

# Letter of Appreciation to Roseburg Housewives

By H.E. Cully

H.E. Cully, Secretary of the Roseburg Chamber of Commerce, drafted this letter in 1927 to express his gratitude to the "housewives" of Roseburg for being conscious consumers and allies in an eight-month-old campaign designed primarily to support local merchants and manufacturers of Roseburg, Oregon. The letter hints at trying economic times for Roseburg businesses in 1927, but notes that by exerting their influence as consumers, community members were saving jobs for local wage earners and avoiding bankruptcy for many stores.

In 1927, the Merchants and Manufacturers Committee of the Roseburg Chamber of Commerce organized the Confidence Promotion Campaign, a collection of programs aimed at improving the local economy. "Buy Home Products" and "No Peddler" campaigns were essential to the program. The Chamber of Commerce distributed 1,000 aluminum "No Peddler" signs for display in Roseburg homes. Roseburg newspapers reported on the discoveries of a sub-committee that investigated and publicized the dealings of less-than-honest door-to-door salesmen from outside the county. The same group publicized dishonest merchandising efforts of mail-order catalogs and other distributors of goods manufactured in other cities and states.

The Chamber of Commerce also encouraged Roseburg merchants and grocers to make window displays of locally made and grown products during "Home Products Week." Fliers and newspaper advertisements educated the public on the advantages of buying local. "Few people," stated one article, "have ever stopped to really estimate what could be done if everyone would buy at home instead of through peddlers, mail order houses, or in other cities."

Other cities in the United States held similar campaigns, at a time when chain stores and national distributors like Sears and Roebuck were making a real impact on local economies. Members of the Roseburg Chamber of Commerce studied the successes and failures of other cities' programs to determine how to proceed. In contrast to a similar campaign in Texas, for example, the Roseburg program promoted the goods of farmers and manufacturers in rural areas of Douglas County. The campaign was designed primarily to improve conditions for retailers in Roseburg, the financial center of the county, but also to foster a relationship between city merchants and rural producers.

H.E. Cully's letter gives credit to Roseburg housewives for resisting the sophisticated tactics of peddlers who specialized in dealing with women consumers. Anthropologist Carol Lopate, in her article "Selling to Ms. Consumer," notes that the scientific study of women as consumers sharpened at the end of the World War I, coinciding with the growth of psychoanalysis in the United States.

**Further Reading:** Hoskins, Deb. 'Negotiating 'the Circle of Friendship': Agriculture, Cooperation, and Diversity in a Small-Town Revitalization Program, 1926-1930." *Agricultural History*, Vol. 76, no. 1. (2002), 82-105. Lopate, Carol. "Selling to Ms. Consumer." *College English*, Vol. 38, No. 8, *Mass Culture, Political Consciousness and English Studies*. (April 1977), pp. 824-834. Written by Sara Paulson, © Oregon Historical Society, 2007.

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