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French Creek as a Rural Community

A. J. Dadisman

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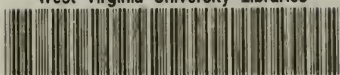
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Agricultural Experiment Station

College of Agriculture, West Virginia University

JOHN LEE COULTER, Director,

MORGANTOWN

FRENCH CREEK AS A RURAL COMMUNITY



The farmers of French Creek get together frequently to discuss with the county agent or a specialist from the college of agriculture matters of production, marketing and other economic problems. Practically all belong to the farm bureau.

BY

A. J. DADISMAN

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FOREWORD

In connection with the country life side of the farm bureau movement in West Virginia an interesting competition has sprung up among certain country communities. In answer to a demand from the communities for some unit of measure by which they could determine which communities might be considered the better places in which to live, the country community score card was devised four years ago through the co-operation of specialists representing the Agricultural Extension Service, the Department of Farm Economics of the College of Agriculture, the State Department of Schools, the State Department of Health, and the State Sunday School Association. After two years' testing of this score card in a few communities, in 1919 it was brought to the attention of twenty-five communities, and in 1920 to eight additional ones. With the co-operation of specialists who assisted the local leaders in interpreting the standards suggested in the score card, these communities rated themselves.

In 1919 French Creek in Upshur County received state-wide recognition as having the highest score, and the community activities of French Creek during the following year so added to the score as to keep it in the lead during 1920. Some weeks previous to the community meeting at French Creek in 1920 when the ratings in the score card were determined for the second time, Miss Laura B. Moore, formerly of French Creek, gathered together some very interesting data relative to French Creek and its people. Miss Moore was employed under a co-operative project entered into by C. J. Galpin, representing the United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Farm Management and Farm Economics, A. J. Dadisman, representing the Agriculture Experiment Station, and the Extension Division including the Upshur County Farm Bureau whose county agent was J. E. Romine, and whose home demonstration agent was Miss Marjorie Eastman.

This bulletin, prepared by Professor Dadisman from data gathered by Miss Moore, should be of special interest to those in other country communities of West Virginia who are forward looking, as well as to rural investigators and extension workers.

NAT T. FRAME,
Director Agr'l Extension.



One of French Creek's many beautiful waterfalls. Love of nature and appreciation of scenic beauty have long been marked characteristics of French Creek's people.

The old mulberry tree by the roadside on Mulberry Ridge has been a landmark for a century. Children of several generations have enjoyed its large and luscious fruit.



French Creek as a Rural Community

By A. J. DADISMAN

Early in the nineteenth century several families from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont, moved into the wilderness region of what is now Upshur County, West Virginia. These pioneers traveled in wagons drawn by horses and oxen a distance of 600 miles and settled in the forest on a little stream called French Creek. This little community has existed for more than a century, and in that time has developed into one of the best rural communities of the State, and has influenced the development of many other communities.

French Creek community is located a little to the southwest of the center of Upshur County, and Upshur County is located a little northeast of the center of the state. French Creek village, near



the center of the community, is located about two miles from the nearest railroad. The community consists of 134 families and about 500 persons, living within a radius of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. French Creek village occupies the level land and the hill-sides where Bush Run empties into French Creek. The village contains 23 dwellings, 2 churches, a two-room school, a doctor's office, 3 general stores, a garage, a hotel, a planing and grist mill, a blacksmith shop, a postoffice, a telephone exchange,

Sketch showing principal features of French Creek Community.

a furniture and undertaking establishment, a millinery store, a cobbler shop, a saddle shop, and a barber shop.

*Acknowledgment is made to Mr. Fred E. Brooks, of French Creek, for the photographs used in this bulletin and to the following publications for valuable data: Fifty Years in the Wilderness (a sermon by Rev. Loyal Young, 1869); Souvenir of the French Creek Home-Coming (1916); and Memorial of the Centenary Celebration of the French Creek Presbyterian Church, (1919).



A few of the Colerider herd of sixty Herefords. They will be sold for export in the fall. Such herds add to a community's score.



Good hay on the E. W. Ervin farm. Some of the better topography of French Creek community is here shown.



Residence of R. A. Darnall hidden by evergreen trees. Corn field in foreground shows the work of one of French Creek's farm boys.

THE FIRST SETTLEMENT

The fear of Indian raids prevented extensive settling of what is now West Virginia previous to 1795. Soon after this time several promoters obtained land grants in the vicinity of French Creek and were successful in interesting settlers from different states in this new territory. The first settler in this immediate neighborhood was Aaron Gould. He came from Charlemont, Massachusetts, in 1808. In 1812 three other families came from Massachusetts to French Creek and they together established a little settlement. Between 1814 and 1816 five more families from Massachusetts settled at French Creek. Twelve other families from New England and one or two from Virginia had settled in the same community and in other nearby communities before 1825.

FROM NEW ENGLAND TO FRENCH CREEK

There were several reasons for these New England people's leaving their native homes and starting on a long journey into the wilderness to establish new homes. In 1812 and 1816 the summers in New England were very cold. There was frost in each summer month which destroyed much growing vegetation. The settlers had a longing for a warmer climate. "People were migrating from the eastern states into the new land, prompted by the hard times fol-



A view of the principal street in French Creek village. Arrangements have been completed for the construction of concrete sidewalks along this street. Such evidence of community spirit adds to the score under "Business."



The French Creek girls' club. This club improves the social life of its members and at the same time teaches them the elements of homekeeping. Such club makes for a better community life.



The French Creek boys' club. Such clubs are called the 4-H clubs because they develop the Head, Hand, Heart and Health. The products grown are only one of the many means to the development of the club member's character.

lowing the Revolution and the disturbed conditions connected with the War of 1812. Profiteering was then in vogue in the East. Prices were prohibitive. Flour was \$17.00 a barrel; salt was \$5.00 a bushel; sugar was 30 cents a pound; molasses was \$2.00 a gallon. The new West was the hope of the people."

These descendants of the Pilgrims had inherited the love of adventure, discovery, and conquest. At this time there was a general westward movement of the people. Roads "leading westward from the East were covered with lines of moving wagons." Sometimes whole communities moved together and settled together, but more frequently a family went alone. These early French Creek settlers migrated as did hundreds of other families.

FARMING

The country about French Creek is largely rolling uplands which are comparatively smooth. The flat-topped hills and ridges are cultivated while the hillsides produce good pasture. The more nearly level land along the streams is cultivated or is allowed to remain in pasture. Upshur is one of the leading counties of the State in the production of cattle and sheep. Corn, oats, wheat, hay, and fruit are the chief crops. The farms in French Creek Community are typical of those of Upshur County; they are fairly small.



A meeting of the French Creek farm women's club at the home of one of the members. The club pursues a regular course of study selected by themselves as being adapted to their needs. This activity falls under the division of "Clubs" in the community score card.



A group of high school students at French Creek. The community's interest in education was demonstrated when \$13,000 and a free site were subscribed toward the establishment of a district high school.

The average size of the farms of Upshur County is about 85 acres of which about 60 acres are improved land.

THE FRENCH CREEK PEOPLE

Among others from New England, Daniel Stebbins and Patrick Peebles may be mentioned as taking up large tracts of land in this section. They held meetings in Northampton, Massachusetts, at which they attempted to dispose of their land holdings in what is now West Virginia and to induce the people to migrate to this promised land. Many were persuaded to buy land and later migrated to it.

Some of the earliest families which migrated from New England to French Creek were the Morgans, Goulds, Youngs, Brookses, Phillippes, Sextons, Leonards, Perrys, Aldens, Burrs, and Hayneses. These people brought with them their New England piety and faith which helped them to overcome difficulties on their long journey and after they arrived at French Creek. Several members of these families and their descendants have been real leaders in the community.

By 1835 there were 66 scattered dwellings in the community, a Presbyterian church, a tanyard, a number of wheelwrights, house carpenters, cabinet makers, and joiners. The principal pursuit of the people was agriculture, the school term was six months each



Family gatherings and homecomings are frequent social affairs at French Creek. Celebrating the one-hundredth birthday of Aunt Fanny Wingrove. She later moved to Kansas where she lived for several years with one of her sons.

year, and the state of education was far superior to that which existed in the adjacent country.*

Since the first settlement of the community a very large percentage of the farmers have owned their own farms. In this new country "ten acres of rich land could be purchased for the price asked for one of the stony acres of New England."

The individual families were generally large, as were the families of most of the early pioneers. From eight to fifteen children in a family was not uncommon. The early settlements of French Creek were made as the natural result of courage, fidelity, integrity, and faith, and these characteristics have been no less outstanding in each generation since the first settlement. French Creek has contributed to the citizenship of at least two foreign countries, and thirty-two states, in addition to West Virginia. Among the actual residents of this community are listed 203 school teachers, several of whom have taught in colleges and universities in this and other states; 29 vocal and instrumental music teachers; 15 ministers, representing six different denominations; 6 missionaries to foreign countries; 20 physicians; 5 dentists; 3 pharmacists; 3 noted scientists, one in entomology, one in ornithology, and one in forestry; 3 optometrists; 27 district, county, and state officers; 15 com-

*Martin's Gazetteer of Va. and D. C., 1835.



One of the old pioneer log cabin homes of French Creek.



Home of one of the younger farmers of French Creek.

Bird's-eye view of French Creek territory.





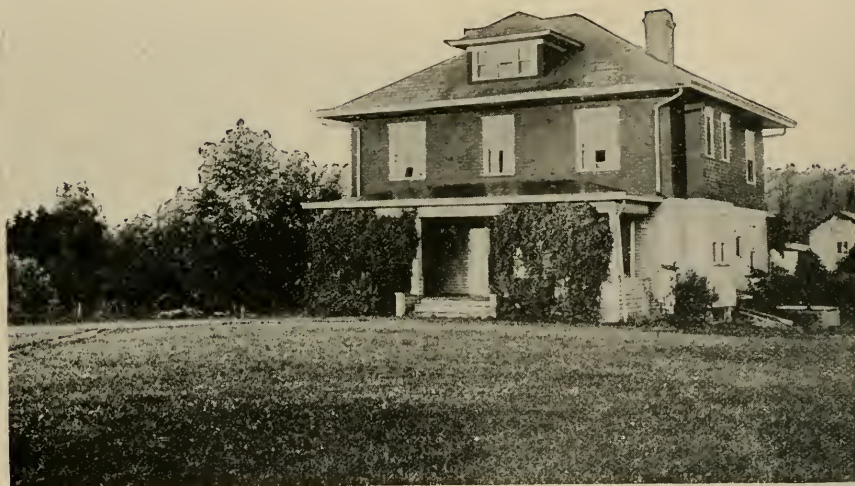
Home of E. W. Brooks equipped with telephone, gas, bath.



village and surround-

Home of Charles Gould equipped with telephone and gravity water system.





What career more satisfying than that of the eminent scientist who lives in this comfortable house in his own home community and shoulders his share and more of the community responsibilities.

missioned army officers, one in the war of 1812, 9 in the Civil War, and 5 in the recent World War; and 2 state military officers.

In a recent address, at the centenary celebration of the French Creek Presbyterian church, Warren H. Wilson* said: "This is the most perfect expression of the life of a community I have ever witnessed * * * yet it is representative of the best and most frequent type of rural community throughout the United States. * * * The whole world has been richer for French Creek. There are cities which have not contributed so much as you have to the wealth of mankind."

DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLS

The first school teacher in the French Creek settlement was Miss Anna Young who taught first in a barn, later a private house was used as a school room. The pastors of the Presbyterian church "taught some of the higher branches to the most promising young people and started them on their way through college." The first school house was a small log cabin which the settlers built in 1824. "The sons of the old families began to find their way to Washington and Jefferson, Marietta, Wooster, and West Virginia state colleges, and the daughters to Steubenville, Washington and Oxford." A select school, opened soon after the Civil War, paved the way for advanced education which was to follow. Private schools were also taught at different times. In the winter of 1859-1860 Miss Rebecca Thom, a graduate of Blairsville Seminary in

*In charge of church and country life work of the Presbyterian church in the United States.



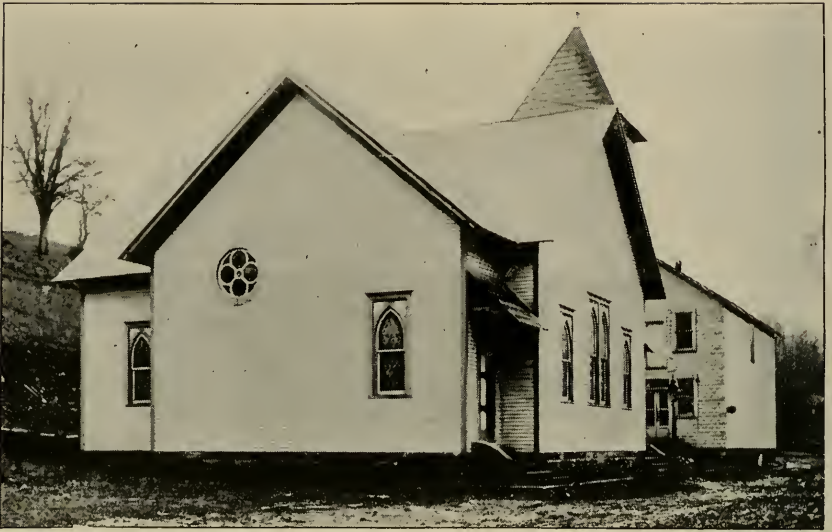
Five ministers of the Gospel who for fifty years have set high standards for French Creek. From the reader's left to right they are Rev. W. O. Phillips, Rev. A. C. Powell, Rev. W. J. Hazlett, Dr. Earle A. Brooks and Dr. S. Hall Young.

Pennsylvania, was employed by Theodore Morgan to teach his own girls. Mr. Morgan soon provided quarters for other girls of the community in his home, and conducted "a boarding school" for two years. High school branches were taught in Miss Thom's school. One of her twelve students later became principal of the French Creek Academy.

The New England settlers brought with them a number of books which were used as a circulating library among the early French Creek people. The books of this library were read by a large number of people.

Dr. Asa Brooks was one of the first postmasters at French Creek. He read aloud from the New York Tribune, principally editorials by Horace Greely, to large crowds of people who gathered at the postoffice on days when mail was delivered. Special teachers were secured at an early date who devoted their time to teaching penmanship.

In the spring of 1871 nine men who were interested in higher education organized "the French Creek Institute for the purpose of establishing and conducting a male and female academy, to train up teachers and promote education generally." The incorporators



The French Creek Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1865 and has been a great factor in influencing the lives of the people.



The French Creek Presbyterian Church was organized in 1816 with fourteen members and has maintained high standards for the community for more than a century.

subscribed \$410.00 and provided for increasing the capital to \$30,000. During the twelve years of its existence the French Creek Academy, as it was commonly called, had on its faculty some of the best educators of its day. Four of these instructors who are still living—Dr. S. Hall Young, Rev. L. B. Moore, Dr. R. A. Armstrong, and Rev. J. L. Gould—have more than a state-wide reputation.

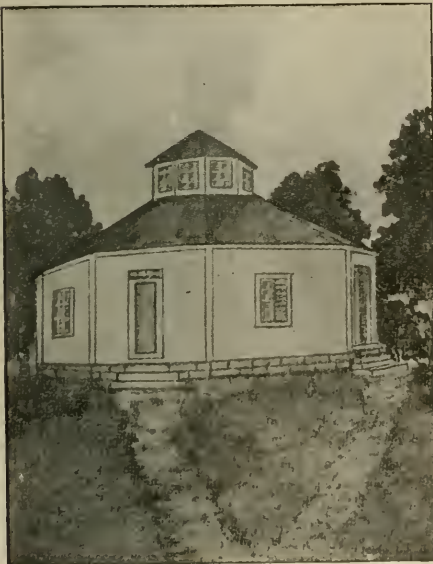
The Academy offered a full high-school course and attracted students from other parts of the State. Among its students have been people in many callings. From an available list of 161 of its students one finds 78 school teachers; 16 ministers representing six different denominations; 1 university pres-



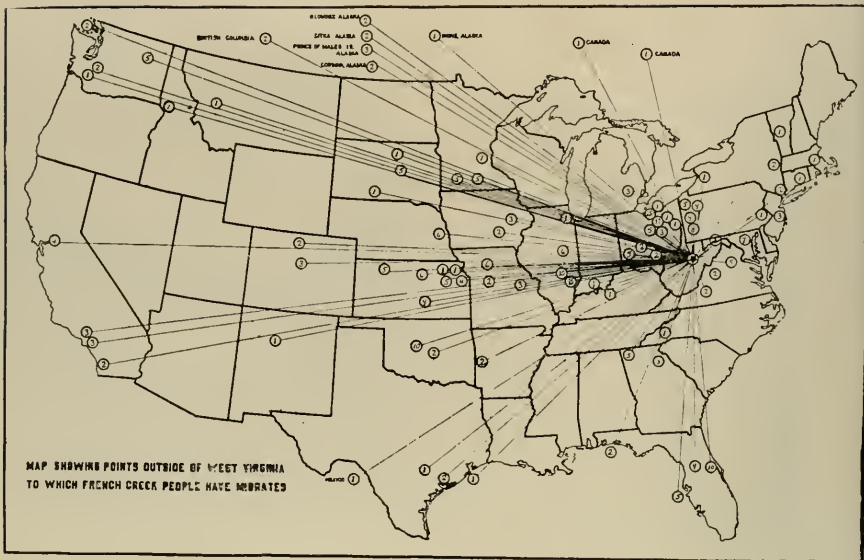
The community score reminded the people that the school had fallen behind the times and they immediately got busy on the solution of this problem.

ident; 12 physicians; 4 lawyers; 4 missionaries, two to Alaska, one to India, and one to Mexico; 1 judge; 2 bankers; 2 authors; 6 merchants; 1 sheriff and 4 deputy sheriffs; and several business men, mechanics, farmers, and farmers' wives.

In an address in 1919 Dr. R. A. Armstrong, principal of French Creek Academy in 1882-83, said, "This school was not notable for any great buildings, or any elaborate apparatus or equipment. Its success was due to the eagerness of the students and the sympathetic devotion of the teachers." The French Creek Academy served its useful purpose in the community until the West Virginia Academy, a United Brethren school established in 1882 at Buckhan-



French Creek Academy attracted students from all parts of the state and sent out a large number of teachers and influential people.



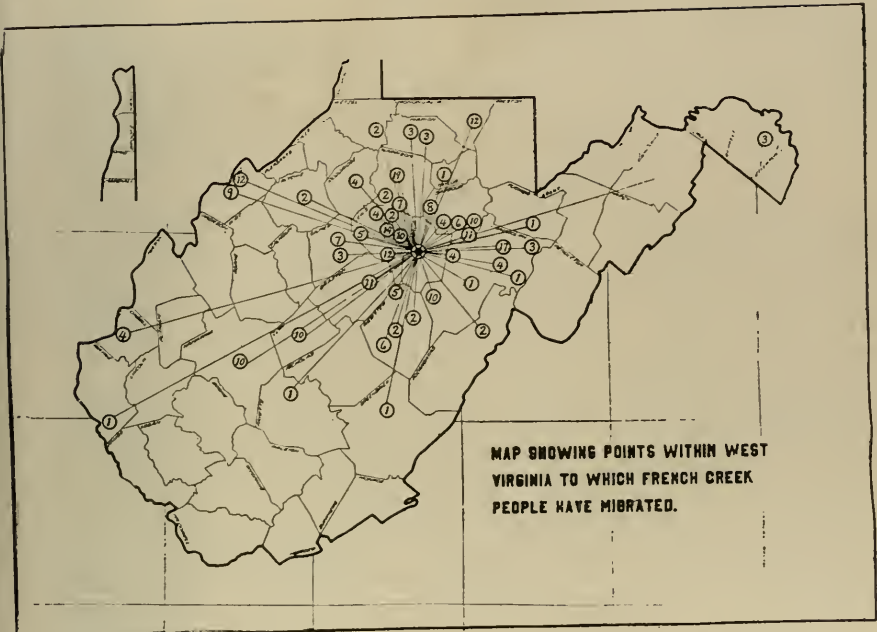
One method of measuring the influence of a community on the country at large, began drawing students from the French Creek Academy. Later the French Creek Academy gave way to it. Not only did the Academy send out a large number of teachers and influential persons but the community has always been known for its teachers.

In a sermon in 1869 Rev. Loyal Young, D. D., said, "This neighborhood (French Creek) has always furnished school teachers for the region round about." In a centenary sermon in 1919 Rev. S. Hall Young, D. D., said, "French Creek has produced more physicians, teachers, and preachers, in proportion to its population, than any other community in the State."

At present there is a two-room school at French Creek. A local movement has been started to build a high school; \$13,000 and a free site have been contributed by the local people. A ballot of the district will be taken in a short time on a levy to provide for a district high school.

FRENCH CREEK CHURCHES

When the New England settlers first arrived at French Creek the few families met every Sunday for worship, at first at a private house. The French Creek Presbyterian Church was organized in 1819, and a log church building erected in 1823. A Sunday School was started the same year the church was organized. Rev. Asa Brooks came from the Hampshire County (Mass.) Congregational Missionary Society to French Creek as a missionary in 1816; it was he who perfected the church organization, with fourteen members.



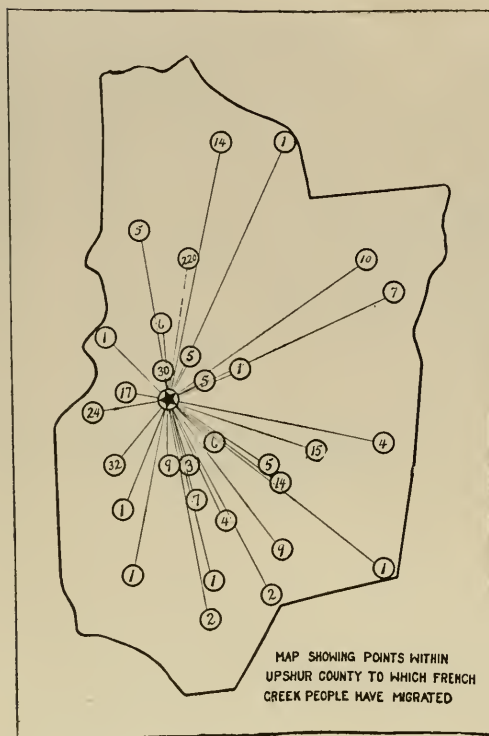
French Creek has given her full quota to the up-building of the State.

Eighteen new members were received into the church the next year. Such was the beginning of one of the oldest churches in this section of the country, and one that has continued to have an elevating influence on the people.

Rev. A. C. Powell, pastor of the church in 1919, said in an address, "The whole congregation from the least to the greatest contributed in some way of their means and service to humanity. Every member of the Sunday school and church belonged to the Red Cross, and contributed towards its support. * * * The church is thoroughly organized, a strong Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society, a live Christian Endeavor, a fine Young Ladies' Guild, and a front line school with class and department organizations, five organized Bible classes of which four are adult. * * * The school has a strong and efficient corps of teachers, and is doing excellent work.

"The congregation maintains high standards of education for its children. Among the families of the church and their children there are thirty-five school teachers, seven doctors, two ministers, thirteen graduates of colleges, seven of the children are in college, and twelve are teachers in active service."

In 1865 a Methodist Episcopal church was organized and a church building was erected one mile from the village of French



Upshur County is the richer for having within her borders French Creek community.

he said: "Though at first the singing was very poor and confined to two or three tunes, this part of worship was rarely omitted." A list of twenty-nine vocal and instrumental music teachers who have taught music at French Creek has been compiled; some of these were local people and some were from distant places. Recently a French Creek band has been organized, consisting of fourteen pieces.

ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the churches, schools, Sunday school, Red Cross, and band, several other organizations have had their influence on French Creek life. In 1829 a Bible society was formed and distributed "450 Bibles and 200 Testaments" among the people of the county. In 1828 one of the first temperance societies of the country was formed at French Creek. This was probably the first temperance society in the United States to favor total abstinence.

Creek. Later this was abandoned and a new building was located in the village but was afterwards destroyed by fire. The present substantial and attractive church building replaced it. This church has a good Sunday school, maintains weekly services, and has been a great factor in influencing the lives of the people.

MUSIC

Music has played an important role in the lives of French Creek people from an early date. Soon after the first settlements there were several homes at which people gathered to sing. These homes usually contained some form of musical instrument. Home orchestras were common. Singing was almost always a part of church worship. In a sermon by Dr. Loyal Young in 1869

Other organizations which have flourished or are active at present on French Creek soil are the farm bureau, the farm women's club, the G. A. R., the Sons of Veterans, the Grange, the literary society, the Invincible Sons of the Hills, the bird club, the book club, the boy scouts, the boys' corn club, the farm girls' club, the Jr. O. U. A. M., and the Good Templars.

COMMUNITY GATHERINGS

Frequent community gatherings have characterized the social life of French Creek since early times. Among them were some very notable ones. There was a famous meeting of the Presbytery of Greenbrier at French Creek which was a landmark in the history of the community. In the early development of the community, fourth of July celebrations were held each year. Reading of the Declaration of Independence, public speaking, a parade, and dinner served on long tables set in the Presbyterian church grove were features of these occasions. Those of 1868 and 1919 celebrated the return of French Creek sons from two great wars and were attended by hundreds. Decoration and Memorial days have always been observed. In 1869 the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Presbyterian church and in 1919 the centenary of the same event were celebrated by meetings which brought together noted speakers and many guests. The Home Coming in 1917 lasted three days and was attended by 2,000 persons, many coming from distant states.

FARM HOMES

The first houses on French Creek were of the pioneer log cabin type. However, some of the New England settlers constructed more satisfactory houses, some which are still occupied by the older residents. New modern homes have replaced many older ones. Many of the families now use natural gas for fuel; a telephone line extends to practically all houses of the community; water systems have been provided in many homes; mail is carried daily on the main-traveled roads; and most of the farmsteads are adorned with trees, shrubbery, and flowers.

COMMUNITY SCORE

The country community score card, previously referred to, is made up of nine divisions: history, government, business, farms, clubs, homes, schools, churches, and health. One hundred points may be earned on each division except farms which is 200, thus making a total of 1,000 points. French Creek scored high on history, churches, and government but comparatively low on schools and health. This community has been scored two years. The total score in 1919 was 728, in 1920 it was 769. Each division of the score showed an increase from 1919 to 1920 except that of farms.

Community activities, some of which are in progress, will still further increase the score. Among the improvements in progress or contemplated are a new high school, a general health campaign, more purebred sires, a resident pastor, more attention to fence rows and farmsteads, more voters at election, better telephone service, improved roads, and concrete sidewalks in the village.

MIGRATIONS TO OTHER COMMUNITIES

People from French Creek have migrated to many other communities where they have had their influence in shaping the lives of other people.

Four hundred and sixty-two persons have left French Creek to settle in 31 other communities of Upshur County. To one of these communities, Buckhannon, 220 persons have gone. From one to as many as 30 persons have settled in other communities of the county.

Two hundred and seventy-two persons moved to points within West Virginia outside of Upshur County. These persons located in 23 different counties. Only one person located in each of five counties, and more than 20 located in each of five other counties.

Three hundred and fifty-six persons settled in 32 different states outside of West Virginia. Of this number 92 located in one state and 75 in one county. Fifteen migrants passed the border of the states, four locating in Canada, ten in Alaska, and one in Mexico.

The three accompanying maps (pp. 18,19,20) show the number of persons who migrated to various communities throughout the country. At least 143 different communities and perhaps many more have been directly influenced by French Creek people, to what extent no one can say. But 220 persons from one rural community settling in a small city, 75 in one county in a distant state, and 47 in one county nearby would seem to be influences worthy of consideration. The migrants from French Creek doubtless have carried with them customs and traditions peculiar to themselves.

The people of every other community in West Virginia have done to a certain extent what French Creek people have done. Every community is modified and influenced by the new settlers added to its population and since some of the members of each community are ever changing their locations the influence of any community is far beyond its own borders. The good community spreads good influences, the poor community can spread only the materials of which it is made.

SUMMARY

Among the reasons why French Creek community made a high community score may be mentioned:

1.—An ancestry of energetic people with high ideals which have been passed on by each generation.

2.—Rural leadership in each generation. The leaders have had faith in their undertakings and a vision of progress.

3.—A love of country for which no sacrifice was too great.

4.—Church fellowship and Christian influences.

5.—High educational ideals, especially in the earlier periods of development.

6.—Location and environment conducive to good health.

7.—A satisfying social life and a good community spirit. The people provided their own entertainment.

8.—Good farm homes with more than average conveniences.

The community score card helped to point out the needs of the community. When people have their problems clearly defined they are in a position to begin work leading to their solution.

Handwritten text, possibly a signature or a name, located in the upper right quadrant of the page. The text is faint and difficult to decipher.

