

The Basques of Oregon*

Harkness, Ione Juanita Beale

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Komunikazio hau Oregonen kokaturiko komunitateei buruzko tesi baten laburpena da. Tesi hau Hegoaldeko Kaliforniako Unibertsitateko Historia departamentuan aurkeztu zuen egileak. Lehen euskaldunak 1890 inguruan iritsi ziren bertara. Hainbat gunetan dira artzainak, baina estantzia gehienak McDermitt, Jordan Valley, Anderson eta Fields herrietan daude. Aitzindariak ez ziren naturalizatu, behin ere ez baitzuten sorterrira itzultzeko esperantza galdu. Bigarren belaunaldian, ordea, mekanikari, txofer, ostalari eta merkataritza lanetan aritu ziren. Hezkuntza maila desberdina bazuten ere, aise ikasi zuten ingelesa eta haien seme-alabak eskolaturik daude.

Esta comunicación es extracto de una tesis sobre las comunidades establecidas en Oregon, presentada por su autora ante el departamento de Historia de la Universidad de California del Sur. Los primeros vascos llegaron hacia 1890. Pastores en diferentes lugares, el mayor número de estancias se concentran en la actualidad en McDermitt, Jordan Valley, Anderson y Fields. Los pioneros no llegaron a naturalizarse dado que nunca perdieron la esperanza de retornar a su país. Ya en la segunda generación se ocupan como mecánicos, chóferes, hoteleros y comerciantes. Con diversos niveles de instrucción, aprenden fácilmente el inglés y sus hijos están escolarizados.

Cette communication est extraite d'une thèse sur les communautés établies en Oregon, soutenue par l'auteur au département d'Histoire de l'Université de la Californie du Sud. Les premiers Basques sont arrivés vers 1890. Ils ont été bergers dans différents endroits mais leurs principaux établissements se trouvent aujourd'hui à McDermitt, Jordan Valley, Anderson et Fields. Les premiers arrivants ne se sont pas faits naturaliser car ils espéraient retourner chez eux. A la deuxième génération, on trouve des mécaniciens, des chauffeurs, des patrons d'hôtel et des commerçants. Plus ou moins instruits, ils apprennent facilement l'anglais et leurs enfants sont scolarisés.

* Archives Manuel de Ynchausti. Ustaritz.

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Typewritten Manuscript, July 18, 1925. P. 37-41, 44 are all that relate to the Basques. (Tratándose de un trabajo de mayor extensión y amplitud temática, sólo se reproducen las páginas relativas a los vascos.)

The Southeast corner of Oregon harbors one of the strangest and most interesting peoples of all her diverse races. The Basques, whose origin is lost in obscurity, whose native tongue -the Eskaura¹- is a puzzle to philologists, have answered the call of climate and settled in the semi-arid region of Malheur and Harney counties.

From the northern coast of Spain the towns of Bilbao and Viscaya sent forth the vanguard about thirty-six years ago (1889) to seek in the New World a location similar in topography and climate and adapted to their ancient occupation of sheepherding. This they found in the Nampa Triangle of the great American Desert where Steens Mountain, the finest example of a faultblock formation in the world, rears its perpendicular face. The creeks and small lakes supply water; the soil supports various varieties of grass; the climate is dry; the location is remote from the civilization that is detrimental to sheep raising. A sweep of country stretching two hundred and seventy five miles between the nearest railroad terminus at Crane, Oregon, and Winnemucks, Nevada, on the 41st meridian, furnishes a wide range.

The settlers -ambitious young men- entered the United States by way of Ellis Island, and quickly drifted across the continent in search of the familiar habitat for sheep herding. This they found at various points in the Inland Empire. Today the principal Basque settlements are at McDermitt on the northern Nevada border; at Jordan Valley, at the intersection of the 43rd meridian with the Idaho boundary; at Anderson, one hundred and twenty miles south of Crane; at Fields, fifteen miles farther south; and as far north as Ontario at the junction of the Malheur River with the Snake.

The Basques proved to be so much better herders than the Mexicans that the latter were quickly driven out. Their method was to take bands of sheep into the hills and stay for years until their accumulated wages would enable them to buy flocks or ranches of their own. Then their friends and relatives could be sent for. It is surprising how many entire families have come to this country. Usually a cousin or brother came first; then before many years the whole clan was with him². They arrived in great numbers just before and during the Great War. Since the War many of the American ranchers have sold out to the Basques, either because their fortunes were made or because of the depression in stock raising.

The leading man among the Basques at McDermitt, Joe Uguesia, was worth over twenty thousand dollars, owning many large bands of sheep and the largest store in town.

Near Westfall, a Basque owns one of the finest ranches, has three large bands of sheep, drives a Buick, and carried ten thousand dollars life insurance. He and his three bright, beautiful children speak good English, the mother speaks the Spanish and "Bosco" -the colloquial name for themselves and their language. An interesting and unusual point about this man is the fact that on his ranch he hires only Americans as herders, ranch-hands, or camp-tenders. This is unusual because as a race they are extremely loyal and clannish³.

McDermitt is strictly a Basque town, only two stores in the entire village are owned by Americans.

At Fields there are five families, while around Andrews there are some fifty or sixty single men. The pioneers of this section were Felix Urizar, Angel Egurolla, Eusablo Azuerey and Henri Seudagasta⁴. Jordan Valley is a strong Basque settlement. At Ontario a "Bosco" boarding house accommodates twenty or thirty young people. At one time two cultured Castilian women were with them⁵.

The pioneers among the Basques kept rather closely to sheep-herding; very few became naturalized, they expected to return to Spain when "the fortune" should have been accumulated.

The second generation, however, has taken up various occupations, becoming auto mechanics, chauffeurs, merchants, or hotel proprietors⁶. These occupations are chosen because they offer a better opportunity to "get rich" quickly. More "cousins" are sent for from Spain to carry on the prosaic business of sheep-herding.

They are thrifty, energetic, and peaceable. They make good citizens⁷. Around Jordan Valley and Ontario many of the leaders in all the community enterprises are Basques. In the county track meets, declamatory contests, and county fairs their children are creditably represented and they win their share of the honors⁸. All of them are more or less educated, speaking Spanish besides their own Eskura and they are very apt at learning English. A large proportion of the children attend high school and many enter college. The Catholic faith is their religion, but as they become Americanized they drift away from the faith of their fathers. In Spain while they are devoted to the Church, they allow no priests or lawyers to take part in the political affairs⁹. In America, however, more time is devoted to business and less to politics and religion.

One of the most interesting points noted was the effect of the climate on the type of houses¹⁰. In the remote districts where American influence was less pronounced the houses were like those of the Spanish Basques.

The low stone houses were divided into many small rooms, insuring warmth in winter and coolness in summer. Their homes are not particularly sanitary or attractive. This may account, perhaps, for the fact that while the Basque young men marry into the best American families, not a single case of an American marrying a Basque girl was noted¹¹.

Brilliant colors are used in their costumes, which is customary among Latin races. Many of the young men wear a bright kerchief or sash, which sets off their dark beauty to perfection. They are very attractive in appearance and make a favourable impression on the sojourner among them¹².

1. Ripley, W.Z. *Races of Europe*, 184
2. Letter of Miss Grayce Sage, a teacher at McDermitt, who has lived among them.
3. Letter of E.B. Conklin, a lawyer at Ontario.

4. Letter of Mr. George Smith, merchant at Fields.
5. Letter of Mr. Conklin.
6. Letter of Mrs. Moran, librarian, Malheur County Library.
7. Letter of George Smith.
8. Letter of E.B. Conklin.
9. McBride, "the Land of the Basques". *National Geographic*, 41:63-87.
10. Interview with Dr. Warren D. Smith, of the University of
11. Letter of Mrs. Moran. Letter of Miss Grayce Sage; "the food is quite similar to the usual American repast. A great deal of meat is used, but few vegetables. They seldom eat hot bread and only the most sophisticated use butter. At the hotel they majored largely in stews, hot with garlic and peppers, tomatoes and pimientos were featured also".
12. Personal Interview with Professor Roland Dickerson, of the University of Oregon.

The typical Basque -of which Marshal Foch is a good example- has a remarkably clear, olive complexion, with large sparkling dark eyes, and a perfect teeth shining through the extremely red lips. Occasionally a Basque with blue or grey eyes and fair hair is seen¹³. They are socially inclined and are fond of gathering in the plaza or around the stores, where some will play the accordion, guitar, or harp, while others of the group stand in a circle with their hands on each other's shoulders and sing. They dance the American dances, and have also their own graceful Spanish and folk dances. The *Arresku* is a famous ancient Basque dance resembling a Polish mazurka. Though they play cards they do not gamble, and though they drink they do not become boisterous of vulgar. They are clean in language and exhibit a great deal of self-respect and deference to woman¹⁴.

The Basque population in Spain is about 700.000 of this 100.000 have emigrated to Chili and Argentine. They are a proud, conservative, self-reliant people. The old quotation "Every Basque a noble" is justified by the character of the people¹⁵.

It is unfortunate that an effort is not made to attract more such self-respecting, tireless workers to Oregon.

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c. Records

1^o. Minutes of Chehalem Monthly Meeting, 1878. (The Religious Society of Friends.)

2. Personal Interviews.

a. Mary E. Lewis, Secretary to President Pennington.

b. Perry D. Hacy, Professor of History at Pacific College.

3. Publications.

a. *Graphic*, Newberg, Weekly, 1878.

b. *Pacific College Bulletin*. 1923-24, XVII. Published quarterly by Pacific College. Newberg, Oregon.

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A. Original Sources

1. Manuscript

a. Personal Letters to Ione B. Harkness

1^o. E.B. Conklin, Lawyer, May 10, 1924, Ontario, Oregon.

2^o. Nina K. Moran, Librarian, May 5, 1924, Malheur County.

3^o. Grayce Sage, Teacher, April 3, 1924, McDermitt, Oregon.

4^o. George A. Smith, Merchant, April 15, 1924, Fields, Oregon.

2. Personal Interviews

a. Professor Roland W. Dickerson, University of Oregon.

b. Dr. Warren D. Smith, University of Oregon

B. Secondary Authorities

1. McBride, Harry A., "The Land of the Basques". *National Geographic*. 41; 83-87.

2. Ratzel, F., *The History of Mankind*. Tr. By A.J. Butler from second German edition with an introduction by E.B with colored plates, maps and illustrations. Taylor, 3 vols. Macmillan Company, New York, 1896.

3. Ripley, W.Z., *The races of Europe, a Sociological Study* (Lowel Institute Lectures). Appleton and Company, New York, 1899.

4. Brunhes, Jean, *Human Geography*. Tr. By T.C. LeCompte, Edited by Isaiah Bowman and R.E. Dodge. American edition illustrated. Rand, McNally and Company, Chicago, 1920.

5.5. Drake, H.F. and Lindgren, Valdemar, *The Nampa Folio*, N^o. 103. United States Geological Survey, Washington, 1904.

13. Francis Xavier was of this type.

14. Personal Interview with Professor Roland Dickerson of the University of Oregon.

15. McBride, H., *cp.cit.* 41, 63-87.