other factors combined to instigate a more than usual amount of labor conflict. This unrest might have been due to the fact that many had come to West with the vision that they would better their lives. When wages or working conditions were not what they expected they were more impatient and outraged because their dreams for prosperity were not realized. Many, like the early Cascade coal miners, had become familiar with radical union politics in their home of origin, either Europe or the East Coast. To some, Washington had been billed as an unspoiled proving ground for some of the more radical experiments in the relationship between the economy and government. An example was the formation of Utopian communities. These factors, combined with the fierce independence of the pioneer spirit, manifested itself in a penchant for radical
politics, unconventional alliances and fierce political independence and receptiveness to third party politics.

During the years before World War I (1914-1918) and immediately thereafter, a strong labor movement flourished in Washington. There were two major unions: the older, more conservative AFL, which consisted of small craft unions; and the militant, more radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which demanded one union to represent all workers, and whose members were called Wobblies.

In 1916 the IWW tried to implement a free speech campaign in Everett. When about 250 IWW members arrived by ship in Everett to meet with shingleweavers, Snohomish County officials were waiting for them at the dock. A shot was fired and the ensuing battle left 7 dead and about 50 wounded.

At the end of World War I, Washington’s economy experienced a downturn, and dockworkers protested wage reductions. Labor unions organized the Seattle General Strike of February 1919, which lasted for five days and was itself peaceful. The strike was finally settled by the intervention of outside labor leaders. Employers’ associations convinced many people that the strike was affiliated with the Russian Bolshevik Revolution and encouraged violence against dissenters and radicals.

Economic Developments

Despite labor unrest, Washington had a strong economy during the years before World War I. Agriculture revived in the early 1900s, aided by a road-building program that made rural areas accessible and by federal and state
irrigation projects. By 1929 one-eighth of the farmland had been irrigated, but this land accounted for more than 40 percent of the income from crops. Farmers benefited from the demand for foodstuffs during World War I and suffered a brief decline in the years following the war.

Industry grew during World War I. The federal government granted funds to cities like Tacoma and Seattle to construct shipyards to build war ships. By 1918 there were five shipyards building steel-hulled ships in Puget Sound and about 12 others making wooden-hulled boats.

The Depression

The economic policies of Republican Herbert Hoover, president at the beginning of the Depression, did not satisfy Washington state voters, who elected Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt as president in 1932.

Roosevelt's Public Works Administration (PWA), benefited Washington. In 1933 the PWA began construction of the Grand Coulee Dam across the Columbia River. Completed in 1942, it was the largest dam ever built at that time. Edson traveled to Eastern Washington to view the construction of Grand Coulee, his letter recounting the adventure can be found in the LETTERS section of this CD-ROM, #55.)

World War II

Washington did not fully recover from the Depression until World War II (1939-1945). During the war, the demand for ships and aircraft soared. Existing plants again began to operate at full capacity, and new ones were built. The Boeing Airplane Company developed and produced B-17 and B-29 bombers,
and its payroll rose to 44,745. The aluminum industry was established in 1940 with a plant at Vancouver to take advantage of Washington’s cheap water power. The Hanford atomic installation, opened at Richland in 1943, converted uranium to plutonium for nuclear armaments and conducted nuclear research. Washington had the second highest number of defense contracts in the nation. All these jobs attracted war workers from other states, and Washington’s population grew rapidly.

The war brought particular hardship to one segment of Washington’s population. After Japanese fighter planes dropped bombs on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1941, President Roosevelt ordered all Japanese living west of the Cascades to relocate to the east of the mountains for reasons of “national security.” Japanese nationals and Americans of Japanese descent alike were forced to move to makeshift housing in eastern Washington or Idaho. When the relocation centers closed, many Japanese returned to their homes to find possessions gone, their savings and bank accounts impounded, and their fields overgrown. They also often faced racial prejudice. In 1988 Congress allotted $20,000 in compensation to each Japanese American who had been sent to an internment camp during World War II.

(Edson comments on internment of Japanese in LETTERS section, #3)

**NOOKSACK**

Nooksack: The River and the Tribe

Nooksack is the name given to an indigenous tribe, a river, and a town. Neuk-Sacks or Noot-saak, or Nooksack meant “fern-eating people”, because
“Noot” meant “people”, and “Sa-ak” meant “fern or bracken roots”. The Nooksack Indians ate fern roots as a regular part of their diet. They gave their name to the river on which they lived. Their largest village was near what was later called Nooksack Crossing and is now close to the present town of Everson.6

The Nooksack Indians were very important to the early settlers of the Nooksack Valley and Lynden in particular. The settlers were dependent on the Indians for transportation up the treacherous Nooksack River. Their knowledge of the River and their wonderfully built canoes were the early settler’s lifeline to the outside world. Phoebe Judson writes about the virtues of these people despite her obvious concern for their lack of spiritual salvation. She recounts several times in her autobiography of befriending, tending and relying on her Indian friends. Holden Judson encouraged the Nooksack Indians to take advantage of land claims, and they were one of the few tribes in the Pacific Northwest to own land.7

Originally, whites called the Indian canoes, Chinook, this later became the term used for the language used by the Indians. Emmett Hawley writes in his account of the early days that he spoke Chinook fluently as did Phoebe Judson and Ed Edson as well.8 The impression one gets from the accounts of those early pioneers, was that although viewed as different and somewhat primitive, there was a certain amount of respect and admiration for their Native American

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6 Lelah Edson, The Fourth Corner- Highlights from the Early Northwest, Cox Brothers Publishing: (Bellingham, 1951) 8

7 Ibid,10

8 Emmett Hawley. Sgee-Mus

Phoebe Judson, A Pioneers Search for an Ideal Home

Ed Edson. Ed Edson Correspondence
neighbors. There was some Indian warfare, but it was limited to intertribal conflict and the incidence of Indian/White conflict in the Lynden area was isolated.

The Nooksack River played an important role in the development of Lynden. Without it, it would have been almost impossible for early settlers to arrive in the densely wooded area of the Nooksack Valley. Even so, it was slow going. Until Phoebe Judson and the women of Lynden organized a fund to hire a local man and several Indian workers to blast two huge log jams out of the Nooksack River in 1879, canoes were the only vessel able to travel up the river. After removal of the logjams, it was possible to bring steamships up river, right to the front door of Lynden. This “breakthrough” coincided with the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad and resulted in a population boost for Lynden and the Nooksack Valley. Even with the advent of roads, the river continued to serve as the preferred method of transportation because mud was such a factor much of the year.

**EARLY SETTLERS: THE JUDSONS**

**EARLY SETTLERS**

Lynden developed slowly. First to arrive were fur traders and miners—mostly single men. In the 1850’s, settlers began to arrive, but unlike other settlers of the West, they came by the household rather than in droves. This was primarily due to the difficulty in reaching the area. Lynden was so remote that it was reached only by taking a snub-nose canoe up the Nooksack River, usually hiring a local Nooksack or Lummi Indian as the guide and muscle. The size of the canoe limited the amount of supplies and household goods, but there was an
even more daunting obstacle. There were logjams in two separate parts of the river which required fording and carrying goods along a treacherous, log-strewn, frustrating path. This portage added about three hours to the already tiresome trip. Phoebe Judson describes these logjams in her autobiography, "…. It was three quarters of a mile long; great logs and huge trees, in every conceivable position, piled high across the bend of the river, reaching from shore to shore. It was evident, by the large trees growing in the midst of it, that this jam had been accumulating for many years, and was enlarging, as every freshet carried on its current a new supply of logs and uprooted trees." As inconvenient as it was, the Nooksack River remained the main source of transport and communication for these early settlers. It was not until 1880 that the jams were successfully removed.

Early life in the Lynden area was rough. Some of earliest settlers were single men, drawn to the area by the Fraser River gold rush. They were often thrifty, competitive and selfish. Often the strongest and most educated would take advantage of the weak and ignorant. Settlers united to avenge injustice and murder. Law was loosely interpreted. As more settlers came upriver, political organizations and educational institutions were established out of a need for authority. Even in the wilderness, with the river the only outlet to the wider world, the settlers could not escape the pressures of organized society. Leaders such

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9 Phoebe Goodell Judson, A Pioneer’s Search for An Ideal Home. A Book of Personal Memoirs (Bellingham: Union Printing and Binding Company, 1925), 202
as Holden and Phoebe Judson emerged to provide guidance and compassion in an otherwise harsh environment.\textsuperscript{10}

THE JUDSONS

Much of the Judson family history is chronicled in Phoebe Judson’s autobiography, \textit{A Pioneer’s Search for an Ideal Home}. Even to the casual reader, Phoebe Judson was a truly remarkable person. In addition to the fact that Phoebe Judson named the city, (she named the settlement after the Linden tree, but thought the spelling “Lynden” looked so much better) her high ideals and sense of community set the tone for the future course of development of Lynden.

Early settlers, and the Judsons in particular, were brave to the point of lunacy and must have thrived on the isolation. After crossing the plains in 1853, they moved around in search of what Phoebe called her “ideal home.” First they settled in Olympia, near her parents and then moved to Vancouver. The decision to move to Whatcom County came with the proposition of Colonel Patterson, a single man who sought the Judsons help in raising his two motherless daughters whom he had sired with his Indian wife near what is now Lynden. He offered the Judsons his homestead in exchange for raising his children.

The Judson’s decision to make the trip and to move to an isolated area, lock stock and barrel, sight unseen with all belongings and their own three small children would be hard for contemporary folk to imagine. The logistics and hardship of the move and travel is daunting in and of itself. Additionally, it is important to note that during this time in the Pacific Northwest there were serious

\textsuperscript{10} Dorothy Koert, \textit{The Wilderness Days. Lynden, 1858-1904} (Everson: 1989), 2
conflicts between settlers and Indians. The Judsons had experienced the Indian Wars first hand while in Vancouver and personally knew of several friends and acquaintances who had been killed by Indians, including Mrs. Judson’s sister and brother-in-law. Now they had committed to moving into an area with very few whites, and those single men, surrounded by Indians and dependent on the Indians for transportation, supplies and mail. In effect they needed to trust in the Indians to provide their only link to the outside world. Brave, crazy, devout?… perhaps all of the above.

Once settled in their log cabin on Fishtrap Creek, the Judsons made it their business to provide some civility to their harsh surroundings. They set a tone of responsible citizenship and community which was to remain in Lynden long after their passing. They were religious, true, but as the old hymn said, they, “showed forth their praise not only with their lips, but in their lives.” In addition to raising the two half-Indian daughters of Colonel Patterson, the Judsons took on the care of two other orphaned families over the course of their time in Lynden.

Soon after arriving, they decided they needed a post office in order to keep in touch with friends and relatives and to receive the many books and magazines to which they subscribed. Holden Judson cleared off a bookshelf in their cabin which in 1874, became the official post office for Lynden. In this role, he became a one man Chamber of Commerce. No other family was so fool hardy as to move to a completely unknown area as the Judsons had; many would instead, write a letter to the Post Office in an area of interest. It would be Holden Judson who would respond to the inquiries for Lynden. If the people sounded like good
“stock” he would describe the area glowingly and would offer assistance, in the form of lodging while their home was built, or information of a vacant homestead in which they could reside. In this way the Judsons were able to recruit like-minded people to share with them in their ‘ideal home.’ Most accounts of early settlers confirm that they either spoke to the Judsons or were supported by them upon their arrival in Lynden.

In addition to being good neighbors, the Judsons were influential in establishing the political, moral and cultural tone of Lynden. Holden served as Lynden’s first mayor, county commissioner and representative to the State Legislature. Resourceful, Phoebe Judson demonstrated “equal rights” throughout her life, and found a happy balance of power. From 1883 to 1877, the territory of Washington had “impartial suffrage,” and Phoebe Judson served on the petit and grand jury and on election boards. She wrote that she “walked in perfect harmony to the polls by the side of my staunch Democratic husband, and voted the Republican ticket.”

She was strongly opposed to the sale of liquor and worked against gambling, saloons, and a drug store which sold liquor. She had seen alcohol ruin homes and destroy lives. Believing people were free and had to make a choice between good and evil, she never used her resources on small goals.

From 1883 to 1887 there was Local Option in Lynden, which meant that they sold no alcohol in town. This was due to women’s vote and Phoebe Judson’s influence. When Washington was granted statehood on Nov. 11, 1889, church bells rang in Lynden, Phoebe Judson wrote, “…My heart was

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11 Judson, 277
12 Koert, 15
thrilled with a sweet and solemn joy... no gambling dens, no saloons—nor even a drugstore where that ‘dark beverage of hell’ could be procured—had come to cast its debasing gloom over this captivating landscape, where our ‘ideal home’ had begun to materialize.”

In addition to participating in the political and moral issues of the community, the Judsons were fun loving, adventurous and generous. This was in contrast to some of the somber Hollanders who arrived later. The Judsons bushwhacked their way to the top of one of Mount Bakers highest foothills and camped there for several weeks when they were both in their seventies. They donated land for all sorts of civic functions including the town opera house. In 1888 Judsons donated land for a grade school. A two-story building was erected and was in service until very recently. These are but a few examples of the acts which set the tone of civic duty and high ideals exhibited by this truly remarkable couple. They left a legacy of civility to a raw formidable region.

THE HOLLANDERS

ARRIVAL OF DUTCH IN AMERICA

The second major influential development for Lynden was the arrival of the Dutch. Of course Lynden was not the only community to welcome Hollanders, they had been immigrating to the United States beginning around 1830. The Dutch who immigrated were energetic rural folk of the lower rungs of society who had the most to gain by leaving. Four out of five were from the countryside and

13 Ibid, 26
14 Judson, 278
15 Koert, 30
rural villages. Only one in eight was wealthy. Adult males outnumbered females by a ratio of six to four, and more than three-fourths of all immigrants left with family members. This high degree of family involvement exceeded by fifteen to thirty points in the German and Scandinavian migration and revealed the Dutch as a “folk” migration rather than a “labor” migration of solitary adult males, as with the British and Irish. Of the emigrating families, two-thirds were couples with children, and the remaining one-third were single parent families and childless couples. The average age of husbands was 36 years, wives, 33.5 years, and children of all ages, 8.3 years. These were young, still growing families.16

The religious make up is important because one of the very first thing the Dutch did when they settled in a community was to establish their church. Most of the Protestants were members of the privileged Reformed Church (the church of the monarchy), but in the 1850’s a secession by more orthodox conservatives led to the founding of a small ultra-Calvinist church, the Christian Seceders. Bitter government suppression of the Seceders in Holland, including heavy fines imprisonment prompted many to immigrate to the United States for religious freedom.

Although the Seceders comprised only 1.3% of the Dutch population in 1850, they totaled nearly one-half of all emigrants in the initial phase of emigration, 1845-49, and 18.4% in the whole period through 1880. Many times these groups traveled with their ministers. More than 99% of the Seceder emigrants settled in the United States.

Three most common occupations of emigrants were unskilled day laborer, farmers, and farm hands-represented over 60% of those head of household emigrating.

Although the total Dutch immigration was relatively small, its impact on the US was significant for several reasons. Ninety percent of all Dutch overseas emigrants before the mid 1890’s settled in the US as their choice destination. This funneling pattern, like a megaphone, amplified the Dutch visibility in America. Netherlanders also had a greater presence in the US than their numbers warranted because of their clustered settlements.

Few immigrant groups, if any, have clustered more than the Dutch. Thus, in spite of relatively weak volume of overseas migration, the Dutch single-mindedness for the United States and their clannish settlement behavior created a choice environment in which to nurture and sustain a strong sense of “Dutchness” for many generations. ¹⁷

Dutch immigrants valued an ordered, traditional society based on kinship, village and church. When these people emigrated, and this was especially true of the Calvinists, they sought to transplant their village cultures, churches and kin networks. Most were not innovators seeking to break free of their identity group, but conservatives intending to maintain their culture in a new environment. Group identity and the desire for religious and cultural maintenance dictated communities on the frontier or in urban neighborhoods. ¹⁸

HOLLANDERS IN LYNDEN

The chief settlement of Hollanders in Washington was Lynden, which grew to become the largest Dutch settlement in the state and the Pacific Northwest. In 1895 when Gerrit Veleke, visited Lynden, the place was desolate, for the effects of the depression that had begun in 1893 still hung on the village. Houses stood unoccupied, the furniture and household equipment abandoned. Lynden, was a town dependent on shingle manufacturing had felt the full effects of the depression. Veleke saw the possibilities and in the spring of 1896, he returned to Lynden with several others: the Herman Oordt and Douwe Zijlstra families, from Oak Harbor. Soon the effects of the depression lifted, the influx of Hollanders provided a workforce, and prosperity returned to Lynden. Newspaper propaganda on behalf of Washington worked to the advantage of Lynden. The benefits of the climate were printed in De Grondwet and other Dutch-language newspapers. Soon Hollanders began to leave their settlement in Alberta and Saskatchewan, in order to escape the bitter winters and the chilly loneliness they felt among a strange people and strange conditions of life. During the year 1901 excellent land a few miles from Lynden was offered for sale at $10 an acre, a price so low that farmers in the Midwest, struggling with heavy mortgages, could scarcely resist.19

Gradually the Dutch community in Lynden expanded. Several Hollanders started businesses, such as a small scale-lumber mill, egg production, and a grocery store. Most Dutch settlers were farmers, and they developed excellent dairies and general-purpose farms. With their success they expanded on all

18 Ibid, 145
sides of Lynden, westward toward Blaine, eastward to Sumas, and even northward into British Columbia.  

DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

The Dutch Reformed Church and its many offshoots played an important part in the life of the Hollanders and consequently, the development of Lynden. The church provided a spiritual as well as cultural tie for the Dutch community. Reverend A.J. Brink arrived in 1899, he had been sent out as a Home Missionary to organize a church. Because of the important role religion played in the lives of the Dutch settlers, the organization of a church was imperative to attract Hollanders to Lynden. The First Christian Reformed Church was organized July 11, 1900, and with its development and the formation of several other denominations of Reformed Churches, Hollanders began arriving.

The Dutch Calvinist’s simple faith centered on the home, plain living and hard work. They concentrated on orderliness and the practical side of human affairs. Meals were begun with sober family prayers and closed with reading the Bible. They strove to build an educated, prosperous, wholesome community dedicated to the expression of their faith. There was no mystical contemplation about the world beyond.

The early 1900’s brought the beginning of the Dutch influence on Lynden’s community life. Hollanders brought more emphasis on the religious life of the

20 Ibid, 424
21 Koert, 53
community by their unity and consistency. With the background of tradition and seclusion from outside influences there also came a new breadth of vision. They tackled Christian issues with conviction.22

The Dutch achieved strength and prosperity by their religious unity, agricultural expansion throughout the valley and building of the private school, churches and business establishments. It was a stable, orderly society dedicated to civic service. There was restraint in dress and social life. Few were the moral excesses to mar the dignity of that first generation. The gradual integration came through marriages and an ever increasing Dutch population.23

CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

One of the most effective methods the Dutch had in fostering their culture was in excluding their children from the public education system. This was done by organizing their own school. In order to graduate from the Christian School, students were required to pass a state examination as well as a Bible and Dutch language examination.24.

Study of the Christian School history serves a dual purpose, it illustrates their exclusivity as well as provides perspective on the growth of the Dutch population in Lynden. To look at the population of the town alone does not reflect the number of farmers and Hollanders living in outlying areas of Lynden. Most Hollanders sent their children to the Christian school. If they were too poor to pay the tuition, the Church assisted.

22 Ibid, 50
23 Ibid, 55
The Lynden Christian School was founded in 1910, under the leadership of Rev. P.J. Hoekenga, Herman Oordt, D.J. Zylstra and others. By 1912 the school had three teachers. In 1916, enrollment was 122 students, and in 1921, there were 200 students. The school continued to grow, and to give the Hollanders credit, the whole time the school was developing, they continued to vote for and pass major bond and tax issues which benefitted the Lynden public schools. In 1927, seventh and eighth grade teachers were hired. Then came the depression and the school had its most difficult time, it seemed a luxury to be running two separate school systems in a town the size of Lynden, but once again, the Hollanders firm convictions prevailed and the school continued. In 1942 they decided to form a separate Society of the Lynden Christian High School. The 1944 the United States Supreme Court decision which declared mandatory bussing unconstitutional hit the school hard. However, the people in a great demonstration of unity, contributed enough funds in one night to purchase a fleet of busses and build a garage to house them.

The first graduating class from Lynden Christian High School in 1944 had 26 graduates. The system had grown in nine years from 230 pupils and eight teachers to 600 pupils and 22 teachers.

This excerpt is taken from a year end report of the Christian school, “When a student is engaged in study, he is studying some part of God’s creation. Whether he knows it or not, or whether he gives the Creator credit or not does not change the truth of that fact…..That is one of the main purposes and

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opportunities of Christian education—to make the student God-conscious—to give God the credit, the glory, the thanks for His creation.”

IMPOSED STANDARDS

When the Dutch first arrived in the early 1900’s they were a welcome mix in the community. It was not until later, when their numbers grew and it became apparent they had no intention of integrating into the society to which they had relocated that resentment developed. Settlers of other nationalities, with other interests began to suspect that the Dutch not only wanted to keep to themselves, but also wanted the town to reflect their religious culture. Lynden was not the only place in the United States where Anglo-Americans felt this pull. In talking about a typical Dutch settlement in the U.S in 1921, Jacob Van Hinte, a native Dutchman, said, “in most settlements a movie theatre is also definately absent. In most of the smaller settlements, such as Zeeland, there are no dance halls, billiards, smoking or soft drink parlors. Also absent is a Masonic Lodge Hall (Holland is an exception) or any group of secret society.”

A demonstration of the extent to which the Netherlanders imposed their standards upon a community not founded by them can be seen in Valley Springs, South Dakota. A few Netherlanders settled there around 1917, one of them declared that Spring Valley was, “the ungodliest place they had ever been in. There were movie theaters, dance halls, and various lodges, and the Sabbath was outrageously desecrated. But gradually more Netherlanders moved in and

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25 Ibid, 105
as a consequence many of “the loose runners” packed up and left. The Dutch settlers bought the dance hall and used it to store farm machinery. The ‘show’ was compelled to close. Five years later, in early 1922, the town was completely dominated by the Netherlanders in spite of all their Americanization and to the chagrin of many of the ‘real’ Americans.”

In his visit to America in 1921, Jacob Van Hines visited Holland Michigan and wrote, “How nicely all the houses are painted and especially the Churches, many of which remind me of the village churches in the Netherlands! This Dutch neatness is so evident that, as I drove through the northwestern areas of Iowa, through Sioux and Lyon counties, I could accurately ascertain which villages had been ‘conquered’ by our countrymen in the continuing process of further farmer colonization.”

The Dutch assimilation was unlike the usual experience of minority populations in the West. As Richard White states in his book on the American West, it was the Anglo American immigrants who had come as conquerors. They had pushed the Indian and Hispanic communities aside, stripping them of most of their resources and autonomy and shoving them toward the outskirts of the periphery of western life. As conquerors, these migrants had been free to reject or ignore most existing western institutions and customs. They had envisioned a West with little or no room for the life that had previously lived there. Anglo-Americans in the West felt free to impose their own language, government,

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27 Ibid,986
28 Ibid,986
economic organization, law and customs on their adopted land. In Lynden, the Dutch came after the Anglo-American and re-conquered the town and surrounding area to re-establish “a little bit of Holland” in the United States of America.

Ed Nelson, in his book entitled The History of Lynden, wrote that it took a while for the Dutch to take over because at first their numbers were too low. Also there was dissention amongst themselves— one need only to look at the number of versions of Reformed Churches, (sixteen to date) to see the conflict. He also thought it took the dying off of the early pioneers to take over completely. “The early settlers were a hardy group and too independent to be assimilated by anyone. As the Dutch presence grew they generally lived in accordance with the conditions set forth by their predecessors; the only difference being in their religious practices. In the early years, their numbers were not strong enough to dominate the practices of society at large.”

**TREES AND MUD**

Trees, both growing and fallen, played an important role in the development of Lynden. There so many trees that it was hard to explore or develop the area and in addition, it was the accumulation of fallen trees in the Nooksack River which made the river difficult to navigate and which created isolation and retarded the growth of the area. The earliest inhabitants of the area were fur trappers and miners. The miners were mostly single men who came to the area

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29 Richard White, It's Your Misfortune and None My Own a New History of the American West. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 181
on the merits of the Fraser Gold rush, but when that did not pan out as it did not for many, they turned to logging as a trade.

One can only try to imagine the landscape which “greeted” those early settlers as they approached the area by canoe. Trees loomed along the riverbed. Dense impenetrable forest impeded their progress as they chose a suitable site. First a clearing was established for a homestead. The cut timber would more than take care of the needs for construction of a domicile and outbuildings. Then an area must be bushwhacked for a garden patch where the sun would be able to penetrate. Many times this would be a distance from the homestead. Trees felled for this purpose would more than take care of the heating and cooking needs for several seasons. After this, trees became a curse.

The trees were so dense that Ed Edson wrote of taking a boat out into the middle of Weiser Lake, just to see the sunshine. In the books and letters of Edson, Phoebe Judson, and Emmet Hawley, all recount in great detail and implied satisfaction, the method for disposing of a tree by burning it down. Holes were bored in the trunk, fire was lit from within and the tree burned for days and eventually crumpled in a mound of ash. In many ways trees were like weeds, a nuisance to be dealt with.

Later on, the main street of Lynden had stumps in the middle which wagons and people negotiated around. City council minutes were filled with entreaties for

32 Phoebe Judson. A Pioneer’s Search for the Ideal Home (Bellingham: Union Printing Company, 1925)
33 Emmett Hawley Skgee Mus or Pioneer Days on the Nooksack. (Bellingham:Craftsman Press, 1945)
4 Lynden City Council Minutes
volunteers to help clear stumps out of the right-of-way. It was not until 1884 the Robinson Maltby saw mill was in business and in 1889 Enoch Hawley started a mill and gave it to his son, Emmet to run, that surplus trees had an actual purpose. The benefit of these mills was that land was being cleared, thus making it available for housing and agriculture. Additionally it provided jobs. When the Northern Pacific Railroad came to the Puget Sound, settlers began to move westward. Hopeful settlers came by boat from Seattle to Whatcom and traveled on muddy roads or on steamboats to the Nooksack Valley community. Many found employment in logging camps. The real estate announced the boom days of 1889. Lots were platted in the timber surrounding Lynden. The surveying and building pushed back the tangle of underbrush. Lots were bought and sold at a profit in a few days or weeks. Quickly built houses were surrounded by stumps.

It was because of the trees, or lack of them, the Dutch found a home in this area. After logging, much of the area became stump land. Some of the few people willing to do the hard work it took to clear out a stump field were the land hungry, hard working Dutch. It took more than one person to clear a field. Because of their large families and the communal spirit of their religious faith, the Dutch often worked together and helped one another clear the land. In addition to blasting and digging, teams of horse or oxen were used to haul the stumps out of the ground. Because of the work entailed, the land was cheap. Another attraction

for the Dutch was that Lynden had very much same longitude of Holland and they were able to grow many of the same crops they had raised in their home of origin.

After the trees came the mud. Perhaps because of the removal of trees, shrubs and groundcover, and the rainy climate, Lynden residents had to grapple with mud. Mud in the roads and pathways impeded travel. Some schools only operated for several months of the year because travel on muddy, rutted roads was so difficult.\(^\text{37}\) One use for the felled trees was to use them in the construction of corduroy roads. Logs were laid perpendicular to the roadway so wheeled vehicles would not sink so deeply into the muddy surface of the roadbed.

After the town was established, much of the city council minutes were taken up with discussion of how to deal with mud. Civilization brought long skirts and attractive footwear so wood planked sidewalks were in demand. The City Council grappled with requests for sidewalk repair and expansion. To illustrate the severity of the drainage problem, one of Edson’s letters describes how firefighters were able to fight the downtown fire of 1904 by forming a bucket brigade with the source of water being a three-foot deep puddle in the middle of Main Street.\(^\text{38}\)

**TWO TOWNS**

A rift slowly grew in community activities. It was as though the town had two divisions-- one Dutch, the other what the Dutch called “Americans”. For

\(^{36}\) Ibid, 35
business reasons they joined and cooperated, but the social and religious life were kept separate. 39

It wasn’t until the big influx in the 1930’s and 40’s of Midwestern Dutch that community relations became more strident. Some believe that Lynden’s already high moral atmosphere made it more welcoming to the very conservative sects of the Calvinist religion and attracted like-minded people looking for a conservative religious community to relocate. Ed Nelson stated in his book about Lynden that after World War II, the Dutch who relocated from from the mid-west were more intolerant than the new immigrants from The Netherlands. He attributed this to their having seen the results of intolerance in their native country with Hitler during the war. Whatever the reason, the town took on a more conservative and less tolerant atmosphere.

The Calvinist religious beliefs regarding dancing, alcohol, the separation of the sexes, to name a few, did impact the community at large, but it was the Sunday closing law which was most difficult for many old timers and non-Dutch to adhere to. Some fought it, but found that the business lost from Hollanders boycott during the week, did not make up for staying open on Sunday. In addition to the stores, it was frowned on to do any activity on Sunday. Non-Dutch who worked in their yards on Sundays were visited by their Dutch neighbors before or after one of their two church services for the day and told of their disapproval. If they owned a business in town they were told they would be boycotted if they continued. One person I interviewed told of being a child growing up in Lynden

38 Edson Papers, #9
39 Koert,50
and being stopped on the street on a Sunday and told it was a sin for him to be whistling!  

A very common complaint heard from people who grew up in Lynden during this time was what they viewed as hypocrisy of the dual role the Hollanders played; tough businessman during the week and pious, devout Christian on Sunday. People complained that they could talk to Hollanders during the week, but on Sunday, you didn’t know them and they didn’t know you.  

Ed Nelson expressed a feeling many non-Dutch felt about turn their community had taken,

“\text{In the Frontier days people worked together, thus making life bearable; all prospered to some degree. When the Dutch arrived, they brought with them their concept of close knit community, one made up of their own people and their strong Calvinist religious beliefs. There were strong ties and incentives to stay within the group. This was not always the case with other settlers in early Lynden, such as the English and Scandinavian, who had more of the frontier mentality which is associated with the settling of our country.}”.  

CONTEMPORARY DUTCH INFLUENCE

In Lynden today, 54% of the residents are of Dutch descent, with many more residing in the outlying area. In 1990, the population of Lynden was 4,690 with the town covering 1,750 acres. The town boasted twelve restaurants (none open on Sunday), two inns, one motel and sixteen churches. Nine of the

\footnotesize{\text{40 Interview Jim Edson Nov. 24, 1998}}

\footnotesize{\text{41 Nelson, 71}}
churches were in the reformed tradition established by the Dutch settlers, five
Christian Reformed, two Reformed one Netherlands Reformed and one
Predestinate Reformed, two Baptist, a Methodist, a Lutheran, an Assembly of
God, a Nazarene and a Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{43}

The Hollanders influence in municipal affairs has increased. Past minutes
of the Lynden City council meetings, revealed examples of Hollanders attempts
to change municipal laws. Some examples: in 1913, several ministers tried to get
the movie theatre to be shut down.\textsuperscript{44} In 1961 there was a motion to close the City
swimming pool on Sunday (that motion was tabled)\textsuperscript{45} On Dec.19, 1960, tavern
owners requested that they be allowed to stay open past midnight on New Years
Eve (Sat) to Sunday. The request was denied \textsuperscript{46}

Perhaps nothing exemplifies so well the impact of the Hollanders on present
day Lynden than the infamous Drinking and Dancing ban which took place in
1981. The mayor and city council, mostly Hollanders, rammed through an
ordinance that prohibited alcoholic beverages and dancing to occur in the same
building. The ordinance and the method of passage so enraged the usually mild-
mannered editor of The Lynden Tribune, William Lewis, he wrote one of the only
negative editorials in his 45 years at the paper. He entitled the article The Holy
City. In it, he said “… most people are aware of the taboos of the various church
denominations against dancing, at one time movies, and drinking of alcohol. The
fifty per cent of the population who do not subscribe wholeheartedly to these

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid,103
\textsuperscript{43} Koert, 55
\textsuperscript{44} Lynden City Council Minutes. October 6, 1913
\textsuperscript{45} Lynden City Council Minutes. May 1, 1961
prohibitions mostly respect their stricter neighbors and have always been tolerant.” He went on to say that a former reporter had informed him that he planned on writing a book about Lynden which he was going to entitle “Thou Shalt Not.” Interviewing the editor 18 years after this incident, he still felt saddened by this rift in his lifelong community. Lewis had spent his life trying to appease and bring together the two factions within his town. In the end he said he felt betrayed.47 He ended his editorial, “Are the kids disappointed in their elders in the “holy city?” Do they want to get out as soon as possible? Aren’t there a lot of disillusioned adults who would go with them if they could? Is this America or Nazi Germany or Russia? Is the whole world out of step but Lynden?”

48 Lewis now spends one half of the year in California and has moved his permanent residence to the larger city of Bellingham, 16 miles from Lynden.

The story gained national attention when it was published in The Wall Street Journal. They wrote, “Lynden, population 4,000 hardly looks like a place that has to worry about lawbreaking. A sober and immaculate town at the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, it was shaped by Dutch Calvinist Dairy farmers, whose thrift and industry brought prosperity. Storefronts wear Dutch tulip and wooden clog motifs, and a pious populace supports 16 churches. Their worshippers, according to Rilpey’s ‘Believe It or Not,’ triple the town population on Sundays.”49

CONCLUSION

46 Nelson,163
47 Interview William Lewis. Palm Springs March 17, 1999
48 Editorial, Lynden Tribune, 18 March 1981
The tone of morality in Lynden was set by the earliest pioneers, particularly Phoebe and Holden Judson. They encouraged like-minded individuals to join them in their “ideal home.” Whether it was the moral tone or the agricultural nature of the area which was most influential in attracting Dutch settlement is undetermined, but the Dutch did come to Lynden and provided a second contributing moral factor. In the early 1900’s, when they assimilated and contributed to the already existing tone, and later in the 1930’s and 1940’s, when the more strident and conservative group arrived they influenced the town. The combination of the “changing of the guard,” whereby the older pioneers faded away and the strength of the new generation made Lynden even more conservative. Because of the concentration of Dutch population with their exclusivity of school and church they soon came to dominate life in Lynden. This moral tone has attracted even more like-minded people to resettle in Lynden. These historical events are the most important reason Lynden is the conservative, religious community it is, and will probably remain so for many years to come.

ED EDSON

CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY LIFE

Ed Edson was born in Hancock County Iowa on August 30, 1860 to Gardner and Ellen Edson. Around 1870, the family put their belongings in a covered wagon and moved to the very edge of the frontier, which was then Kansas. They claimed their 160 acres under the Homestead Act, built a sod

49 “The Beat Goes On, But Lynden Washington is Sitting This One Out”, The Wall Street Journal, 6 July
house and commenced farming. Even the best farmers were barely turning a profit in Kansas, and Edson freely admitted that he was not one of the best, so in 1882, after the death of his father, he struck out for California.

As was the story of many fortune seekers, things did not ‘pan out’, and through a series of odd jobs and acquaintances, Edson made his way to Washington State. He arrived in Whatcom (which is now Bellingham) in 1883. He lived in Whatcom for five years where he held a variety of jobs. While in Whatcom, Ed apprenticed as a pharmacist in a drug store owned by his brother-in-law, H.A. White. Edson first saw Lynden in 1883 when he served on a survey crew sent to map out the town. In 1888 Edson returned to Lynden Washington, bought an existing drug store from F.S. Wright and operated the City Drug Store for the next 55 years.

**FAMILY**

In 1890 Edson married Mary Hamburg. They had two children, Agnes and Gale. Phoebe Judson, the woman considered the ‘mother of Lynden’ was the midwife present at Gale’s birth. The family lived in a house on the northeast corner of Grover and Eighth Street.

The marriage lasted only eight years. Mary left their two small children with Edson in 1898 and moved back to Seattle. Family history has it that she left a note on the kitchen table which said simply, “I’m tired of dancing with Indians”. The divorce papers were finalized in 1902.\(^{50}\)

\(^{50}\) Ed Edson Papers. Mollie Edson’s Basement. Ellensburg. #51
Edson’s mother, Ellen, who had come out West about the same time as Edson and his older sister Jessie, moved in with Edson and the two children. She lived in the family home and then in the apartment atop the drug store when it was built in 1909, until Edson remarried. In 1920, at the age of 60, Ed married Lelah Jackson Edson. Lelah had been a schoolteacher and a student of local history. She had lived in Bellingham before marrying Edson and moving to Lynden. Lelah was known for her lectures on local history and in 1951, published The Fourth Corner, a book about the history of Whatcom County. Edson built a new house for his bride in 1920, located on the corner of Fifth and Edson Streets.

In 1921, Edson’s son, Gale, married Etta Kampen and moved into the apartment above the drug store and began a partnership with his father. Gale had received his degree in Pharmacy from the University of Washington in 1919. Gale’s schooling had been interrupted by World War I, where he served in the ambulance corps in France and Italy for two years. He relived the horrors of that experience for the rest of his life.

Ed’s daughter Agnes was sent to Tacoma to Annie Wright Boarding School in 1905 for high school. She later married Owen Hadley and lived in Tacoma. Agnes and her father carried on a correspondence that is also included in this CD-ROM.

Edson was an uncommonly tall man, over six foot four, and very trim and fit. In his letters he discussed his regimen for staying in shape and maintaining his weight at 190 lbs. He was quite conscious of his looks and to view pictures and comments in the newspaper, he was a snappy dresser. In several of letters
written by his wife Lelah, she talked of the difficulty in locating the old-fashioned, high, stiff-collared shirts he preferred. In a letter written after Edson’s death, she mentioned his extensive hat and vest collection which she intended to donate to the local drama club.

Edson enjoyed physical labor and found it difficult to stay put in the store for as many hours as the job required. He wrote of closing the store in the evening and walking the 16 miles to Bellingham for band practice. He was often seen at the fair grounds after work, clearing stumps from the arena area. William Lewis, editor of the Lynden Tribune and long-time resident of Lynden, had a summer cabin on the same beach as the Edsons’. He recalled a childhood vision of the large, graceful man raking seaweed off the tideflats at Knapps Bluff early on summer mornings so the children would have a clear, sandy beach to play on throughout the day.①

THE DRUG STORE AND OTHER BUSINESS VENTURES

The City Drug Store was where Edson spent the better part of his day. He kept the store open from 9 to 9 six days a week and half the day on Sunday.② Edson’s first store which he purchased on 1891, was in a building which adjoined the Lynden Department Store. As Ed wrote, “when I came to Lynden, I bought not only the store but the owners household goods also. He

① Interview William Lewis April 17, 1999. Palm Springs California
lived in rooms in the back of the store. As they walked out, we walked in.”

In 1902, Edson moved to a building located where the Dyk building was later built. At this location he established Lynden’s first soda fountain. In 1909, three businessmen collaborated and built a building with adjoining walls. Edson’s store was located in the center building. Each proprietor worked on his own building, where Edson’s carpentry skill must have come in handy. The total cost of the building was $3,100. Edson was always dreaming up new and more exotic things for the store to carry. In addition to the soda fountain, china, jewelry and wallpaper were also part of his advertised merchandise. One of the eccentricities of his store was a collection of stuffed owls, pheasants and songbirds that were perched high above the glycerin, cough syrups and cold creams. As far away as Montana, men asked each other, “if they’d seen the collection of stuffed birds in that drug store in Lynden?” (The birds are now part of a permanent collection on display at the Whatcom Museum History of Art)

OTHER BUSINESS VENTURES

In addition to the drug store, Edson had other business ventures. He and William “Billy” Waples started the Electric and Shingle Company in 1903. Waples was quoted as saying that no party in Lynden could go on past midnight because that was when our plant shut down. Edson sold his share to Waples in 1909 and Waples later sold the company to the city of Lynden and it became part of Puget Power. Edson was on the founding board of the Farmers Mutual Telephone Company. The company was described in 1926 as an “old,

53 Ed Edson Papers, #9
efficient association of citizens which is an interesting demonstration of the cooperative spirit and convictions of the rural producers of Whatcom County, and certainly a convincing example of their business ability. “

Edson also served as the town dentist and/or doctor when the need arose. In his autobiography, Skgee Mus, Emmet Hawley told a tale of how Hawley had purchased a pair of forceps from the Sears and Roebuck catalog and for several years served as the town dentist. “When Ed Edson opened his store in 1891, I figured he could give as good, if not better service than I, so I turned the business, forceps and all, over to him, and he continued the good work until the arrival of Lyndens first dentist, Dr, Wilbur”. He also did his share of “doctoring” particularly in emergencies. Edson wrote, “ In 1899 I think it was, our only doctor and a dentist of sorts got the Klondike fever and nothing would do but to join the rush to Alaska. Before he went he handed me the keys to his office …” Edson wrote of a “chap came in who said he’d been kicked on the chin by a horse. There was no reason to doubt it from the looks of him only it seemed queer that such a blow hadn’t knocked his head off or at least unjoined his neck or broken his jaw though it had done neither one” Ed laid the man on a table of the drugstore, administered chloroform, and sewed up his mangled face. The doctoring incident which received the most notoriety occurred when the film projector at the movie house caught on fire and the operator was badly burned in

54 William Lewis, …At Deadline, 70 Years On Front Street (Lynden: The Lynden News Tribune, 1991) 40
55 Lottie Roeder Roth. A History of Whatcom County (Chicago: Pioneer Publishing Company, 1926) 617
56 Emmett Hawley. Skgee Mus, 98
57 Ed Edson Papers, #9
58 Edson Papers, #5 and #9
59 Ibid
front of a packed house. They carried the injured man to the drug store where Edson and his son Gale dunked his hands into a vat of ice cold water. This was an unfamiliar procedure to most of the moviegoers who thronged outside the drugstore, and when the film projectionist recovered in rapid time, Edson was hailed as a hero.60

By dint of a little experimentation and a lot of time on his hands in the early days, Edson taught himself about clocks and watches. He became the town watch and clock repair person as well as the towns bicycle repairman. 61

CIVIC DUTIES

In addition to business ventures, Edson kept busy with public service. He served as Lynden’s mayor three different times for a total of fourteen years. He was Lynden’s second mayor in 1896 (second only to Holden Judson, one of the town founders) In that election he won by a vote of 24 to 1762. He served again from 1918 to 1926, when he was ousted by Walter Pixley, a man purported to have KKK sympathies. He served another four-year term in 1936, at the age the age of 76.

In addition to his terms as mayor, in 1902 he was listed as a candidate on the “citizens ticket” which beat the “anti-saloon ticket” with 100 votes polled and served as the town’s treasurer. 63 Edson’s name also appears in newspaper

60 William Lewis, 99
61 Edson Papers,#9
62 Lynden City Council Minutes, Lynden City Hall. June 1,1895
63 Pacific Pilot December 4, 1902
accounts of an infamous period in Lynden's history when there were two mayors and two city councils operating and claiming legitimacy at the same time. This brouhaha occurred in 1906 and once again revolved around the divisive issue of liquor. The “wets” and the “drys” had a disagreement as to caucuses and filing dates, which led each to believe that their ticket had prevailed. The Washington State Supreme Court later settled this case, but not before the doors of City Hall were battered down by the rival council members and the mayor had been arrested. Edson's name was listed on the “businessman’s ticket” as opposed to the “anti-saloon ticket”.  

Edson served on the school board at an important juncture and was involved in siting and overseeing the building of Lynden High School. This was an accomplishment which Edson considered one of his civic responsibilities of which he was most proud. When coupled with the fact that his son graduated from the school in 1916, there may have been civic as well as familial pride involved.

In 1911, Edson was the first president of the newly formed Whatcom County Fair Board. This was an opportunity for the community to gather, show their wares and have a good time. Horse racing and dancing were the favored attractions in those early days, but were considered controversial as the community became more conservative. The Fair always ran on a shoestring and the records show a certain amount of insolvency as well as inefficiency.  

A letter written by Edson’s wife, Lelah, recounts a story told to her by an out of town

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64 Ed Nelson The History of Lynden (Lynden: Tribune Publishing, 1995) 129
acquaintance. He had been a member of a group who arrived at the fair grounds to participate in a scheduled horse race, only to find that there was not enough money in the till for the purse. As was the case in so many instances, when Ed learned of the deficiency, put up the money for the purse out of his own pocket.66

Edson was an active member of the volunteer fire department. Accounts in history books and in Edson’s own letters tell the story of the BIG fire which threatened to destroy the downtown. Ed decided that keeping the tailor shop from burning was the key to saving the entire block. For several hours he stationed himself next to the tailor shop splashing water on the building from a tub fed by a bucket brigade whose source of water was a large mud puddle in the street. The fire was extremely hot and Ed wrote, “whenever I would get to smoking so I would seem in danger of bursting into a blaze I would have one of them throw his bucket on me instead of the tub.”67

SOCIAL LIFE AND HOBBIES
MUSIC

Edson was a talented singer and musician. He was also a bit of a ‘ham’ and performed in dramatic presentations as well as musical talent shows. He had a deep baritone voice and also played the tuba in the community band. Unconfirmed reports were that tuba playing brought Edson to Whatcom in the first place. He had been working in Wyoming when he received a letter from his

brother-in-law, Henry White, who wrote and told him they needed a tuba player for their newly organized community band. He told Edson that they would send him travel money if he would agree to come to Whatcom and join the band. Ed agreed, found an old tuba and began practicing…he had never played before in his life! 68 The band’s first public appearance was in November 1884 at the Washington Hotel on Division Street in Whatcom. 69 The band was needed for many outlying communities celebrations and members were willing to travel to these gatherings as well as fill in gaps in other towns' bands. Ed writes of walking to Mt. Vernon, about 25 miles away, to fill in for an ill tuba player. 70. Edson enjoyed singing in the Methodist Church choir until a new minister came to town and insisted that the choir members be “believers”. At that time Ed and two other members were compelled to resign. He found another outlet for his singing in a troupe called the “Sunflower Minstrel Show.” The name Sunflower was adopted because many of the members were originally from Kansas. They performed all around the Whatcom, Lynden and Sehome area. The troupe traveled by steamboat and members chopped, felled, skidded and loaded the firewood needed by the ship for these voyages. “Several trips with horse-drawn sled were necessary to supply enough wood for one round trip by the steamer. However, the young minstrel singers felt that the concerts and shows were worth the effort. Years of popularity proved that the public felt the same way.” 71 In

66 Ed Edson Papers, #69
67 Ed Edson Papers, #5
68 Interview Jim Edson March 17, 1998
69 Lelah Jackson Edson, The Fourth Corner (Bellingham: Cox Brothers Publishing, 1951) 216
70 Ed Edson Papers #52
71 Lelah Jackson Edson, 218
writing of the groups and organizations that rented a community hall owned by Emmet Hawley he recounted, “Now and then there would be a home talent show of exceedingly high quality. In these home talent shows Ed Edson and Jack Gale were usually among the leading characters, and a mighty good job they did of it too”.

Music continued to play an important part in Edson’s life in later years. “I believe the keenest enjoyment I have is in listening to music over the radio...When I listen to the “concord of sweet sounds’ that come from some of the better orchestras I grow hopeful that an animal that has progressed far enough to do such things may, if he doesn’t exterminate himself in the meantime, eventually become civilized.”

**CLAM DIGGERS**

One of Edson’s most long lasting contributions to the community was the establishment of the Clam Diggers Club. According to an article written by Edson and recounted in Emmett Hawleys book, Skgee Mus, the idea of a community clam feed and lecture series, began in the winter of 1891-1892. A lecturer had come to the town of Lynden and mentioned having visited a town where a communal meal preceded a lecture. “From his description it sounded so good, that we decided to do likewise.” They formed a committee consisting of various members of the community who “volunteered to get the clams, which involved a two days’ trip to Birch Bay in order to be there at the right stage of the tide which was about 2 a.m..” The group brushed away snow on the beach, started a campfire and waited for low tide. They then slogged out with shovels,

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72 Emmet Hawley, 143
73 Ed Edson Papers, #41
lanterns and gunnysacks and dug clam until the incoming tide drove them back. They hiked back to Lynden and prepared a community clambake the next evening. This was held in the Judson Opera house and was such a grand success that it was decided to do it again. They held this public meal for five years and then it became too much to feed everyone, so it was dropped. In 1909 it was resurrected, only this time there was a limited membership. In order to belong to the Clam Digger Club, one must have been a resident of Washington State before it gained statehood. The date of the annual dinner was set for November 11th, the date of the state’s admission to the United States. This limited the number of participants and, it should be noted, effectively eliminated the attendance of Hollanders. The Clam Diggers Club still holds its annual dinner in Lynden on November 11th. Edson referred to addressing the group several times. His letters include the text of one presentation made on the subject of “spooks”. 74

Edson was an outdoorsman. His scrapbook reveals photos of hikes taken throughout the Mt. Baker vicinity. There is a reference to an Edson who climbed to the top of Mt. Baker, but since there was another man named Edson who lived in Bellingham at the time it is not possible to confirm it was Ed. He wrote to George Burr that he had climbed to the top of Mt. Constitution, on Orcas Island three times. He also had a passion for motorcycles that he passed on to his son Gale. The Lynden Tribune announced that Ed. Edson and Dr. Mulder took their motorcycles out for the first ride of the spring in April 1906. According to his son, Edson rode his motorcycle to California in the summer of 1917. His letters

74 Ed Edson Papers, #59
include one of his few attempts at narrative, in a tale of a five day sailing trip with eight other young people around the San Juan Islands. In his later years, Edson contented himself with carpentry and constructing elaborate wind whirligigs and kites. He described them in detail in letter These hand carved, hand painted carousels decorated his yard and provided pleasure for Edson and his neighbors. He wrote of donating them to the “new” museum in Bellingham. Ed had a curiosity about the wind and once sent a wind-powered invention to the department of defense during WWII as a possible solution to the energy shortage.

**WRITER AND READER**

Edson was a reader and a writer. A complete bibliography of the books and articles to which he refers in his letters is included in the The Historian’s Companion in this CD-ROM. His love of books and knowledge were noted in several biographies which referred to him. Sol Lewis, publisher of the *Lynden Tribune* wrote in an editorial on the day of Edson’s death, “…A great reader, although he had no college degree he was as well educated as any professor who ever visited the town.” In 1926, Lottie Roeder Roth, History of Whatcom County, the description of Edson concluded, “It is not practicable to mention Mr. Edson’s political and religious beliefs, as they are constantly being modified by what seems to be further knowledge. He feels that his sincere and unalterable opposition to war and militarism in any guise is a more worthwhile service to

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75 Edson Papers, #80
76 Edson Papers, #9
77 Edson Papers, #56
78 *Lynden Tribune*, Editorial October 21, 1987
society than any other with which he might be credited". He and George Burr nearly always enclosed clippings from newspapers and magazines in their letters. They also suggested reading materials and sent books back and forth via the mail.

In addition to the correspondence with Burr, Edson wrote regularly to his daughter Agnes in Tacoma. He wrote Letters-to-the-Editor, both in his own name and under the assumed name of T.D. Reiser. (He came up with this pen name by taking the name of a popular author, Theodore Dreiser, and changing it to T.D. Reiser). “I do not care to proclaim my several very unorthodox views over or under my own name except to a very carefully selected and very limited audience. When the impulse becomes overpowering to rush into print I hide behind Mr. Theodore Dreiser” He wrote these anonymous letters to the Bellingham Herald and the Seattle PI and referred to them in his letters to Burr as, “T.D.Reiser strikes again”. Unfortunately, I have found no way to trace these letters and have only one or two examples in the correspondence.

He tried his hand at narrative and poetry and wrote lectures for the Hobby Club and Clamdiggers his autobiography and his invention for wind power.

A complete text of Ed Edson’s autobiography can be found in the LETTERS section of this CD-ROM

79 Roth, 708
80 Edson Papers, #47
81 Edson Papers, #80
82 Edson Papers, #57
83 Edson Papers, #58 and #59
84 Edson Papers, #1
85 Edson Papers, #28
ED VS. HOLLANDERS
A look at Calvinism, which is the basis of the Dutch Reformed Church, revealed a surprising similarity between the Church’s underlying belief and Ed Edson’s ideal. The dissimilarity lies in the motivation for the outward behavior.

In a manner unequaled by any other reformer, Calvin emphasized that the main point of Christian faith was unconditional obedience to the will of God, ethical deeds, discipline and the fulfillment of duty. Not so much by personal sanctification, but by work and the moderate use of the goods of this world, by devotion to one’s neighbor and by unceasing service for the community could one become closer to God. Unfortunately, in Lynden, the community to which the Dutch were called upon to serve mostly included their own kind. A common complaint was that although they expected all to adhere to their discipline, they worked amongst themselves and excluded non-believers.

Ironically, Edson shared many of the basic tenets of the Calvinist faith. He too, was very rigid; in his diet, work ethic and sense of service for the good of the whole community. He believed in using the earth’s resources sparingly and in only taking what one needed. Unlike the Dutch Reformed parishioner, he lacked the theological mandate. He put his faith in government and in the higher calling of the intelligent human being to provide the basis for the commonwealth. He sought the solution in socialism.

There are several reasons to speculate why Edson hid his convictions and did not feel included in the world of Calvinism and the Dutch Reformed Church. Some were outward circumstances, such as his divorce and occupation, others
had to do with his view of himself and the world around him: his religion and politics.
The particulars of the divorce of Ed and Mary are unclear. But if the story of Mary being tired of dancing with Indians is true and her subsequent marriages have any bearing, it appeared **Mary Hamberg enjoyed her creature comforts.** After remarrying, she lived on the top floor of the Sherwood Apartment Building in downtown Seattle with her third husband, Guy Sherwood. He ran the Crystal Pool, which was a high-class swimming and bathing facility in downtown Seattle. The photos of Mary show her dressed in furs and elaborate hats. As a child I remember her drooping earlobes, this she explained, was due to wearing heavy diamond earrings. Her sister, Agnes Nations, was a painter of some note who traveled often in Europe. Agnes occupied the entire top floor of a hotel in Pasadena, which was filled with antiques and works of art. If it can be inferred that these are indications of a woman exposed to and desirous of fine things, it makes sense that Mary Hamberg Edson decided to get out of the little conservative town of Lynden while the getting was good. The repercussions of her abandonment on Edson, who remained in Lynden to raise two small children were most probably negative.

Divorce was verboden in the Dutch Reformed Church. The minister and counselor were sent out to families with marriage difficulties with strict orders to save the marriage. Even in cases of spousal abuse. Their denunciation of the male partner was almost as vehement as upon the woman.\(^86\) Therefore in the

eyes of the Dutch Reformed, Ed would be looked upon as a man who was unable to control his wife.

Owning a drug store had its problems. First of all, Ed kept the store open from 9 to 9 six days a week. Although they respected hearty work ethic, the Dutch also valued the family. The male was the head of the household physically and spiritually, and as such was expected to conduct evening Bible readings and teaching and disciplining of children. It would appear to the Dutch that Ed was not available for his children in this role. Even more egregious would have been Ed's insistence on having the store open half-day on Sunday. The Dutch strictly adhered to no work on Sunday.

In addition to the hours and the problems they entailed, there was the matter of the merchandise carried in a drug store. In addition to medicine, which had its suspicions, Ed also sold alcohol. Not only the Dutch, but also many of the early settlers, including Phoebe Judson, frowned upon the use and sale of alcoholic beverage. There were also cosmetic items in the store which were not considered 'necessary' by the strict Calvinists. In 1909, when Ed opened the first soda fountain, it was more than likely viewed as a frivolous activity. He also sold jewelry, china, and other luxury items which would be considered nonessential and therefore sinful.

Another attribute of the Dutch Reformed Church was the resolve to never draw attention to oneself. They acted and dressed in a manner that exhibited no individuality, a stark contrast to Edson's style. First of all he was

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87 Koert, 80
extraordinarily tall, it was difficult for a man six foot four to go unnoticed at the
turn of the century. Edson obviously played it up. He always dressed formally in a
high-collared shirt and tie. He had a collection of vests and hats which were later
donated to a local drama club after his death.\textsuperscript{89} He participated in every play,
choral group, lecture series, vaudeville show, talent show, band concert he could
fit into his schedule. He loved to perform. Then there was the issue of fast horses
and cars. He was often sighted riding his motorcycle through town, he was also
one of the first residents to own an \textit{automobile}. He built what was considered a
large ostentatious house on the corner of 5\textsuperscript{th} and EDSON streets, another
conceit.

Edson rarely shared his religious beliefs outside of his letters to Lawrie,
but his outward life told volumes. He kept his store open on Sunday, so he
obviously was not at church. He once sang in the Methodist church choir, but quit
when the new minister insisted that the choir members be ‘believers’. Edson
once gave a speech to something called The Hobby Club on one of his favorite
topics, “Spooks”.\textsuperscript{90} He also mentioned giving the same address to the
Clamdiggers Club. Strict Calvinists would not appreciate this proclivity to believe
in spirits and the belief in speaking to the dead. Edson also wrote about evenings
spent with friends around the Ouji board. An activity which, to the Dutch, would
be sinful.

Politically, it would seem there was not much in Edson’s outward life that
Hollanders did not approve or else he would not have been elected mayor three

\textsuperscript{88} Jacob Van Hines, \textit{Netherlanders in America}. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985)123
\textsuperscript{89} Edson Papers, #69
separate times for a total of fourteen years. There appeared to be only two major
issues which caused townsfolk to find fault with Ed Edson's outward politics.
Prohibition, the 'wet' v 'dry' issue, was debated throughout the U.S and in this,
Lynden was no exception. Lynden was dry long before the State was admitted
into the Union. It was not until 1903 that the first liquor license was issued in
Lynden and there was great debate even then. The municipal elections in the
early 1900's most always revolved around the issue of alcohol and a 'wet' vs.
'dry' ticket.

The other political issue was the KKK. In one of his letters, Edson
mentioned the KKK had taken over a service at the Methodist Church one
Sunday morning. 91 Gale Edson, his son, wrote a letter-to-the-editor in which he
said that his dad was kicked out of city hall because of the KKK.92 Ed did lose an
election in 1926 to a man named Walter Pixley whom William Lewis, publisher of
the Lynden Tribune, confirmed had KKK ties. But other than the fact that the KKK
rented the fairgrounds in 1926 for a fourth of July fireworks display, there is no
concrete evidence of their activity or against whom their activity was directed. Ed
Nelson in his book, A History of Lynden, implied that the activity was directed
against the Hollanders. He reasoned that they had bought up all the good
farmland and it could “give rise to envy and jealousy and a desire to put the
newcomers in their place”. 93 Nelson also wrote that there had been a reference

90 Edson Papers,#59
91 Edson Papers, #36
92 Lynden Tribune, Letter to the Editor, by Gale Edson. Wednesday, March 25, 1981
93 Nelson,71
to Klan activity against Hollanders in Iowa in a book by Jacob Van Hinte.\textsuperscript{94} I ran this by several old-time residents. They believed any Klan activity was more likely to include Hollanders and to be directed against Catholics. This explanation seemed more likely particularly since Calvinism had such a tradition of antagonism toward Catholicism and in light of the fact that Al Smith, a Catholic, was running for President of the United States. There was not much more reference to the Klan after 1927.

In conclusion, there does not appear to be much in the record of outward political unacceptability of Edson. This in itself is a lesson. To look at the outward life of Ed Edson and the many foibles which might cause townsfolk to disapprove, they continued to vote for and elect him to represent them as their Mayor. Apparently they did not ask him personal questions about his politics, religion or personal life. It appeared it was sufficient that he was honest, got the sewer system built on time and within budget and had the best interest of the community at heart. His public service and his private life were separate.

At a time in our political and social development where we think it necessary to unmercifully question prospective politicians about their religious beliefs, their personal business dealings and their private activities with family and friends, we could definitely learn a lesson from Lynden and Ed Edson.

**EDSON AND SOCIALISM**

The early socialist movement in Washington State was so closely tied to the Populist movement that it was not until the collapse of the Populist Party in Washington in the 1898 election that socialism became much of a factor.

\textsuperscript{94} Van Hinte, 70
Historian Carlos Schwantes surmised that the national Socialist movement was so strident in its demands that it enraged and antagonized moderate trade union leaders. But it can be argued that because the concerns of labor were being addressed by the Populist Party up until its decline, that there was no reason to embrace the Socialist philosophy. Whatever the reason, after the Populist Party failed, socialism began to take hold in the Pacific Northwest bolstered by a large number of former members of the Populist Party.95

Three very different groups embraced the socialist movement for very different reasons. Farmers in the Pacific Northwest particularly eastern Washington farmers with one cash crop, wheat, experienced the frustration of fluctuating and overpriced rail rates. Historian Hofstadter wrote that areas with one staple crop farming, that were dependent on an export market, with transportation problems, were ripe for socialism 96

The second major group was labor. Extractive industries in the Pacific Northwest necessitated a cheap and abundant labor pool. Conditions in the timber and mining industry were dangerous and exploitive. Schwantes wrote that the predominance of this manual labor, non-factory, work force gave the Pacific Northwest a unique stronghold for the radical International Workers of the World (IWW).97 It was the fear of this more radical and sometimes violent faction of the Socialist Party which turned many away from Party participation. The activities of the IWW partially precipitated the anti labor backlash which occurred in Washington in the 1920’s. The third group to participate and embrace socialist

95 Schwantes
96 Hofstadter, 99
politics in the Pacific Northwest was made up of those who flocked to the area with idealistic dreams for the future of socialism.

One of the most interesting manifestations of early socialism in the Pacific Northwest was the idea of communitarian experiments. In the late 1890's and early 1900's several examples of communes or "Utopias" began in Washington State. They had positive, hopeful names like, Equality, Home, Freeland. Equality (based on the name of the 1889 published work by Edward Bellamy) was actually started with the express intent of socializing the entire State of Washington.\footnote{Carlos Schwantes, The Pacific Northwest (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) 355} Others merely wished to live a life based on the value of work without ties to money. These utopias did not go unnoticed and although their failure seemed inevitable, they should not be dismissed. One of the few areas upon which all socialists could agree was that one of the main objectives of socialism was to educate. Not only did the Utopias attract and educate their members, but their exploits and success were widely publicized in the many Socialist journals of the time. They may not have accomplished their lofty goal of socializing the State of Washington, but they may well have made Washington more receptive to the radical and progressive ideas that soon flooded the state.

**Socialism in Lynden**

Several of the Pacific Northwest communes were located in Whatcom County. One was located in Bellingham and one in Bow-Edison, just a few miles from Lynden, but as Ed Edson's letters and newspaper accounts of the
time reveal, there was some interest, but little support for socialism in Lynden. In 1906 there was an article announcing the arrival of Edna Fisher, a noted socialist, to make a speech at the Judson Opera House. Edson mentioned in one letter he had heard Ms. Fisher speak. Because organized labor was one of the primary sources of support for socialism in the rest of the country and the State, perhaps it was Lynden’s lack of industry and organized labor which accounted for the failure to gain support for socialism. The timber industry would have been the logical base of support and would have provided members from labor. However, because timber never materialized as an industry in Lynden, organized labor was not a factor. The director of the Lynden Pioneer Museum, Troy Lungbill, said 1902 was the peak of the timber and mill industry in the Lynden area and was soon replaced by Dutch farmers and dairymen. Agricultural producers with varied crops and the need for seasonal labor, and the Dutch opposition to organizations devoted to organizing labor, all participated in negating labor as a factor in promoting socialism in Lynden. Thus, the height of the labor movement from 1910-1920’s, in Washington State passed by the Lynden area.

   After the World War I, the interest in the progressive reforms which the socialists and reform minded political parties had advocated came to an abrupt halt. Progressivism was rooted in the idea that humankind could better the situation for all. The underpinning of the movement was that humans were
good. The atrocities and reality of the gruesome war knocked the enthusiasm out of the reformers and sparked an economy of selfishness. In addition, there was a backlash against any and all who did not participate in or support the war effort. Schwantes wrote, “Wartime zealotry and a spirit of conformity spread across the Pacific Northwest… Reformers were now denounced as boat rockers. Radicals and non-conformists who identified with organizations like the Socialist Party and the IWW were singled out for special punishment.”

Richard Lingeman describes this shift toward conservatism in his book, *Small Town America*. The new found business ethic made small towns such as Lynden supporters of business and the Republican Party in the 1920’s. In addition to politics, small towns became morally conservative. Lingeman writes, “Small town morality came to mean not a possible humanization of social Darwinism and opposition to business monopolies but rather the narrow morality commonly characterized by the terms ‘puritanical’ and ‘bluenose’. The town came to stand for opposition to Reds, radicals, labor unions, foreigners and immigration, saloons and liquor, Catholics and to some extent Jews—all ills of the big city.”

Lynden was indicative of this conservative provincialism. An indication of the area residents aversion to organized labor is illustrated in the support for the KKK in Lynden. Edson mentioned in a letter dated 1938, that “…I got all the optimism knocked out of me 10-12 years ago when this town went K.K.K. I would have said it was the least likely to do but that for all that they captured

102 Schwantes, 354
the town government, were received in the Methodist Church in full regalia and had everything their own way. To be sure it only lasted for a couple of years and you couldn’t find one here now, but it goes to show that anything ‘Can Happen Here’ or anywhere.”

Although it was thought that the candidacy of Al Smith for President and an anti-Catholic movement that had initially sparked interest in the KKK, the movement had an underlying anti-labor sentiment as well. Lynden hosted its largest gatherings ever and one of the largest Klan gatherings in the State in September 1925. It was estimated that 25,000 gathered at the fairgrounds in Lynden for a statewide meeting.

Voting records for Lynden mirror the nation’s early interest in socialism. In 1912, locally, Eugene Debs received 58 votes, compared to Roosevelt’s 132 votes, Wilson’s 62 votes and 18 votes for Taft. By 1936, as with the rest of the country, the support for the socialist ticket had waned. Roosevelt received 334 votes, Landon received 261 and the Socialist ticket received 13 votes. Ed Edson, the mayor of Lynden would have been one of those 13 votes. Edson wrote in 1940, “I haven’t been a member of any party for more than 30 years though I usually vote the head of the Socialist ticket just to keep my self respect.”

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104 Edson Papers, #36
105 Lynden Tribune, Thursday October 22, 1936
106 Interview Troy Lugninbill, March 1999
107 Lynden Tribune, Thursday September 17, 1925 and September 24, 1925 and October 1, 1925
108 Lynden Tribune, Thursday, November 7, 1912
109 Lynden Tribune, Thursday, November 5, 1936
110 Edson Papers, #19
**Edson the Socialist**

Perhaps because of the provincialism and anti-reform sentiment, Edson's public life and private thoughts were quite different. For various reasons he did not feel comfortable sharing his ideals with most of the residents of his hometown. Even though he kept his thoughts about politics mostly private, several incidents and actions reveal his belief in the basic tenets of his socialistic political belief. As with most politicians, there were newspaper accounts of Edson performing routine tasks as Mayor that must have flown in the face of his private beliefs. Presiding over a war memorial celebration must have left this avowed pacifist with a certain disquietude. While there were newspaper accounts of this type of inconsistency, there was evidence of numerous activities and actions taken by Edson in his public life which reflected his quiet commitment to socialism and the concept of a commonwealth.

In keeping with his ideal that an individual should only use what he had produced and to save the earth’s resources, Edson lived frugally. He bought and used only what he needed. His letter to his daughter, Agnes, recounted his monthly income and expenditures and a certain satisfaction in his minimalist lifestyle. 111 In a letter to Burr, Edson wrote, “…I have no grounds for complaint as I have every material thing I want though, as I believe I remarked once before, that is accounted for more by the modesty my wants than the abundance of my possessions.”112

111 Edson Papers, #76
112 Edson Papers, #42
In line with the socialist concept of consolidating utilities in the hands of the people, Edson and William Waples established Lynden’s first power company, which they later sold to the city for the purpose of collective ownership.

In another example of utility consolidation, he was instrumental in establishing a cooperative telephone company for which he served as the director on several different occasions. Lottie Roeder Roth describes the venture in her history of Whatcom County, “…the Farmers Mutual Telephone Company, an old efficient association of citizens which is an interesting demonstration of the cooperative spirit and convictions of the rural producers of Whatcom County…”

Edson’s regard for labor and the plight of the working man was reflected in the minutes of the Lynden City Council when in 1933 (during the depression) Edson along with Sol Lewis, the publisher of the local newspaper, argued before the city council not to lower the wages of city employees and laborers. (cite)

Again, his public concern for the worker surfaced in 1936, when as mayor, he oversaw the construction of a new sewer system being built in Lynden as a result of a WPA project. In his capacity as mayor, he requested money previously budgeted for materials be transferred to wages in order to hire more local laborers. (cite)

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114 Lottie Roeder Roth. A History of Whatcom County (Chicago: Pioneer Historical Publishing,1926) 617

115 Lynden Tribune ??

116 Lynden Tribune ??
Most Socialists thought that the highest purpose of engaging in politics was to educate the masses in preparation for the advent of Socialism.\textsuperscript{117} In conjunction with his conviction that an educated and intelligent electorate was the only way to achieve socialism,\textsuperscript{118} in 1906, Edson donated a building and was instrumental in establishing Lynden’s first Library Association \textsuperscript{119}

**Edson’s Brand Of Socialism**

These were the outward actions of a man who quietly believed in socialism. Much more about his political outlook was revealed in his choice of reading material and his private letters. From these written documents it may be possible to trace the evolution not only of Edson, but perhaps better understand the plight of other private citizens who quietly harbored a desire for a more egalitarian society but who felt hampered by social convention, status or a misconceived notion of socialism, to keep their thoughts to themselves. Why these closet socialists were the undoing of the socialist movement will be discussed but, first a look at Edson’s brand of socialism.

Books are very important in understanding Edson’s philosophy. Because he lived in a relatively isolated part of the country and lived among people with fairly narrow view of the world, Edson had almost no feedback or input in developing his views. Unlike his fellow correspondent, George Burr, a newspaperman in Nebraska, who was willing and able to communicate his views

\textsuperscript{118} Edson Papers, #32
\textsuperscript{119} Huestis, Phyllis,ed. *Gems from the Past*. (Lynden: Lynden Tribune, 1984) 36
widely because of his newspaper, Edson developed his ideas in relative isolation with very little criticism because he rarely shared them with others. Rather than public discourse or conversation, his worldview was shaped largely by radio, books and magazines.

Edson wrote that he first came upon the concept of socialism by reading Edward Bellamy in 1890.

"I believe I can safely say that my first dawn of consciousness came with the reading of 'Looking Backward'. I don’t believe that I had ever heard the word socialism until later. If I had it didn’t mean a thing to me. I don’t believe the word 'capitalism' was in use at that time if it was don’t think I knew it but anyway the book made probably the deepest impression on me of any I ever read; but I didn’t know anything to do about it. As you probably remember Bellamy suggested no program and it was not until 5 or 6 yrs later when I first got acquainted with Wayland’s ‘Appeal to Reason’ that I began to put two and two together or at least I thought I was. By the late ’90’s I was sure that the co-operative commonwealth couldn’t possibly be more than ten years away and more likely not more than five; needless to say I was compelled to extend the time frequently and for increasingly longer periods."120

Another reflection of Edson’s brand of socialism can be inferred by his appreciation of the writings of H.G. Wells. Edson often refers to Wells’ work and proclaims in a letter to Burr, that he believes Wells to be the best writer and one who reflects his beliefs most closely.121 Wells had joined the Fabian Society in 1903 and remained a member, although with a great deal of dissention, for a number of years. Edson shared many of the same views as Wells. The main thesis of the Fabian Society was that the human race must adapt itself to the material forces it has created, or perish.122 Wells visited Soviet Russia in 1920,

120 Edson Papers,#44
121 Edson Papers, #32
as did another author mentioned by Edson, Theodore Dreiser. In 1934, Wells’ published two volumes of autobiography, *Experiment in Living*, and *Outline of History* which Edson enjoyed very much.\(^{123}\) World War II was to Wells, and to Edson, a confirmation that mankind had lost the battle and was heading towards its doom.\(^{124}\)

Edson’s brand of socialism appeared to be most closely aligned with the Fabian Society view. “The Fabian Society does not propose that the practical steps toward socialism should be carried out by itself, or by any other specially organized Socialist society or party.”\(^{125}\) Edson confirmed this Fabian view in a letter after Burr accused Edson of being a Communist, his response was that if Burr meant communist with a capital “C”, then he was no more a Communist than Burr.

“Now if you call me a communist with a lower case ‘c’ I should have to plead guilty. I am aware that all sorts of people draw all sorts of distinctions and split all sorts of hairs to distinguish between Socialists, E.P.I.C. Production for Use, Social Labor Party, Communists, Co-operative Commonwealth, etc. etc. But fundamentally I can see no difference in their ultimate aims. The difference lies in their tactics and methods for attaining it but the ultimate aim is a democracy wherein the essential industries are owned and operated by the state, i.e., the people, for the benefit of all rather than as we have it now.”\(^{126}\)

Edson cared not what the organization or party who promoted the commonwealth called themselves, this idea of not aligning with one particular ideology was a Fabian concept.

There were three basic tenets to Edson’s political beliefs. These three ideas formed the basis of his political thought and for no other reason than

\(^{123}\) Edson Papers, #70
\(^{124}\) H.G. Wells, 7
\(^{125}\) Bruno Leone, *Socialism Opposing Views* (St. Paul: Greenhaven Press, 1986) 60
\(^{126}\) Edson Papers, #19
convenience, true to Fabian thinking, came closest to socialism. Edson believed in the fairness of shared wealth, not just that workers should reap what they sow, but also that no one should be a glutton and take more than their fair share. In this, he had no sympathy for the Rockefellers, DuPonts and the like. He was also a firm believer in democracy and the will of the people. Edson was also certain that the downfall of capitalism was just around the corner. These three ideas made up his political belief and for 50 years he never wavered. What did change was Edson's final assessment of socialism. He continually declared he was not a pessimist, rather a realist. In the end there was the disillusionment he felt when he finally came to the realization that his dream was unattainable.

Edson’s primary ideal was his belief in the rightness of shared wealth. In a letter to Burr, Edson illustrated this by likening man to the animal world. He described an article he had read in the Readers Digest, which

“discussed man as a social animal and how none of the mammals have succeeded very well in living a community life. Not at all comparable to the bees, ants, termites as well as some other forms of insect life. While the writer didn’t mention it yet it seems to me that the three I have mentioned live under a perfect totalitarian regime; the organization, the state if you please, is everything and the individual is of small consequence. I would like to ask the author how about beavers? Maybe he doesn’t know about them. While cheerfully acknowledging my limitations as a naturalist and my incompetence to pose as an authority yet I am prepared to assert, declare and argue that the beaver comes closer to the socialist ideal than any other bird, beast or insect. While a member of a colony Mr. Beaver is apparently always ready to do his share toward building or repairing dams or helping provide food for the community larder yet he does not surrender his individuality so but on occasion he and his wife will withdraw from the colony and go off and start a new one. If man ever learns to live together decently--- which he is very far from doing now---I don’t know of another as good teacher as the beaver.”

127 Edson Papers, #49
In conjunction with his belief in shared wealth naturally came the conviction that people should not take more than their fair share and certainly if they did not produce the wealth by the sweat of their own brow. In a letter to Burr he mentioned that communism would require the capitalists to relinquish their wealth, he anticipated Burr’s objection,

“I know you will say, Messrs. Morgan, duPont, Rockefeller, Ford et al have this wealth, they acquired it legally (at least mostly so) that they propose to defend it as far as they can and that no matter how large a majority of people decree otherwise they will resist to the last ditch for the sovereign electorate is no longer the sovereign electorate but has become a howling mob and that any means to resist and destroy is justified.

I believe my reputation among my neighbors as a law abiding citizen would or rather is very good, but deep down inside me I applaud that character in Dickens who said ‘the law is an ass’. To my mind there is not the slightest ground for argument on the proposition that if a man has more than he himself produced then he must of necessity have something that someone else has produced. He has something that morally don’t belong to him. That he legally does merely proves that ‘The law is an ass’.”

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128 Edson Papers,#19
This idea that ‘the law is an ass’ played out in Edson’s view of the Supreme Court. And how he viewed the court as a threat to democracy. Which brings us to Edson's second tenet, an unequivocal belief in democracy.

The Supreme Court drew Edson's ire as an example of democracy thwarted. In the early 1900's, Progressives had feared the power of the plutocracy and the poverty and restlessness of the masses. The Progressives' goal was to maintain power in the middle class by minimizing the wealth and power of extreme right and appeasing the poverty and sheer numbers of the extreme left. Hofstadter states that Teddy Roosevelt, well understood this precarious path.129

In order to accomplish this blurring of lines between “the haves” and “the have nots,” it was necessary to regain competition in business and minimize the exploitation of the working people. Roosevelt effectively used the Supreme Court to this end. First, in the form of trust busting and second in the enactment and upholding of social reform. To some, like Edson, this use of the court thwarted what many thought would be the natural move of the democracy toward socialism.

The Supreme Court and its contradiction to democracy, angered Edson later in his political journey. In 1937 writing about the New Deal, Edson wrote, “If there is anything more absurd or more utterly and wholly undemocratic than to permit one appointive officer to nullify an act of Congress, I should like someone to tell me what it is and a 5 to 4 decision amounts to just that. It gives the old man more power than the President, an elected officer, whose veto may be
overridden, but not so with Mr. Judge. I fear I am sadly lacking in reverence but I confess that the judges of the Supreme Court don’t look any different to me than any other decently good citizen.”

It was not just the fact that the Court diminished democracy, Edson also thought their bias favored corporate America. Supreme Court Justices are drawn from the ranks of corporate lawyers and “… where I am willing to concede that there are or have been instances where a corporate lawyer have so far forgotten or suppressed his early training as to become a reasonably good judge yet I consider the chances against it so great that it should never be done.”

Interestingly, as strongly as Edson felt about the importance of democracy, he was willing to compromise when it came to the “Russian Experiment.” Edson wrote to Burr, “To be sure the country that is trying out this socialistic idea on the largest scale is not a democracy but a dictatorship and unless and until it abandons the dictatorship and adopts a democracy it will have betrayed and fallen short of the ideal. But even if it should prove to be the case it would in no way invalidate the idea but merely be another instance, of which the world has furnished countless examples, where the lust for power has smothered the ideals.”

Edson’s willingness to adopt any plan which led to socialism, was explained in another letter to Burr in which he had less optimism about the Russian experiment. He believed socialism would have to come through the “Scandinavian” method but that it will be much slower because “…their plan


129 Hofstadter, 238
130 Edson Papers, #45
131 Edson Papers, #32
132 Edson Papers, #19
would have to come about through the advance of the general intelligence of which I am very skeptical whereas the Russian plan proposes that the few intelligent ones take charge through a dictatorship and through intensive education raise up the new generation thoroughly indoctrinated with the co-operative idea.”

It appears when pressed for an answer, Edson placed the importance of the common wealth above democracy.

The third tenet was his certainty of the **collapse of capitalism.** With this belief, Edson was willing to accept the Fabian and/or Marxist view of the anticipation of capitalism’s demise. The method of its downfall was argued vehemently among socialists because it impacted the policy and willingness to conform to the current economic situation. Originally an orthodox Marxist, Morris Hillquit, the Socialist Party’s theoretician, held the view that capitalism would fall naturally as a result of economic conditions. He later took a more pragmatic approach and came to believe that politics, and the reforms which it could generate, would be beneficial to the workers and would make their lives easier until capitalism eventually faded away. On the issue of how capitalism would be replaced, the Fabian Society, “…Sympathizes with the ordinary man’s preference for gradual peaceful changes, to revolution, conflict with the army and police, and martyrdom.” Edson accepted either method as inevitable.

“While real Marxists wouldn’t accept me as a brother yet, I agree with them in believing that the Capitalist world is nearing its end. That it inevitably generates the seeds of its own destruction: which doesn’t mean that I am hazarding a guess as to how it will disappear, whether by a gradual merging into

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133 Edson Papers, #45
135 Leone, 60
a cooperative system as it has done to a greater or less extent in all countries and more notably in the Scandinavian states or whether it will finally be violently overthrown or yet by some other means. The point is that I feel dogmatically sure that it is due to pass in the not remote future and believing this I feel that Mr. Roosevelt’s efforts to keep the old machine going are almost as futile as the lady who is reputed to have tried to keep back the tide with a broom”\textsuperscript{136}

What system would replace capitalism was a subject upon which Edson fluctuated over the years. In the 1930’s Edson wrote, “We socialists used to think that when capitalism failed, as we were sure it was bound to do, that it was certain to be followed by socialism.”\textsuperscript{137}

What the present system would be replaced with was an uncertainty, mostly because he had no idea what the plan would be. Originally, he believed the end result would be Socialism, but later he came to be resigned to a totalitarian regime. He sympathized with Marx in not being able to predict the outcome of the fall of capitalism, he wrote, “Marx was the first to recognize and point out capitalism’s inherent defects over one hundred years ago. He wasn’t quite so clear in forecasting just what would happen when the capitalist system broke down, but that doesn’t at all invalidate his acumen in foreseeing it.”\textsuperscript{138}

Edson’s change of heart in the ultimate outcome from the fall of capitalism was his disillusionment with the intelligence of his fellow man. His strong belief in democracy demanded an educated and intelligent electorate. Edson shared the same sentiment as H.G.Wells\textsuperscript{139}, World War II brought about a revelation that humans were not capable of living together because they lacked the necessary

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{136} Edson Papers.#45
\textsuperscript{137} Edson Papers.#38
\textsuperscript{138} Edson Papers.#14
\textsuperscript{139} H.G. Wells,6
\end{footnotesize}
intelligence. The number of letters in which Edson remarked on this phenomena and provided illustrations of human stupidity are too numerous to cite. Many examples are scattered throughout this CD. Remarking on human stupidity became a source of humor and entertainment for Edson. This realization of the stupidity of mankind may also be another reason Edson kept his views to himself because as he wrote to Burr,

“It seems to me that the cause of all our woes can be summed up in a word or rather three words i.e. lack of intelligence. If it were only true as many persons seem to believe, that education and intelligence are synonymous we might hope to do something about it; but ‘larnin’ and sense, especially the all too rare kind we call common are certainly two different things. The one may be acquired the other is a gift of nature which is a simple way of saying that it seems, in light of the little knowledge we have, to be a fortuitous combination of genes and chromosomes handed down by our forebears that are above the ruck though many exceptions may be cited. Of course one may not make this charge, lack of intelligence, except in the bosom of one’s family so to say, or in the confidence of a friend, for the implication is plain that the speaker would not include himself and thereby lays himself open to be called a snob”. 140

Other letters include this sense of lack of human intelligence, “Twenty or thirty years ago I thought I knew. But I have come now to believe that mankind on the whole is too unintelligent to live satisfactorily under any system and with the restricted birth rate among the more intelligent and because of the advance of sanitation and medicine a greater percentage of the spawn of the unfit are preserved it seems mathematically certain that we are bound to go backward instead of ahead.” 141 In another letter he said,

“However I have reached the point where I have no program to urge or even offer. Twenty years ago I felt sure that I knew the answer but I overlooked the

140 Edson Papers,#44
141 Edson Papers,#41
very important fact that the finest program in the world is no good unless there are people of sufficient intelligence to carry it out and the past ten years in particular seem filled with demonstrations and illustrations of various kinds that the human required to live sanely and peaceably together just doesn't exist for if it did obviously we wouldn't be in the fix we are."142

Edson became a student and an observer of Socialism, not an active participant. There were several reasons for this. When he read the handwriting on the wall and could see there was no future in socialism in the United States, he had no need for the Socialist Party. “We socialists used to think that when capitalism failed, as we were sure it was bound to do, that it was certain to be followed by socialism. However we thought it well to make some preparation for it so we had a party machinery designed to enable the party to function as a Government when the time should come as we felt sure it would soon. I believe we were right in our forecast of the breakup of the present system which, as I have said, I think is happening right now but I am very skeptical about it being followed by socialism or any other orderly system unless one considers Italy and Germany as such."143

Furthermore, affiliation with the Socialist Party became a liability. Lynden was a conservative town. The strident views of the Socialist Party regarding labor did not play well in a town filled with agricultural producers and the anti-organization Dutch. In addition, Edson was a businessman. As Lingeman

142 Edson Papers, #38
143 Edson Papres,#38
explained in his assessment of small towns, “As the town passed out of the pioneer stage, competition among the merchants for the farmers’ dollar grew.. it is no wonder then that the small-town businesses were unable to survive competition." 144 It was not worth Edson's livelihood to rile people up when there was another drugstore right next door to his.

Edson had experienced the result of publicly airing his beliefs. The popularity of the KKK in 1927 and his ouster from office had taught Edson the humiliation of defeat. The reaction of the town to his commencement address where he merely encouraged the graduates to go out into the world keeping in mind the good of the community, was taken as an espousal of his socialistic beliefs and taught him the depth of the townsfolk intolerance.

The final blow for Edson was when it became apparent to him that the Russian Experiment had failed. No textbook can describe the anguish he felt when he wrote to Burr,

“I come with a contrite heart, to humbly confess, admit and acknowledge that you were much nearer right than I about Russia. My faith has been seriously undermined for some time past, but now I have just finished the book by Eugene Lyons and it has left me without a rag to cover my nakedness… While I realized from the first that the Russian experiment was a rather frail reed to lean on when one took into account the truly tremendous difficulties of the situation yet the assurance of a number of well meaning souls like the Webbs, Fischer, Hindus, Anna Louise Strong and other who have been assuring us that my frail reed wasn’t a reed at all but a sapling that would soon be a towering tree has kept alive at least a hope that it was a start in the right direction. Practically all the world looks so hopeless to me that I surrender this last hope with reluctance.” 145

Hofstader wrote that “…One of the primary tests of the mood of society at any given time is whether its comfortable people tend to identify, psychologically,
with the power and achievements of the very successful or with the needs and
sufferings of the underprivileged."[^146] Edson and his fellow socialist's
consciousness were sympathetic with the less fortunate. In 1940, Edson wrote,

"I am becoming more and more confirmed, if that is possible, that there is
no balm in Gilead. I mean by that that there is no possibility that any solution of
world affairs that you and I would approve will come about within a thousand
years. Not but what a program could be formulated that would point the way
indeed the Golden Rule would about cover it but one would have to have, with
inconsequential exceptions, different sort of animals to deal with. I suppose I
would be open to grave criticism in the minds of many if they knew my real
sentiments (which they don't as I only confide in a very select few) for personally
and individually I have no grounds for complaint as I have every material thing I
want though, as I believe I remarked once before, that is accounted for more by
the modesty of my wants than the abundance of my possessions. I have, I
believe the esteem and goodwill of my neighbors, excellent, almost perfect health
and live in one of the most delightful portions of the earth. If I just didn't know
that there are millions quite as deserving as I that are deprived of almost
everything I could be very contented and it doesn't seem to help them at all for
me to be discontented. I suppose one would show more wisdom to cultivate
more the spirit of the pious duck of the old story who prayed "Oh Lord bless me
and my wife and my son John and his wife, us four and no more."[^147]

What started with a reading of Bellamy turned into a lifetime of study and
practice. How many more people were there like Edson? People who were
aware of the unfairness of the world, thought they had found a solution in
socialism, but there was no mechanism for change? This is the true failure of
the Socialist Party.

EXCERPTS OF EDSONS LETTERS

INTRODUCTION

The following are excerpts from letters on various topics which Edson wrote to Burr. The
punctuation and sentence structure is as it appeared in his letters. The file number of

[^145]: Edson Papers, #41
[^146]: Hofstadter, 243
[^147]: Edson Papers, #42
each letter has been cited and the reader may go to the LETTERS section of the CD-ROM to view the original. Several of the letters do not have confirmed dates so they are labeled “no date”. Like the others, they were written sometime between 1931 and 1944.

Edson had another side to his personality which he did not share with the rest of the community nor even with his own family members. Edson was an avid reader and genuinely self-taught man. His studies and observation of life around him caused him to draw some conclusions about politics, morality, religion and economics that were quite different from those of mainstream society. Perhaps it was because Lynden was a conservative close-knit community, or perhaps it was some private part of Edson which he did not care to reveal, but whatever the reason, most people in the town of Lynden were unaware of Edson’s view on the important subjects of the day. Edson was not completely unwilling to share his unorthodox beliefs, but he did so safely, by writing to an old childhood friend from Kansas whose friendship he resumed through this long and frank correspondence.

George Lawrence Burr, the fellow with whom Edson corresponded, became what Edson himself described as his ‘whipping boy’. Edson wrote to him almost monthly and his letters were filled with comment on the national and international events of the time. In one letter he explained to Burr why he wrote to him and also why he wrote letters-to-the-editor under an assumed name. He wrote, “All of this is of course a deep dark secret just between us two. I trust you will not be too greatly shocked by this revelation of duplicity but if one doesn’t believe practically the same as everyone else I find it much better to keep it to one’s self and if one must blow off steam occasionally it is safer if not as satisfactory to do it anonymously.” (#47)

Burr too, had grown up in Kansas but had continued to reside in the mid-west most of his adult life. He was a newspaper man and owned and published various papers in Kansas and Nebraska. Later in life, and during their correspondence, Burr and his wife Hattie moved to Florida to retire. The surviving correspondence between the two men runs from 1933 until Edson’s death in 1944.

For a man such as Edson to find someone with whom to share his deeply held beliefs, one would imagine he would choose a like minded person. Someone with whom he could commiserate—a kindred spirit. He did nothing of the kind. Apart from their shared youth, Ed Edson and George Burr (whom Edson addresses as Lawrie), had very little in common. They differed on race, Burr had been a Populist in the late 1880’s. In the mid-west the Populist Party had fairly blatant racist undertones and Burr’s opinions reflected that belief. He had little regard for the Native American, openly discussed his distrust of Jews and after his move to Florida, wrote of his dislike for the ‘niggers’. The letters show that Edson does not share Burrs views and he says so quite plainly. In addition to a different attitude, it is apparent that Edson’s views on race were powerfully influenced by his reading of The Golden Bough which he cites as on of the most influential book in his life.
After leaving the Populist Party, Burr became a Republican and in fact writes with familiarity of several Republican Senators. Edson, by contrast, turned to socialism. Another book Edson cited as important in his life is Edward Bellamy’s, Looking Backward. From the moment he read the book he was convinced that a cooperative commonwealth was the only answer for the nation’s economic and social ills. In keeping with his ideals Edson and a partner purchased the electric and phone companies in Lynden and turned them over to city government in an effort to socialize these services.

Religion was another area in which Edson and Burr differed. Burr believed in God and Christianity and Edson did not. Edson was a believer in spiritualism and had firm convictions about afterlife, but it certainly did not include any organized religion and in fact he placed the blame for many acts of inhumanity at the door of organized religion.

**POLITICS**

There is an analysis of Edson’s political beliefs in the ED EDSON section of this CD-ROM. It can be found in the chapter entitled Edson and Socialism. These are a few examples of the political views he shared with Burr.

**Socialism #44**

I will try to trace my politico-economic trail from its beginning until now. I believe I can safely say that my first dawn of consciousness came with the reading of ‘Looking Backward’. I don’t believe that I had ever heard the word socialism until later. If I had it didn’t mean a thing to me. I don’t believe the word ‘capitalism’ was in use at that time if it was I don’t think I knew it but anyway the book made probably the deepest impression on me of any I ever read; but I didn’t know anything to do about it. As you probably remember Bellamy suggested no program and it was not until 5 or 6 yrs later when I first got acquainted with Wayland’s ‘Appeal to Reason’ that I began to put two and two together or at least I thought I was. By the late ‘90’s I was sure that the co-operative commonwealth couldn’t possibly be more than ten years away and more likely not more than five; needless to say I was compelled to extend the time frequently and for increasingly longer periods. Back in the days of the Appeal I most sincerely thought that the co-operative way was the best but I didn’t realize that it was
indispensable as I now believe it to be if we are to learn to co-operate that
nothing worth the name of civilization will ever come to pass and that instead of
advancing mankind with deteriorate. Naturally I had been interested in these
various communistic, socialistic or co-operative efforts like Ruskin, Brook Farm,
Amana, Equality, the Doukabours up in Canada and other too numerous to
mention. I accepted and joined in the current explanation that their failure was
because of being surrounded and engulfed as they were by then the sea of
capitalism and subject in so large a measure to its laws and customs it was
impossible for them to survive. This argument has much to sustain it even if it is
not altogether convincing. So when Russia decided to try my hopes went sky
high. Here was the largest country in the world with 170,000,000 people more or
less and with capitalism suppressed and banished so the new way would have
an unhindered trial. Of course I had some conception of the tremendous
handicap under which they started, with a population made up of something like
75 tribes and peoples speaking as many different tongues and ranging all the
way from some of as highly cultured people as one could find anywhere down
through all sorts of graduations to the nomads living in tents on the wind swept
steppes. Probably no other country has such an inhomogeneous mass or mess
to deal with and with an illiteracy of somewhere near 90%, a country ravaged by
four years of war which had been greatly aggravated by the incompetency of
their commanders and with every mans hand against them including our own it is
little short of outstanding that they have accomplished what they have. Realizing
at least in part the almost insuperable difficulties they had to deal with I was
prepared to make very great allowances for blunders, errors and mistakes, especially so in view of the blunders (to put it mildly) that other governments make under much less trying circumstances. What I really pinned my faith to was the hope that if they could hold on until a new generation could grow up away from the evil influence of capitalism and sucking their socialism with their mothers milk then we should have a fair trial for socialism for the first time and I believed all it needed was a fair trial. There have been a number of happenings over there that have been rudely shocking to us 'fellow travelers' but what put the finishing touch to me was a book by Andre Gide, I've forgotten the title. In it he tells of these young people of whom I have been expecting so much. He said they had been pumped so full of propaganda that the world was all distorted for them. From his description, which I believe was dependable, there would be small choice between them and the Nazis Heiling Hitler. After reading Gide I have given up all hope and it seems as if every world happening accentuates and aggravates the hopelessness of the outlook. "It seems to me that the cause of all our woes can be summed up in a word or rather three words i.e. lack of intelligence. If it were only true as many persons seem to believe, that education and intelligence are synonymous we might hope to do something about it; but 'larnin' and sense, especially the all too rare kind we call common are certainly two different things. The one may be acquired the other is a gift of nature which is a simple way of saying that it seems, in light of the little knowledge we have, to be a fortuitous combination of genes and chromosomes handed down by our forebears that are above the ruck though many exceptions may be cited. Of
course one may not make this charge, lack of intelligence, except in the bosom of one’s family so to say or in the confidence of a friend for the implication is plain that the speaker would not include himself and thereby lays himself open to be called a snob” It seems to me that a very large share of the things we do are unintelligent all the way from wearing high heels to accumulating a million dollars. The first is a sacrifice of comfort for appearance which from my own point of view is distinctly unintelligent; however I recognize the possibility of a debate balancing the pleasure and satisfaction with one’s appearance against the discomfort of being tilted on one’s toes and rattling along like a boy on stilts. The unintelligence of accumulating wealth beyond ones needs is less debatable and especially so since the amassing of considerable wealth means the appropriation of the wealth that others have produced or else of some natural product, like oil, land or timber that should belong to all. We are as a whole unintelligent in that we permit these things and not only permit but encourage them and it seems to me that the person who spends his life in piling up wealth out of all proportions to his needs evinces the intelligence of a pack rat. To be sure we have a number of instances where these vast fortunes have been devoted to good ends but I am very skeptical if ever one has accumulated with that end in view. It was the pack rat that got it together and after he had it and couldn’t eat it or take it with him so the quite obvious thing to do was to buy absolution for his various sins committed in getting it and attain a pseudo sainthood by a restitution cloaked as charity or philanthropy. I am not criticizing, I’m only saying it isn’t intelligent.
Edson was asked to give a commencement speech in 1910. He told the graduates how fortunate we were that we now had the means to produce an abundance of goods and that it would be up to their generation to figure out how to distribute the wealth so that all would benefit. The next day when someone asked a fellow in town how the commencement had gone he responded,

Graduation Speech

It so happened that I was the chairman of the school board and it fell to me to present the diplomas to the two girl graduates. It was my very first experience of anything of the sort for as you know I never did any graduating myself. I can’t remember whether it was my own idea or a suggestion of the Principal that I make a little talk, I think though that it was the latter. After handing them their diplomas with some congratulatory remarks I told them that I thought that this was a most significant historical occasion. That from the beginning of mankind on the earth, however far back that may have been, quite certainly some hundreds of thousands of years ago and some anthropologists place it more than a million years back, mans efforts had been devoted largely, in fact in most cases almost solely to providing himself with food, shelter and clothing, depending, for most of this time, on his own unaided strength and skill though a few thousand years back he began to use the horse and the ox to lighten his labor and increase his production. Reckoned by the time he has been on earth it was only yesterday that he learned to utilize steam to do his tasks and
it has come about within my own lifetime that he has now so far improved and
perfected his utilization of steam, water and electric power that it is now possible
for the first time in the life of the race to produce in abundance to supply the
needs of everyone. Already the problem is arising of surpluses and difficulties of
finding markets for them. So I repeat that this a very is a very significant
historical occasion whether we recognize it or not. We have solved the age old
problem of being able to produce and abundance for all. The problem that now
faces the rising generation is how to distribute it. It should be a much simpolder
problem than it has been to learn how to produce and so I am very hopeful that
you young people who are just ready to take your place and assume your duties
in life will find a way that all these good things that we have learned to make may
go to those who need them. I’m afraid you can’t depend on us oldsters to help
much in this for most of us are so lacking in education along this line as to be a
total loss as helpers of advisers.”

I have always thought it was a pretty good speech; it was the only one I
ever made that I have any recollection now of what I said. Remember this was in
1910 when surpluses and markets had not become as much of a headache as
they have since. I claim no originality in the matter, I rather suspect that I had
absorbed the idea from Wayland of the Appeal to Reason. Unfortunately my
younger generation has proved unequal to the occasion for I can’t see that we
are any nearer an equitable distribution than we were 30 years ago and nothing
of any promise in sight unless totalitarianism finds a way and I’m sure I wouldn’t
like their way even if it was good. My own estimate of my speechmaking was not
shared by all my hearers. Maybe none. A chap who I think feels as friendly toward me toward anybody, though he gives one the impression that his milk of human kindness is curdled, was asked next day by someone who had not attended, how the graduation exercises went off. He said “‘Oh all right only Edson made a damn fool of himself.’ He and everyone else knew that I was a good socialist at that time and he was an equally good Republican for no better or other reason than that he had been born and grew up in Vermont and being as ignorant as a Galapagos turtle of any smattering of sociology or economics he thought me guilty of what would have been the very bad taste of injecting my peculiar politics into the occasion. I’ve had many a good chuckle over it since and he and I are as good of friends as ever though I don’t think he ever knew that his words came back to me and all the happenings in the world during these 30 years haven’t affected him apparently at all; his world is flat and scarcely more than a mile across.”

#54

_In a sad letter acknowledging the failure of socialism in Russia, Edson wrote in a melancholy mood… “While you and I can recite all sort of things that need fixing about this USA still I believe we are rather better off than any other so called civilized place on the globe and I suppose we should be thankful for that. If everyone had no more personal troubles and worries than I have it would be a very good world to live in but a knowledge of the millions upon millions of people living in the direst poverty, insecurity and hopelessness with the prospect of_
getting worse rather than better makes a satisfaction with one’s own lot

something to be apologetic rather than boastful of. #41

**RELIGION**

_In these excerpts Edson reveals his struggle with organized religion as well as his belief in psychic phenomenon_

**Death and Afterlife**

_May 9, 1937_

I am enclosing a clipping which may interest you if you haven’t already seen it. I find myself rather curiously indifferent about what if anything happens or more accurately what if anything takes place when we do the shuffling act. Happen, I believe, denotes an element of chance and so is not the most suitable word to describe a fixed sequence. I mentioned my attitude toward the future as one of curious indifference because almost everyone I ever heard expressed themselves on the subject seemed to have a lively desire to live on. But in my own case I have no dread nor even dislike for the thought of oblivion after I am through here and this seems rather curious to me because I am inclined to believe that there is some sort of existence after this and then my experience with life has not been such as to sour me on it and so be glad to be rid of it. On the contrary my life on the whole has been a pleasant one amid pleasant surroundings and so, logically, it seems to me I should at least prefer to go on living after I have done here and I am strongly inclined to think I will but if I knew I wasn’t I don’t believe it would distress me in the least. We are all glad to lie down at night and lose ourselves in sleep, if that sleep should prove endless instead of a few hours, what difference would it make. I sometimes fear it is an indication of advancing years that the zest for travel has departed and I no longer care for strange countries and new scenes and this seems to apply to that “far away land” as well as other portions of this terrestrial ball. But if I do get over there, I will try to fit in and adapt myself as well as I can.

-#32

**Religion and the Wife**

She says we argued for weeks trying to convince, or more properly, convert each other. All I was trying to do was make my position clear so that if she married me she would know just what kind of chap she was tying up with. She is probably right in saying that she tried to convince me but inasmuch as I had given the subject much more study and thought than she had that her arguments were neither enlightening nor convincing. We have never discussed religion at all since our marriage.

#12
The State of my Soul

I have been wondering about my soul. Well not exactly wondering, perhaps speculating is a better word and my speculations are not concerned particularly with my own soul, they would apply as well to yours or anyone else. I am not at all concerned about the salvation of my soul, whatever that means. When you and I were young it had a very definite meaning but since the bottomless pit has been filled up and the fires of Sheol have been so thoroughly quenched salvation would have to be newly defined. So my speculations are not as to the fate of my soul but as to whether I have a soul at all. Inclined as I am to accept the Evolutionary theory to account for our being here, one cannot, as I understand it, escape tracing his lineage back to some one-celled creature who raised a family or at least increased his, its or her kind by following the current fashion of constricting the waist to such an extreme that it broke in two and became two individuals. A reversion of this very primitive method still occurs now and then as in the case of identical twins, or at least that is the accepted explanation of those who are supposed to know. But the point I have in mind is the difficulty of supposing that this tiny blob of protoplasm had an undying soul and if it didn’t then just where and when on the rather extended journey to the status of genus homo, as we know him, did this soul thing appear? Most folks who are sure of their souls are equally sure that no so-called lower form of life than themselves has one. So these people, if they accept the Evolutionary hypothesis too would have to have a man wait until he was man before he could have a soul and there would arise the very grave difficulty of determining just when he became even as you and I; and was his soul given to him as something additional after he became a man or was it a germ that traced back to his amoebae ancestor and only finally developed into a soul after or at the same time he became a man. Of course the Biblical account is much simpler and therefore usually more satisfactory but if one becomes too inquisitive even that develops complications. According to the story it seemed comparatively simple to make a mud man and breathe the breath of life into it or him. However I am strongly inclined to question the translator or somebody for it says, as you doubtless remember, that “The Lord God formed man of the dust.” It doesn’t say whether he did or did not use a little water but I don’t believe even the Lord God could make an image out of just dry dust that wouldn’t keep it’s shape until he could breathe the breath of life into it. But we’ll waive the difficulties, insurmountable as they appear and concede for the moment this beginning of our common ancestor. It is greatly to be regretted that the chronicler either forgot or deemed it of insufficient importance to mentioned that the thus endowed mud man, or dust man if you insist, was further endowed with the most remarkable gift of perpetuating to all his posterity this gift of a soul. As far as the account goes it would appear that whatever soul we came from the mud man alone as there is no mention that the animated rib had a soul. It is interesting to speculate that if all the souls came from a single and such impeccable source that they should have become so diversified and we fear in some cases so degenerated. But going back to the Evolutionary theory, which, as I have said, I am inclined to accept, at least ground for a soul or spirit (the terms are synonymous to me) that
could exist independent of the body and yet there is a great mass of evidence that there are disembodied forces and intelligences that purport to be the forces and intelligences that once animated the bodies of persons once living but no dead. Alfred Russell Wallace, co-discoverer with Darwin of the Evolutionary theory undertook to surmount the difficulty of the origin of the soul by postulating that at some stage of man’s upward climb, he didn’t hazard a guess as to when, there cam an influx of the soul. He was unquestionably a very learned gentleman but that explanation never enhanced his reputation with me. His explanation would raise more questions than it would answer.

#16

The Problem with Religion

October 22, 1939

I believe my objection to religion and the church can be briefly summed up by saying that I regard it as pernicious when such a tremendous and influential organization teaches and promulgates as the absolute truth a doctrine for which the evidence is so insufficient that no self-respecting court would entertain it for a minute, and in addition to that does it’s best to cultivate and inculcate a dumb acceptance which tends to stultify and repress the best part of a human being.

#43

WOMEN AND SEX

On the subject of women and sex I think it safe to assume that Edson was years ahead of his time. After reading the proclamation of the Baptist Church at their recent annual convention which said that women must submit graciously to their husbands, I am beginning to think that Edson was ahead of our time. Edson was married twice in his life. His first wife left him after the birth of their second child. She ran away to Seattle, fed up with small town life and left a note on the kitchen table which said, “I am tired of dancing with Indians”. She left him to raise the children by himself which he did, with the help of his mother, Ellen. He remarried many years later, at the age of 60, to a well educated school teacher, Lelia Jackson Edson, who later wrote a book about the history of Whatcom County, entitled The Fourth Corner.
The letters suggest that Edson liked women. He argued for the empowerment of women and showed regard and respect for women. In one of the letters he remarked that women have a higher calling than merely bearing children. His views may have been influenced in part by the fact that his second wife, Lelia, who had not been married prior to Edson, never had any children. His eldest daughter, Agnes, whom he respected and to whom he often wrote was also childless.

DECEMBER 4, 1938

……….By the time I was 70 I no longer found a skirt any more exciting than a pair of pants though that isn't a very apt symbol for in this day of slacks one may easily find feminine legs under either pants or skirts. However if some surgeon or fairy godmother should offer me sexual rejuvenation I think I'd say no thank you. I have no particular admiration for or wish to emulate these octogenarian sires that we hear or read of. To me there is an unpleasant incongruity in the thought of a super annuated, rheumy eyed, toothless, leathered skinned old relic embracing thus intimately a lady young enough to deserve something better. Probably just a foolish prejudice of mine but I confess to it anyway. I do sometimes think back to the days when my timidity and bashfulness coupled with what the experience of later years has convinced me was an exaggerated conception of the reluctance of the fair sex for such dalliances, has caused me to miss some experiences that might be very pleasant to remember but bearing in mind the always possible unpleasant consequences, to put it no
stronger, of such intimacies perhaps it was just as well or better that my amours have been as limited as they have. It has been quite along time now since I regarded chastity as a virtue though when we were young they were synonymous terms at least as far as the girls were concerned though one only spoke of their virtue and never of their chastity. One hears occasionally of their virtue, most often in print rarely in speech. The change in the attitude of the public toward the unmarried the female who have suffered (or otherwise) the degrading experience 'worse than death' has changed since our youth about as much as our means of transportation. I haven’t heard of any young lady being 'ruined' for a good many years.

#18 JANUARY(no date)

In this letter, Edson had been writing about a book by Arthur Brisbane where Brisbane spoke about the war(WWII) in which he made some comment about Abraham Lincoln’s mother. This had obviously pressed several of Edson’s buttons….

…… So I repeat that it is absurd to credit a parent with more than being lucky for having a child above average and doubly absurd to give all credit to the mother alone for it is the common experience of everyone to have seen instances where some good trait in a child was very evidently inherited from the paternal side. His (Brisbane) constant reiterated hogwash that the most worthwhile thing a female can do is to have babies is to my mind even less admirable than his constant call to arms for in a world as overcrowded as this one and whose parlous conditions is due in such a considerable measure to such
overcrowding, any encouragement or effort to aggravate this condition of plethora of population is in my opinion of the gravest disservice, to consider it from that point alone but beyond that I would say it was a piece of sublime impudence for Mr. Brisbane or anyone else to presume to advise anyone as to whether or not they should bear children. If there is anything more particularly the business--or pleasure-- of the persons concerned and less the affair of anyone else than deciding whether or not to have children then I can’t think of it now. To be sure we occasionally see some couple spawning brats in such numbers and under such conditions that it seems reasonable to believe the world would be better without them and if one could persuade them to use a contraceptive it would seem a patriotic thing to do. Perhaps I am illogical but it seems to me it is quite different to try to influence someone to stop rather than to persuade someone to start. Anyway to hold that having babies is the highest and noblest thing a woman can do is far from complimentary to the sex for everyone knows that the world is full of women who are most ordinary, to be as complimentary as possible, and yet who can perform this one function as well or better than the most talented, accomplished and brilliant woman of the land: and according to Brisbane they are rendering a greater service and are consequently entitled to greater respect and consideration than the Jane Adams’, Mme. Curie’s, Rosa Bonheur’s and the other thousands and million of women who really have ability and brains.

#51(A)  FEBRUARY 15, 1942
Your comment on social conventions, or lack of them, of the youngsters of your part of the world are, as far as I know, fairly applicable to all the rest of the U.S. The rules and regulations that seemed to us in our day as fixed, unchangeable and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians have certainly been very drastically modified. The profuse exhibition of bare legs all around us today would have horrified all decent folk in our youth and a modern bathing suit would have been even more shocking because more revealing than Lady Godiva’s curtain of her tresses. There isn’t a great deal of drinking among the women and girls of this community but no one suffers in reputation who does. Smoking is quite general among girls and younger women. Your speculation as to whether the relaxation of the more puritanical conventions of our boyhood has led to more immorality caused me to scan the word very carefully for quotation marks indicating that you had your tongue in your cheek when using it. I have just looked in my dictionary for the definition of ‘moral’. There was almost a column of it. It seemed rather elusive and difficult to pin down. Several of the quotations cited had to drag God into it which to my unbelieving mind didn’t tend to clarify it at all. It mentioned in two different places that the word was used in connection with sexual conduct or behavior but there was naturally no mention of the fact that the rules concerning sexual behavior are purely arbitrary and differ very widely among the different peoples of the world and who are we to say that ours are right and all the others wrong. I would contend that all sexual relations have no relation to morality and that nearly all the immorality connected with it occurs within wedlock and meets no disapproval from either the church or the law. But
to debate this we would first have to come to some sort of understanding of what
we meant by the word ‘moral’. I believe the dictionary column-long definition can
be boiled down to “Any action tending to injure in any way another or oneself is
immoral.” It would practically be the golden rule except that it would apply to
oneself as well as others. It would logically follow that any action that entailed no
injury or evil or untoward consequences would not be immoral. The sexual
relation being not only a natural but a necessary function obviously would not be
injurious and hence not immoral. Because the various peoples in their
superstition and ignorance have imposed various and sundry widely divergent
and contradictory rules and regulations concerning the matter is not reason to
suppose that any of them are right or justified. If I were debating it I would
contend that they were all wrong.
I believe that sexual relations should be wholly, solely and entirely a matter
between the parties concerned. Of course I wouldn’t dare to say that to anyone
but you because there is no discernable difference between that and “free love.”
To be sure, that term is not nearly so horrendous as it was 75 yrs. ago but Mrs.
Grundy would still feel forced to frown on it. I would of course concede that the
sexual act accomplished by force i.e. rape would be a highly immoral act and I
think most everyone knows that there are rather frequent cases of an over-sexed
husband and an under-sexed wife where the marital act is little short of rape yet,
as I have said, neither the church or the law disapproves. In fact I feel quite sure
that the Bible adjures the wife to submit to her husband. Needless to say that it
was a man who wrote it. It would be interesting to know how we came by the
notion that virginity is especially commendable and desirable by so much that in our day it was regarded as woman’s chief virtue, in fact even yet virtue and chastity are used as synonym sin reference to the female of the species.

I am inclined to think that our Puritan forbears carried that to greater extremes than almost any other people and their baleful influence still lingers. From the very little I know about the Mohamedans I have the impression that they are, in this respect, most like the folks of “The Scarlet Letter”. It seemed to be a cardinal principle of the Puritans that anything that was pleasurable was necessarily sinful and that there was virtue in crucifying the flesh. That idiotic doctrine crops up among all sorts of people all over the world. We readily recognize the silliness, to put it no stronger, even the immorality of the (unreadable) flagellants who beat themselves with whips or the Kast Indians who gaze at the sun till them become blind or hold an arm aloft till it becomes immovable or lies on a bed of spikes or a hundred other things along the same line but our own customs, conventions and superstitions that are hardly more defensible to the man from Mars have been so instilled into us with our mothers’ milk that any departure is unthinkable. To my mind a very cogent argument for a more natural relationship between the sexes would be an avoidance of some of the ills of the present arrangement. For one thing I would expect it to practically eliminate masturbation. While the physical ill effects are often over-rated yet they are not negligible but the mental effects are, I believe, quite frequently injurious. I believe that if the restrictions, prohibitions, and taboos were removed and the matter treated and regarded for what it is, a
purely natural and normal function that it wouldn’t occupy the minds of the adolescent to anything like the extent that it does now, under our system. Being, as it is, a major function of all life it is impossible to quench it and suppression leads to various ills. I believe Nature is wiser than man. To the crushing query, “Do you want a world full of little bastards?” I would have to say that I can’t see any difference between a bastard and other folks. The only difference is that in one case society has given its consent and approval in advance that with no more consideration than is shown by its agent, a tobacco chewing J.P. who says “Jine hands. Hitched. Two dollars.” Which after all is just as legal, just as binding and just as good as the ceremony where the bride comes in on the arm of her father with bridesmaids, best man, flower girls, pealing organ and gowned priest. But whatever the form of the ceremony or lack of ceremony it is merely society’s permission to cohabit. The performance that takes place some hours after these magic words are spoken is considered perfectly proper and even commendable whereas if it had occurred some hours previously the lady would, in the language of our generation, have been overtaken by “a fate worse than death.” Singularly enough the gentleman, apparently equally concerned, would have suffered no ill effects so far as society was concerned. It seems rather odd but as far as I know we have no word by which to designate a continent male as the word virgin describes the unsullied and unpolluted female. About the nearest is ‘he virgin’ which is more often used in derision than praise. I fear what I have just written may give you a wrong impression. Of course at my age the sex question is purely academic but even when I was younger I was very well
behaved by popular standards but it is since it is no longer a personal matter that it has become clear to me that our conventions in regard to it are almost as bad as they could well be. A hopeful sign however is that we pay less attention to them than we used to. There is, at least out here, quite an improvement over the world we knew as boys. The unmarried mother is no longer ‘ruined’ which she practically was in those bad old days. At least most of us did what we could to make her feel that she was ruined. I asked my lawyer friend what was the difference between a common-law marriage, which is recognized in some states, and lewd living which is supposed to be a punishable offense and once in awhile, though rather rarely a case of this kind is prosecuted. My friend said that there was no difference except in the name by which it was called. As Mr. Shakespeare has so aptly said “A rose smells just as sweet no matter what you call it.”

HUMOR

The following are some examples of Edson’s humor. They have not been edited, but merely drawn out of a larger text. Where explanation was necessary to set the stage, it has been added. Where dates have been established, they are provided, otherwise, it is left blank. These are excerpts from Edsons letters to Burr and to his daughter Agnes.

Blackouts
January 4, 1942
“I just read today where Tacoma had installed a special siren to sound an air raid alert, but through some miscalculation it was pitched so high that no human ear could hear it but all the dogs in town set up a howl. The account didn’t say whether they would get another siren or depend on the canines.”

-#8
Bee Stings
February 7, 1941

Edson was describing some of his various stints as the town doctor. At one point he was explaining how he had received credit for saving a young boy’s life.

“…his son Ray, then just a child, was stung on the foot by a bee while he (Emmett) was away from home and that the boy began to swell and especially around the throat so he seemed in danger of choking and the family thought he was about to die so the oldest girl hopped on her bike and rushed as fast as possible down to the drug store for me and that I got there in an incredibly short time and gave him something that relieved him almost immediately and they think saved his life. He doesn’t amount to much now however and I may have done the world no service, but it is too bad that I have no idea of what I gave him for there might come a chance to use it sometime on a more worthwhile subject.”

-#5

Whistle Stop

Letter-to-the-editor,

In these days of rationing, war restrictions and conservation, I am wondering if it would not be an appropriate time to consider the possibilities of saving by cutting down on the whistling time at the Dairy Plant. I have been considering making such a suggestion for little more than 22 years, but haven’t wanted to act precipitately in the matter, but present conditions seem to suggest this as an appropriate time. The whistle I more particularly refer to is the 7 o’clock. It always wakes me up, so naturally I have observed it more closely. It seems to me that if it was cut down not to exceed 15 minutes, that there would be a material saving. I have at different times undertaken to calculate the energy used in the usual morning blast, and as near as I can come to it, I would say that the steam used would be equivalent to the amount necessary to pull a hundred loaded freight cars up a 12% grade for a distance of seventeen miles which, I submit, would be well worth considering.

I have often wondered whether there was any rule governing the morn-blast. Most of the time it sounds as if the ‘whistle punk’ just held the cord down till the pressure was exhausted, but maybe it is
the way that he manipulates it that gives us that impression. I have sometimes thought that pulling the whistle cord was probably less arduous than some of his other duties and so he might, quite naturally, though perhaps unconsciously, prolong the easier job.

You will note that I am not making this as a request, but merely as suggestion in the interest of conservation (I almost wrote conversation) but if there should be a modification of the present practices, I feel sure that there must be a number of others besides myself who would rise up and call you blessed. And if these lines should assist, however little, in bringing about such a consummation, I would feel very proud indeed, and one of these days when Knapp & Knapp and the Rev. Campbell get hold of me, I shall be leaning over the battlements listening for him (Rev. Campbell) to mention that probably my most distinguished contribution to the community in any way was the initiating of the anti-whistle movement. I feel sure that he will mention it, for he lives a few rods nearer the whistle than I do and, I feel sure, must have thought some of the same thoughts (very unbecoming for a preacher) as I have.

As I have said, I am offering this just as a tentative suggestion in the interest of conservation, but if it should be prove to have the additional merit of abating a nuisance, why that would be just so much gravy.

Begging your pardon for this intrusion on a busy man’s time, I am

Yours for Conservation,
E. Edson

Kansas
September 7, 1940

Edson received a letter from some acquaintances from Kansas who said the old place and many of the people were not doing very well. Edson responds

“…that, of course, is not to be wondered at. The thing to wonder at is that they have had the courage to live there at all, though I suppose in most cases it isn’t or wasn’t so much a matter of courage as of not being able to do anything else except to commit hari-kari and I would readily absolve them if they did that, and I believe that you will agree, that my absolution would be just as effective as the popes.”

#20

Poem

So breathing a prayer for the loved and the lost
He fell on his dagger and gave up the ghost

Now Thisbe returning and finding her beau
Lying dead by her veil, which she happened to know,
She guessed in a moment the cause of his erring
And seizing the knife which had ended his life
In less than a jiffy was dead as a herring,

Young gentlemen, all, a word with you please
Don’t make assignations near mulberry trees,
And if your sweetheart is missing it shows a weak head
To go stabbing yourself till you know she is dead?

And young ladies pray don’t go gadding about
When your anxious mama’s don’t know that you’re out,
And remember that accidents often befall
From kissing young fellows through a hole in the wall
-#57

Bonta Judson’s Funeral

November 9,1933

Edsons letter to his daughter explains why he has taken so long to write. He was delayed because he had to participate as a pall bearer at Bonta Judson’s funeral.(Bonta was the son of Lynden founders, Phoebe ad Holden Judson).

“Nothing in Bonta’s life became him so much as leaving it. He was always an ‘ornery’ devil and since his first stroke, in July, he has been a terrible burden to Mrs. Ebey which he has seemed rather to enjoy making as insufferable as possible. He was born in June 1853 and he lived at least 80 yrs. too long.”

#23

Steinbeck Criticism
September 3, 1939

Speaking of stories, a week or so ago a chap brought me Tobacco Road and Of Mice and Men. I read about a chapter of Tobacco Road and quit. The other is much shorter and the blurb on the jacket was so enthusiastic that I waded thru thinking maybe there would be something at the end but the end was even worse than the rest of it. The story, such as it was, was the uninteresting and highly improbable doings of a couple of uninteresting hoboes and the author tries to ‘pep’ it up by a frequent use of bastard and sonofabitch spelled out in full. But even people who have lived the sheltered life that I have can scarcely escape knowing that low persons that would employ these two words so freely would certainly have a more extended vocabulary along the same line and the authors failure to let them exhibit their wares, which is understandable of course but never the less destroys the verisimilitude and genuineness of his attempt. As to Tobacco Road, if you haven’t read it you have quite certainly seen enough about it to know that it is about people that you would go around a block to avoid meeting in everyday life and I can see no reason to seek them out in a book. Then too, like the other book, it is inaccurate in factual detail and that about spoils even a good story for me. For example, just in the little I read it tells of Jeeter stealing a bag of turnips. Of how he stalked it as if he were sneaking up on a wild animal then how he pounced on it as he expected it to escape him if he didn’t grab it, and then how he ran with it squeezing it so hard that the turnip juice squirted through the sack into his eyes. Opposed as I am to gambling I will on this occasion wager a
quarter section of land against a burial lot that not even Sampson or Goliath of Gath or any other man of might and muscle can squeeze a turnip in his hand hard enough to make a single drop, let alone squirt. One of the incidents in Of Mice and Men is just about as fantastic. A great big powerful nitwit is being punched by a prizefighter and he is too stupid to know enough to try to defend himself till his pal and mentor shouts to him to, “Get him.” Whereupon he reaches out and grabs the prizefighters fist and crushes it to a pulp in his bare hand. Now you know that no man in the world can with one hand squeeze my clenched fist hard enough to even hurt, let alone injure it to say nothing about the difficulty of getting hold of a prizefighters fist while he was in action. I never thought I could write a book but at least I couldn’t do it as badly as some people who do.

#53

**MINORITIES**

Edson lived through one of the nations most volatile times in the area of race relations. He remembers as a small child in 1865, the black crepe hung on the door knobs of houses on the day of Abraham Lincoln’s death. As a child in the Plains and as a resident of the Pacific Northwest, he had dealings with Indians. When he moved to the Pacific Northwest Edson took it upon himself to learn the Native American language. He spoke fluent Chinook, which was a combination of French, English (or Boston, as the natives called it) and the tribal language. He was often called upon to interpret on behalf of the Native Americans in the Lynden area.
His views on Jews may have been influenced by his friendship with the Jewish publisher of the Lynden Tribune, a man named Sol Lewis. Edson respected and admired Lewis and his family.

His sympathy for the American Japanese during World War II was consistent with his concern for the powerless people in society and his attitude on war in general. This first letter and the ones that follow, are in sharp contrast to Burrs racist remarks. Burr stated in letter (cite) that although he conceded that there were several blacks who had made contributions, it was like putting a “handful of wheat in a pail of rat droppings, hard to find the value.”

#46 MARCH 2, 1939

For myself, I do not believe I have a trace of race prejudice unless it be against the race to which I belong. I don't know of any other that has been as guilty of such heinous sins as our own. That may be because I know more about my own kind than the others. You don't like the Indians because they are dirty and thieving. Well, perhaps their idea of personal hygiene does leave something to be desired though those out here--- and there were a number around Lynden when I first came here but the last one died a couple of weeks ago-- did not suffer greatly in this respect by comparison with their white neighbors. The manner of life of the Plains Indians, the ones you probably seen most of, is not conducive to bathtub consciousness and I suppose they do get a bit smelly at times. But I should say that it indicates a great self-forgetfulness, in view of the record, for any
paleface to accuse them of thievery. Most people professed to be horrified at the rape of Ethiopia but aside from the time involved and the more spectacular methods employed I can see no essential difference between it and our acquisition of this land of the free and the home etc. Our stealing was on a magnificent wholesale scale with plenty of murder thrown in for good measure whereas I sincerely doubt if you have ever known of any but very petty pilfering by the redskin. The Indian out here is just as honest as the whites. I very well remember when I was working in A.J. Allens store and either the Otoes or the Pawnees came through on their annual migration to the buffalo herds and an old squaw was buying some calico from him and he was measuring it off with a yardstick and he contrived to slip it back about a foot each time so he was cheating her out of about 1/3 of her purchase. I admit that by a strict definition that it wasn't stealing but cheating and perhaps is permissible under quite generally accepted business ethics that it is all right if you can get away with it. The old girl could see that he was 'gypping' her and she put up a holler but he bulldozed her into taking it anyway she not being wise enough to walk out on him. Then he bragged about it afterward. No, I should say that any paleface that hollers about stealing by Indians has forgotten his history or else reckons by a double standard.

As to the Negroes, enough of them have come up in spite of the tremendous handicaps we imposed to prove that their shortcomings are largely chargeable to us rather to them. I believe in two important respects they as a race are superior to us. I believe they are less cruel and less cunning; two most despicable traits.

As for Jews with their topnotchers in practically every field one can name music, art, theater, medicine, law, science, philanthropy as well as business, finance and sports
which you know I don't rate very high. I feel quite sure that on a percentage basis the Jews can show more blue ribbons than any other race: and yet, paradoxical as it seems, a very large per cent of the people who dislike them so insist on borrowing and appropriating their God. To be sure the original model has been changed considerably even since you and I first knew it for as late as that anger, jealousy and vengeance were outstanding characteristics but in the current streamlined model these traits or blemishes have been soft-pedaled almost to the point of obliteration but with all the alteration or rather transformation the chassis is still that of the Jewish Jehovah or Jaweh or I guess that should be Jahweh. Not only do they borrow the Jews God but they choose a Jew for their Savior and the Savior of the world. It is all very confusing I am sure. And you don't like the Mexicans, Filipinos or Hawaiians and I think it perfectly safe to assume that you wouldn't like the Chinese or Japs if you should be thrown among them or any of the other Kipling's "lesser breeds". You remember the old rhyme, "I do not like you mister Fell, The reason why I cannot tell but I do not like you Mister Fell" but in your case I am sure you could give a reason if necessary though maybe your reasons would seem rather inadequate to me but then it isn't at all necessary that they should.

#33

OCTOBER 23, (no date)

Edson spoke of the deplorable conditions around the world; China, Spain, Palestine and to the Jews everywhere in Europe....

"to be sure we are hardly in a position to point a reproving finger in view of our treatment of our own colored people more especially in the south but to a large degree in the north as well. To be sure it doesn't seem so bad in the case of the 'niggers' because"
they have never known anything else but in the case of the Jews, prior to Hitler they were on about the same level as they are in the US and then all at once to be robbed, beaten, imprisoned, reviled and humiliated in every way that the most devilish ingenuity could invent with no escape short of suicide makes one ashamed to belong to the same species.

JUNE 7, 1942

You ask "How can you know anything of the loyalty of a Jap". I can't see why the question isn't equally applicable to any German or Italian. Hitler's attack on his neighbors and Mussys on Ethiopia were all of apiece with the Japs attack on Pearl Harbor. If you are going to hold every individual of a country responsible for the acts of his government you are going to put yourself and myself in a rather awkward situation for I am sure that the U.S.A. has done a number of things one time and another that neither of us would approve. As for stressing this cry of treachery because of Pearl Harbor it seems silly to say the least. In the first place war isn't a sporting event to be played according to a prearranged rules except the rule to beat the other guy to the draw if you can. This talk of civilized war is a contradiction in terms……..But I still don't believe in taking it out on U.S. citizens because we can't get at the ones who kicked us in the slats and happen to be of the same race…..

OCTOBER 21, 1943

As for the Jap question I can't imagine how it would have been worse mishandled. Of course, as you say, in some instances as around Tacoma, the local people did what they could to mitigate the outrage. Up here we had just one Jap living at Wiser Lake. Everyone thought so well of Tommy that the neighbors came in and gave a party for him
before he was taken away. There was never any reason other than some highly prejudiced suspicion (which could hardly be called reason) for supporting that the US born Japs weren't just as patriotic as the rest of us, but after the treatment that has been accorded them it would be a reflection on their intelligence if they had a spark of goodwill left for the country. I am sure I would hate it most cordially if I were in their place…. Nothing can or could be done now in reparation could ever restore the goodwill of these people who have been outrageously treated and it would seem to be extremely bad business on the part of the Government to allow or condone a measure engendering so much ill will against it.

**ED'ISM'S**

*This is a compilation of short snippets of Edson's observations on all sorts of subjects, some serious and prescient, others tongue in cheek.*

**Teddy Roosevelt**

March 17, 1938

I can’t agree with you in lumping FDR and Teddy and Woody together as equally vain. Now I wouldn’t go so far as to claim that FDR is a shrinking violet or afflicted with an inferiority complex, but he never struck me as being really vain, but both the others seemed to me to be afflicted to Nth degree though they manifested it in quite different ways. T.R. was to me much more repulsive, a cheap, vulgar inability to distinguish between notoriety and fame. I think Wilson was a very vain man and that his vanity blinded him to his own limitation and in a very large measure, led to his failure and eclipse. But his sort of vanity wasn’t the kind to lead him into the cheap limelight seeking antics of T.R.

#51B

**Education**

May 9, 1937

The Supt. of our schools who has been here for twenty years or more has no more political sense than a jackrabbit. Whenever he picks up the paper he turns first to the sports page, which I think sufficiently describes him to show how incompetent he would be to help our schools save democracy. It would seem at least to me, that if we had the right sort of teachers, which we haven’t, and wouldn’t know where to look for them if we wanted them, which we don’t, and they were allowed to teach what every good democrat should know, which they couldn’t, the Legion and the DAR would see to that, that the schools might and should help us to run a democracy: but because of the rocks in the road
as mentioned above, I don’t believe they are likely to help any more in the future, at least the immediate future, than they have in the past, which is practically nil.

-#32

Advertising

August 15, 1937

I don’t know whether there is anyone that dislikes advertising as much as I do. I realize of course that I cannot reasonably expect any sympathy from an old newspaper man, the very lifeblood of whose business is or was advertising. But obviously in a sane and civilized world where goods were made for use and not for profit, there would be no occasion for advertising. And just think of what might be done toward promoting human happiness if the staggering and almost unbelievable aggregate of wealth now spent to persuade people to buy Jones’s’ product rather than Smiths’ were used for such purpose. If everyone was like me about advertising, it would go out of style without waiting for a change in our social economy. That is one thing that I shall expect and be greatly disappointed if I do not find when I pass through the “pearly gates”, to wit; that I shall see no more billboards or any other kind of advertising.

-#17

Sports

I think I mentioned in some former letter why I don’t like the major so-called sports, such as football, baseball, etc. But an octogenarian is privileged to repeat himself as long as he please, so at the risk of repetition, I’ll say the reason I don’t like them is because they are so often conducted in so unsportsman-like manner and the behavior of the spectators is so often nothing short of disgraceful. The idea of a sportsman-like contest is quite lost in the determination to win and to me, that isn’t sport. All these games are made the occasion for much betting and I am also a crank against gambling.

-#12

Women

I believe women, as a rule, are less inclined than men to live within themselves, sort of go hermit, so to speak. While I live about as active a life as I ever did and expect to as long as I can, yet I feel less and less inclination to go outside of my reading—and radio—for entertainment. While I am on the best of terms with everybody, there are scarcely more than the number of fingers on one hand that I would miss if I never saw them again.

-#38

Travel

Every day is almost exactly like every other. A lot of people, younger especially, would think it unendurably monotonous, but I am quite content with it. I am past the time when strange lands and adventure appeal to me. I prefer now to my travelling by proxy. I have taken the National Geographic for a good many years and I can see the interesting places of the world much more comfortably and satisfactorily to say nothing of how much more cheaply, and as for adventure, this world show that is being put on
before our eyes is certainly the most stupendous adventure that has every befallen mankind, and no matter what we do or don’t do we can’t escape the consequences. One would indeed be a glutton for adventure to ask for more now.

-Town Boosterism

Our state is spending a bunch of money, I don’t remember how much, to try to get people to come here. Needless to say I am altogether opposed to the idea. There are too many people everywhere already, and I would much rather see half our population leave than to have any more come. That’s another of my unorthodox views that, of course, I don’t proclaim, but as mayor, I received this a.m. a bunch of maps to be used in furtherance of this booster scheme and so I am sending you one.

-Health

I am as well as I ever was with never an ache or a pain for which I continually give thanks to whoever—or whomsoever—if you prefer, is entitled to them, which would, I suppose, include my quite heterogeneous ancestry as well as myself, for I believe I have learned several rules of right living, at least they seem to be right for me, for my particular case, though they may not suit anyone else, and I have not only learned them but what is rather unusual with most people, I practice them constantly and faithfully; but I can’t consistently advise other people to follow my example, because if I did it would ruin the drugstore business.

-Environment

March 17, 1940
Edson responds to Burrs concern about the debt the New Deal will pass on to the next generation. Edson sees a much more onerous debt legacy than money...

When we look about us and see the near universality with which governmental obligations are disregarded when they become sufficiently onerous, I should say it would be extremely unlikely that the next generation would feel themselves under greater obligation for a debt they never contracted than the present one has shown itself for debts of its own making. No, I am not worrying about the next generation on this account. Unless they prove much bigger fools than we are, with whatever gods there be forefend, they won’t allow themselves to be saddled with this particular load. If we could compel them to carry it, that would be horribly wicked beyond description, but thank goodness we can’t. But we are doing even worse than that in the way we are destroying the natural resources of the country. That is something the consequences of which they cannot escape and for which we, as a nation, should be consigned to the bottomless pit, where the fires are never quenched or else to a perpetual asylum for fools.
Constitution

March 17, 1940

The attempt to make it appear that our constitution is something embodying the wisdom of the ages and to be held sacrosanct and in inviolable is quite unjustifiable in the light of the facts for I am sure you know better than I that the constitution was far from being anything like the unanimous agreement of its makers, but on the contrary was a matter of compromise and was so inadequate and unsatisfactory that it was necessary to begin tacking on amendment right away and some, if not the most valuable parts of it, have been added after the all wise founding fathers had finished their perfect instrument.

Trees

March 2, 1939

I seem to have given the impression, quite unintentionally I’m sure, that I would not favor cutting any timber, that I would leave all the forests stand. It proves either how careless or how inefficient I am with the use of language. As you of course know, the “furriners” of Europe have known for a couple of hundred years or more how to cut what timber they needed without destroying all the remainder, and, as a consequence, their forests are perpetual. Living where you have, you haven’t had the opportunity to see the “American” method firsthand, but I have been right in the middle of it and don’t have to take anybody’s word for it. When I came here, this whole Puget Sound country was covered with one of the most magnificent forests that ever grew anywhere and now it is all gone except back in the hills and in its place thousands and thousands of acres of blackened stumps. It would take from 300 to 500 years for such trees to grow again and they have all been destroyed while I have been looking on.

The Dust Bowl

March 2, 1939

There wasn’t any dust bowl before the sod was broken up. When you and I first saw that country it was nearly all covered with grass, though everybody was doing all they could to destroy it, but they hadn’t at that time succeeded to an extent to make the dustbowl formidable. The native sod would not only prevent wind erosion but when it was not burned off would hold water better than anything else when we would get those occasional downpours. You say we didn’t make the dust bowl that it was there from the beginning. Well I’m not arguing that a deficiency of rainfall didn’t exist on the western plains, for nobody knows how long, but my point is that before we came, and this we is quite personal, for you and I were close to the vanguard, before we came, there was no dust worth mentioning. Of course no one foresaw the consequences of destroying the natural covering of the soil, but I have no reason to think that anyone would have done differently even if we had had a divine revelation of what would happen.
Global Warming

March 2, 1939

The rather rapid recession of glaciers all over the world together with some seemingly significant temperature records over a period of years in various parts of the world would seem to indicate that we may be in for another of the several warm spells that this old ball has experienced in the past. If this is true, it would be nearly impossible to restore the grass covering to the plains even with the most thorough and painstaking effort, though of course we know that no effort at all will be made toward that end, but with the world outlook what it is I don’t know that it makes much, if any, difference.

-#46

Grand Coulee

March 2, 1939

The damn is so stupendous and the whole thing on such a magnificent scale as to carry one away in admiration of the accomplishment of puny man that one forgets to inquire as to the wisdom and utility of the undertaking. There is certainly no immediate demand for the almost unlimited power to be generated. Most of the people of this state are on the west side of the mountains and we already have lots of hydro-electric plants with others being developed. So to find a market for the “juice” it will have to be transmitted over long distances and that costs money. These big transmission lines are expensive to construct and require considerable for maintenance. As far as the agriculture, conceding it to be good land, isn’t it a fact that we are already raising more agricultural products than we can profitably sell? Then why spend hundreds of millions of dollars to further aggravate a bad situation. It is a wonderful project as illustrating what man can do, but I am doubtful it is wise.

-#46

Salmon

March 2, 1939

Then there is the salmon. I believe I said something about that in a previous letter, unquestionably it is a tremendous source of natural wealth that if once destroyed can never be restored. It is questionable if Bonneville Dam won’t be sufficient to put an end to them though they have spent a bagful of money to provide ways for the fish to climb over but no one pretends that they ever could be taken over Coulee Dam so they talk of teaching them to go up the tributaries instead. Unfortunately a salmon doesn’t prove to be teachable at all when it comes to trying to tell him to go lay his, or rather her, eggs.

-#46

Hunting

October 22, 1939

This is the hunting season you know when the bloodlust of the most savage and merciless of killers has it’s annual indulgence. There is a slight compensation to read in the evening paper that to date there have been eleven hunters killed in the state and as the season isn’t over I hope to read of several others yet. I am glad have you to unload my
unorthodox thoughts on for if it should be known how I feel toward people who kill things for fun or to gratify their love for slaughter I am afraid I would be regarded as ‘queer’ so I don’t intrude my opinions on ‘sport’ anymore than I do on religion. I have you you see for my whipping boy and you can escape it by dropping it in the waste basket.

-#43