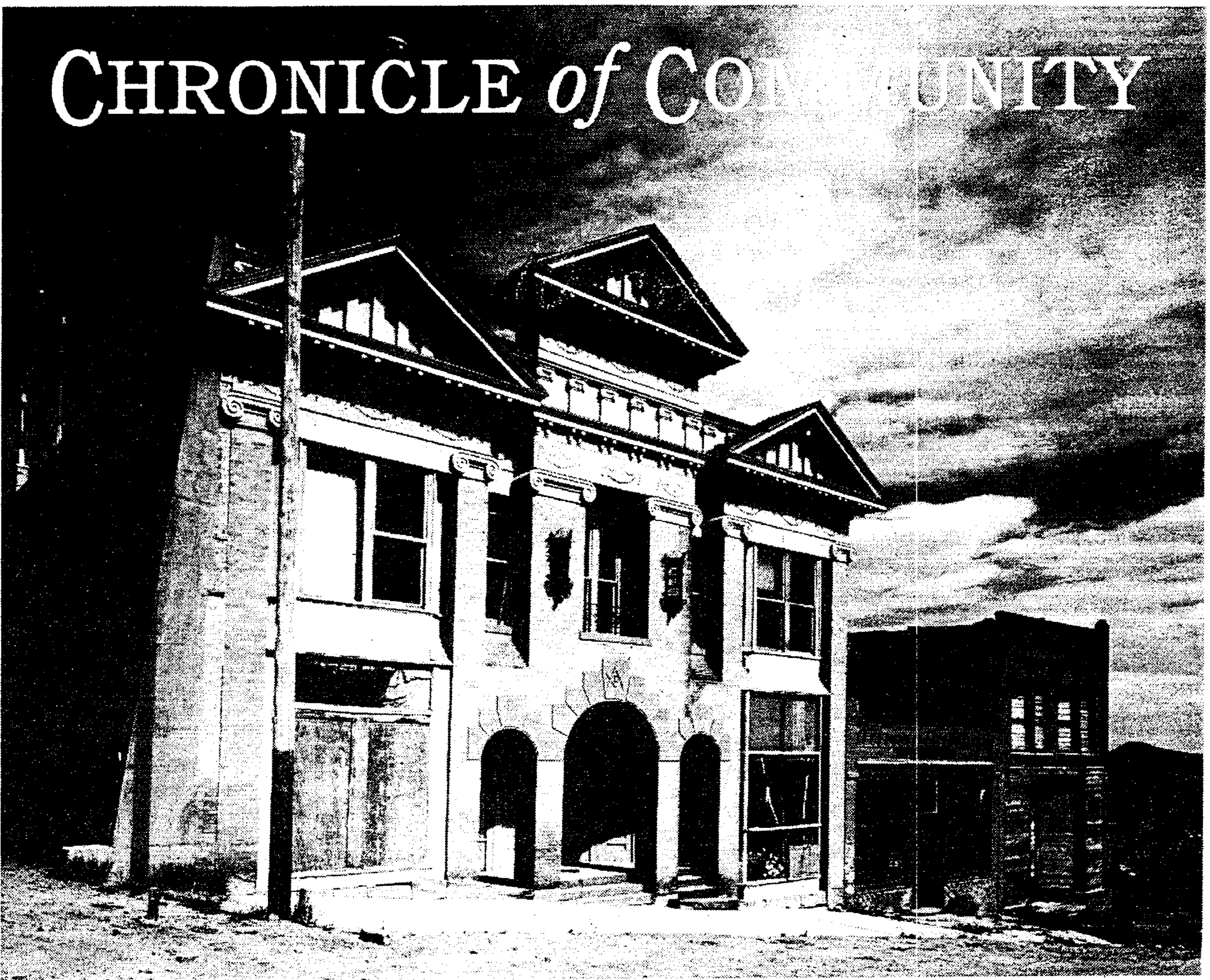




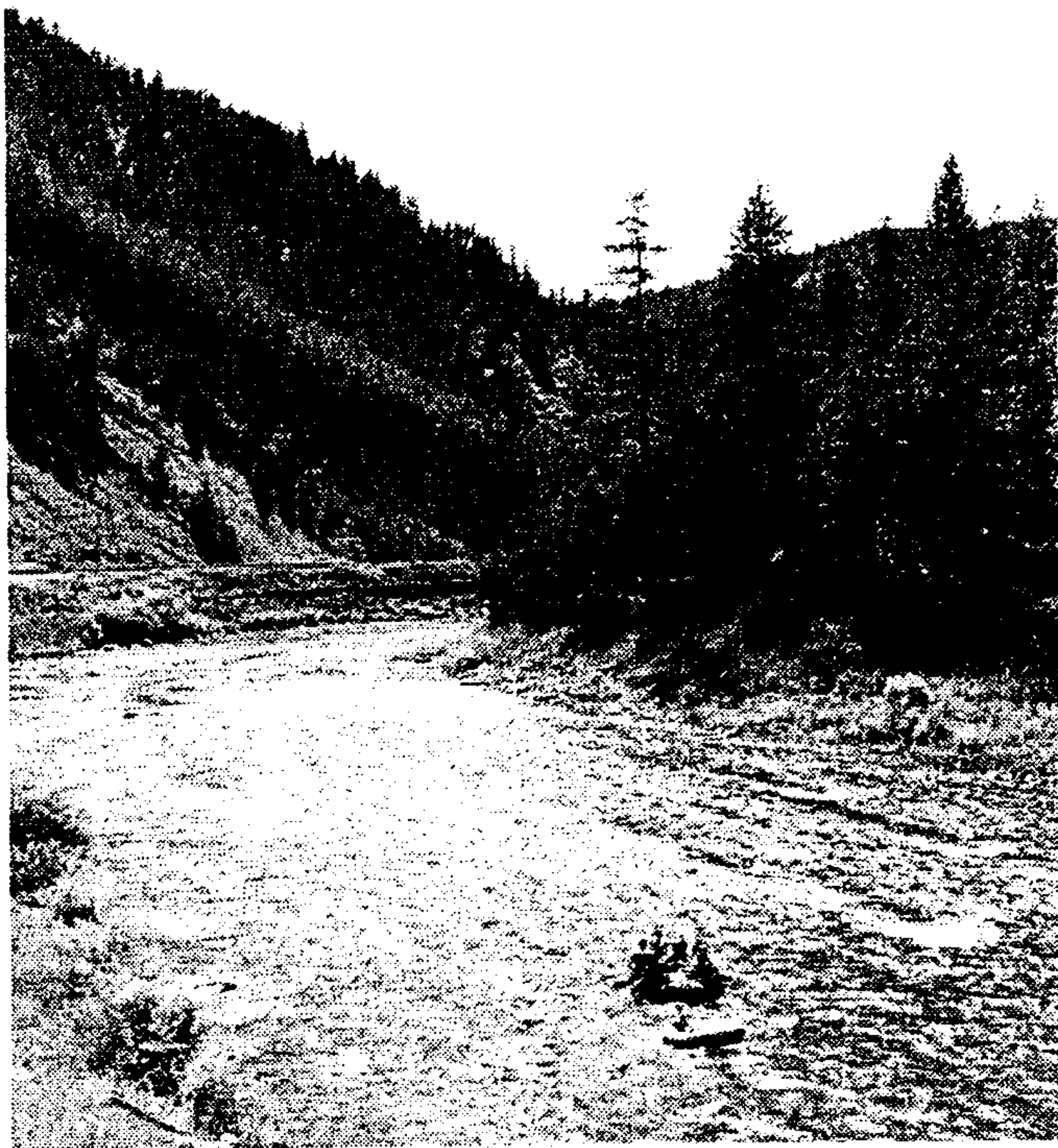


CHRONICLE of COMMUNITY



THE MASONIC LODGE IN VICTOR, COLORADO. Photo by Val Brinkerhoff ©1991

A public land partnership in Moab, Utah 
A new approach for instream flows in the
Clark Fork River, Montana  Building
community in the West  Dan Kemmis
reflects on community and public lands 
Plus The Federal Advisory Committee Act



RAFTERS ENJOY A SHINY AFTERNOON ON MONTANA'S BLACKFOOT RIVER.
See article on page 17.

INSIDE

HOME

- 5 Doing It the Moab Way: A Public Land Partnership at Sand Flats *Sarah Van de Wetering*
- 17 River Story: A New Chapter for Montana's Clark Fork *Donald Snow*

FRESHENERS

- 26 Ranchers as Land Stewards: Beyond Slogans
- 27 President's Council Calls for Collaborative Approaches

CHAUTAUQUA

- 28 What is Community? *Carl M. Moore*
- 33 Turning to Each Other *Shirley Solomon*
- 36 A Conversation with Dan Kemmis
- 40 Coming Home *Donald Snow*

TOOLBOX

- 44 The Federal Advisory Committee Act: What You Need to Know *Thomas Brendler*

LETTERS

- 48 From Owen Olpin and Brian Hanson

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COMING UP

in the Winter, 1996 issue:

Dan Dagget (*Beyond the Rangeland Conflict*) profiles Nevada's Tipton Ranch.

SARAH VAN DE WETERING describes Wyoming's experiment with Coordinated Resource Management.

MATT MCKINNEY explores consensus and suggests how to make it work.

BETSY RIEKE reflects on the role of federal resource managers in building community.

KATIE DEUEL surveys community conservation service organizations in the West.

And more ...

Turning to Each Other

Community starts neighbor to neighbor across the back fence.

IN THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS, the hawthorn tree stands for "hope." For me, it has become a symbol of community, made real whenever I look into my neighbor's backyard and see the stumps of the three splendid hawthorn trees he cut down this past spring. ¶ The removal of the hawthorns caused quite a stir within the circle of surrounding neighbors. Those trees were important in our intensely urban world. Their expansive, dense crowns provided a valued privacy screen to our cluster of tiny backyards. As gracious hosts, they served the countless birds that took shelter in their branches and feasted on their succulent red haws throughout the winter. The largest of their number granted homestead rights to a squirrel family and sheltered the nest through successive generations.

THE NIGHT AFTER THE "LOGGING," as someone caustically referred to it, we gathered, caught by surprise and saddened by the loss. Everyone groused and wondered about his sensitivity, his good sense, asking of each other: "Did he mention his plans to you?" and "Did he let you know what he was going to do?" Fact is, he had talked to no one. Not that he was given to talking to any of us. Nor us to him, for that matter. When he moved in three summers ago, the neighbors extended the usual welcome, gathering for a potluck to get acquainted. But little warmth was generated and we settled into a pattern of perfunctory head-nods when acknowledgment was unavoidable, unusual behavior on a street filled with diversity and known for its friendliness. No one made the extra effort to draw him into our circle of community, an omission that cost us at

the very least those three valued trees. We learned the hard way that not being in ordinary, everyday conversation with your neighbors means not knowing their plans, not being in a position to discuss options, suggest alternatives. Let's face it, if you have not established yourself with someone, you have lost the opportunity to influence him.

THE HAWTHORNS LED ME to a deeper level of understanding about the necessity of being "in community" with those around me. Those pathetic stumps have shown me that when you live in the same place, you are connected to those who live there with you. Whether you choose to acknowledge it or not, your fortunes are intertwined. Like it or not, the quality of your lives together depend in large measure on how well you play the give-and-get game. And that making the effort to be "in relationship" with those not like you, those with whom you may have little affinity, is essential. Civility cultivates community.

The experience sent me back to Robert Hughes' 1992 criticism of political correctness and multiculturalism entitled *The Fraying of America*. To Hughes, this country is a construction of the mind, an act of the imagination whose making never ends. He suggests that because it

by SHIRLEY SOLOMON

is composed of so many dissimilar parts—the melting pot that never melted—its cohesion can only be based on mutual respect. Since there is no core America in which everyone looks the same and believes the same things, the country delivers its promise of equity only to the extent to which we, its citizens, are able to negotiate accommodations with one another. That the accommodations succeed unevenly or not at all in no way diminishes the promise.

So it is with the building of community in our home place because community, too, is a state of mind, a way of being in this world, a promise as much as a reality. Community is both promise and obligation. The root of the word originates in two Latin words: *co-* and *munis*. “Co-” means together. “Munis” is the annual gift required of every citizen as an indication of commitment and support.

I share my friend Tom Jay’s view that ideal communities are like functional extended families. They may be contentious, difficult, divisive, diverse, but you don’t leave, you stay and work it out. Working it out means living and dying together, enduring, abrading and weaving the different realities into a rich character, particular to that place. It means mutual respect and accommodation, refining your skills in the give-and-get game.

Such a way of being would root you in your home place, connect you to those who inhabit the place with you, and invest you in the civic life and institutions of that place. And seed a new culture, built around the specialness of that place and all its people, a unifying culture that finds its meaning in common place.

AT THIS POINT I begin to feel overwhelmed by the great distance still to be traveled. The noble dream of community, cooperation, accommodation, mutual respect, unreachable because of the way things are, because of the way they’ve always been. The promise laid waste before special interests, power inequities, seemingly irreconcilable differences. It seems easier to adapt to what is than to seek change. The inefficiencies are too entrenched, shortsighted policies have devastated our resources, the

I of self always overtakes the *we* of common purpose, entitlements have turned into rights clung to regardless of the larger cost. Community: It’s the siren’s song, seduction followed by the cold light of winter.

I am caught by the promise and overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. In this I am in good company because many of us who work to bring about com-

munity are often confounded by what to do to make a difference in a realm where there is so much divisiveness. Witness the words, at a recent conference of the American Fisheries Society, of a preeminent biologist, assessing the future of Pacific salmon stocks: “Our difficulties are not technical in nature. Sure, we don’t know all we could know, but we know enough. Our difficulties lie with ourselves and how we come to terms—or in most instances, don’t—with our different needs, values, and interests.”

And another: “Anymore, it’s not about fish, it’s about people and I just can’t handle the ‘people thing’ because behavior is too irrational.”

ACCORDING TO ROBERT PUTNAM in *Making Democracy Work*, this inability to cooperate does not necessarily signal ignorance or irrationality or even malevolence. On the contrary, it suggests that “social capital” may be in short supply, thereby trapping people in counterproductive behavior patterns. Social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In communities with ample social capital, agreements on all aspects of life together are embedded within a larger structure of personal relations and social networks. In those places where the networks cut broadly across social cleavages the greatest degree of cooperation occurs.

Finding ways to nourish the widest possible participation is a challenge in a society as pluralistic and factious as ours. In many places the edges have hardened and many of the lines are no longer drawn in sand. We still assume there are no limits, despite all the evidence to the contrary. We half-expect, half-hope that technocrats, data, and federal dollars will arrive, cavalry-style,



to save the day. We try to pass the ball, to the scientists, to the politicians, the lawyers. We lull ourselves with platitudes and evasion, hoping for quick 'n' easy painless answers. But deep down we know that inept, ill-equipped and ill-prepared as we may be, coming up with our own answers rather than being persuaded or forced to accept someone else's is better. We are beginning to get what Barry Lopez has been saying all along: "We have only ourselves to turn to if we want to make a true home of our place."

SO HOW DO WE PROCEED? When in need of inspiration I surround myself with those who offer me their example and their counsel. I recall the awe on the face of the young woman who crossed into the reality of her Indian neighbor and for a brief moment bore witness to the experience of another.

I feel the love in my heart as I felt it on the Saturday morning I spent with forty of my neighbors, a true Rainbow Coalition, planting street trees. I see the leader of a small, disenfranchised community ask for the help because what needed to be done, he could not do by himself. I hear the voices of all those people who unhesitatingly said yes when invited to a talking circle because they deeply yearn for human connections with those around them.

I am assured by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., that we are not bound by the circumstances of history nor by some notion of human nature. We are free to make real the promise and create that new world. He cautioned patience because to seek an inclusive community is to undertake a revolution, and revolutions take time. First, cultivate compassion. Compassion will make us human to one another, help us acknowledge our present limitations and the ways in which we are likely to disappoint one another. The *Politics of Meaning* advocate, Michael Lerner, encourages me to stand up for my highest values and demand that my flow-

ery ideals be taken seriously and used to shape the nitty-gritty realities in the economic, political, and social institutions of everyday life.

And I hear the whispers that remind me that you cannot think your way into community with others. Divisiveness is not overcome by agreements or analyses, indispensable as they may be. Divisiveness is conquered only by a conversion, by a change in perspective, by a turning from the imperatives of the self to a new sense of kinship with place and neighbors.

I, in turn, encourage all those many who hold the flowery ideals of love and caring, compassion and empathy, respect and tolerance to stand with me, outside the boundaries of the mainstream. Together we can defy the prevailing consensus regarding on- and off-limit subjects. Together, we can let it be known that we do not believe all the pieties or subscribe to the generally accepted notion of how things should be done. Together, we will find the courage to say that what was right and timely for another time may not be so for now. We cannot carry forward ways of doing things that damage our land and polarize our communities, that do not take into account those who will come after us.

Let us not forget that community, social connectedness, social capital, effective governance and the best use of our resources are all the same thing in the end. It starts neighbor to neighbor across the back fence, in public places working together on things that have meaning. It's the potlucks, the meetings, fixing the stream in the dead of winter to ensure the salmon reach home in the spring. Collective action on things that matter give us a chance to believe that there is hope for the future. And with hope comes the courage to take that first step, supported in the knowing that, while it is not required that we complete the task, we are not free to desist from it. **C**

Divisiveness is conquered only by turning from the imperatives of the self to a new sense of kinship with place and neighbors.

