September 27th 1932

Dear Mr. Phillips:

I spent yesterday at Vandergrift where you remember I went eighteen years ago. You may recall the article that we published. What I had in mind was convincing myself that a town organized like Vandergrift with the various arrangements for home owning, insurance, decent conditions, a town run by the workmen themselves would carry on through this last eighteen years and particularly through this period of depression. I went out with a man at the head of their Welfare Work, Russell. They do not shy at the word "Welfare" which I like. Russell has grown up I take it in the plant, has been there about 23 years and is a very warm hearted and understanding person.

Of course the town has grown since I was there, rather I suppose it must be twice as large. They are going to send me the exact figures but it has changed surprisingly little. That is it is being developed along the lines in which it was begun nearly forty years ago. Today, as when I was there, over 90% of the people own their own homes; that of course being one of the things that they started out to do. Owning their own homes they have a degree of stabilization which is genuine. If everybody does not work in the mill everybody is connected in some way with the mill and just as was anticipated the man who comes in at the bottom, perhaps as an unskilled laborer, comes to the top in the second or third generation. I am enclosing a table of the Cerase family. Immigrants into Vandergrift 37 years ago. Sam, one of the sons, will probably be foreman in charge of all labor before he gets through, that is what the General Superintendent told me.

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One of the Doctors in town came from this family and you can see how they are educating the third generation. Just what I discovered eighteen years ago that there was an enormous pride in educating the younger people, sending them to college, holds now, educated technical people, teachers, professional men and of course many of them scatter into other communities.

Such times as these last three years where there has not been on an average over three days of work for the men, wages cut at that, has been awfully hard on those who are buying homes and here is where the corporation policy in regard to homes comes in. They beat Mr. Hoover by years in his home loan bank; the corporation having a regular policy of loaning money on homes and if for any reason a man cannot make good returning to him his investment with small interest.

These people here have all sorts of ways of buying homes. One is through the Commercial Home Loan Society which is not run for philanthropic purposes and is quick to foreclose. Probably they must do a certain percentage of this to keep their company alive but the man at Vandergrift who finds himself held up by the Loan Company is quick to appeal to the Welfare Department or if he can get to him preferably the General Superintendent, Mr. Bodman. Any one who thinks the General Superintendent of one of these great mills has nothing to do but see that his orders are filled do not know much about the inside of such a place. Of course, now, with the mill running only about half a week, Bodman at Vandergrift has a great deal of time on his hands so that the people get to him with every conceivable difficulty. They go over the

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heads of the Welfare Department if they can although he himself never does that and I was rather amazed at a problem they were wrestling with yesterday. The mother of a Greek girl had appealed to Mr. Bedman to see that a young Greek who was pestering her 15 year old daughter was disciplined, kept out of the girl's way. How to do it without interfering with the rascal's independence as a citizen of Vandergrift was some problem.

The Heights which were debating eighteen years ago whether they would come into the town or not are in now. Fine settlement with all the facilities, more modest than the old town. Strong rivalry between them.

As you know one of my interests out here is the extent to which the depression has driven people to think of the farm. Vandergrift gave me, many years ago, my first conviction, which as you know I never have lost, that industry must work together with the farm if people are to be kept in food and roofs through the business cycle. Vandergrift is the best place I have found for that sort of thing. There are a good many men who still keep the farms that they had or their fathers had when the mill first started in the ninety's. Eighteen years ago they were going back and forth full time then but living on their farms, garden and fruit, liked it better. I remember some men told me. Now a deputation of them has gone on in an extraordinary way. I motored out and fifteen miles from Vandergrift we began to see the old farms and little properties of the employees, snug homes, many of them very good looking, very well kept, big gardens, a great deal of fruit, poultry, possibly cows and pigs though I do not know. Most of these places had been built up from the bottom by men who had taken cheap, raw land,

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cleared it and made themselves homes which are a godsend now. The hills above Vandergrift are beautiful, the views fine. We passed one place where three men had taken a piece of raw land, about twehty acres, cleared it, built houses, I would have been glad to have lived in any one of them. Had orchards, gardens at cost. These places were clear of debt and would give their men practically all their food through this period.

You will see from the enclosed statement the extent to which the company has encouraged the garden activities this year and nothing amazed me more than when I sat at lunch with six or eight officials to hear practically nothing discussed but gardening and what they had learned particularly this year about fertilizers, about pests, Mexican beetles and how to get rid of them; how to raise potatoes in the shallow soil. Mr. Bodman grumbled that instead of putting money into new machinery he had had to buy spraying machines. I learned more about cold pack for vegetables, fruit and fowl than I had ever heard before. Apparently every bit of experience of the various workers on their gardens is passed around. The man at the head of the activities who himself owns a farm and is an important head of one department told me he had learned a great deal about cultivation, about various new vegetables as well as about drying and canning, particularly from the Italians and the colored people. We went out to see a plot possibly ten miles out worked by Italians principally. They have been going out daily as early as they would go to the mill sometimes walking, more often I take it combining in a fliver or little

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truck. In this particular tract a few single men had built a shack and lived out there to guard the plot, thieves being known on the outside of fields though the rarest thing inside. As a matter of fact Mr. Bodman told me he never took his key out of his car nor locked his garage so safe is it but they have had some thieving on the outskirts. I talked with two or three Italians who raise nothing but tomatoes. They dry them on racks for here as in Italy their food is almost entirely macaroni or and nothing is so good with them as tomatoes. There had been a heavy frost and they were losing some but women and children were with the men salvaging all of the ripe and good and planning to gather the green which they use in various ways.

The darkies are wonderful with their gardening. One of the most remarkable human stories that I have come across in many a day is that of the colored man who came from the South with his wife and daughter some three years ago into the mill. Handsome six feet three, straight as an arrow, great dignity. He worked a year perhaps when it was discovered he had organic heart trouble, went all to pieces, wanted to die. Russell and his wife took hold of him, put him in the hospital because one of the things that thw welfare Association looks after most steadily from the start at Vandergrift has been health. They got him over the first stage but he could not go back to the mill. He never will be well, Russell says. Now the Company as well as the workers themselves have relief associations and Russell got from one, I do not know which, a thousand dollars for this man. They went on to the hill outside of town and

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rented a little house, lots of useless ground around which their landlord told them to use as they pleased and they certainly have done wonders. Their plots are scattered, one of the biggest is on a side hill which I walked down or slid down, shallow soil but off that they have kept themselves in midsummer on water melons. They have canned, I saw the cans myself, more than 200 cans of vegetables and fruits and berries which they picked. They have ten bushels of corn, the white variety, men got the seed in the South which they have ground for meal. They have also gotten enough corn to fatten three pigs, they are going to kill all of them for bacon. He has 104 fryers and smacked his lips thinking of the good eating they are going to have and explained to me how his wife dropped batter and fried apples into the grate. I came away feeling that if every white family in this country had anything like the courage, the ingenuity of these two that we never would again have anything like what's happening now. That is we would be prepared for whatever might happen.

The people at Vandergrift are the better prepared, that is the old residents, because from the start one of the teachings of the town, and this applies to all of the agencies of the town, churches, schools, industries, has been thrift. Owning a home meant thrift itself. It also meant a bank account. From the start there has been a wonderful old banker here, he is old now. His Savings Bank and Trust Company is never called by its proper name, it is always Whitman's. He started it 37 years

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age. I talked to him 18 years ago and was amazed at the amount of savings these people have. He has a most conservative old place also made himself disliked by thosewho wanted to borrow on what he considered unsafe securities. There is a second bank now that has no such prejudices. It closed its bank in October with big losses and there was not even a day's run on Whitman's. In a town built up as this has been, such a banker practically knows every family and their financial conditions, also their financial weaknesses, tendencies to speculate, gamble, etc. But they have not only saved at Whitman's. The Postal Savings Account contains many names of individuals having a limit of $2500. which the P. O. takes. Since the mill went into the steel corperation and the stock sharing plan was advised, practically the whole mill has invested and as at Geary, there are people who began at the start and have always kept their stock. I asked how about this last year, stock was offered last March at 40. He was oversubscribed, more than 100% at Vandergrift and everybody was mad, Mr. Bodman, himself, included, because he could not get his full allotment. That is, these people know the intrinsic value of the mill. They in their experience think the present condition won't last forever. They remember back in 1903, 1907, 1913, 1920, all depressions, never so long as the present one. They have learned to be financially wise by actual experience. If the speculative instinct which seems to be a fundamental instinct, could be disciplined and educated, they would be one of the safest communities in the country. They get a lot of education in finance too, because these mill people run the town.

(Include here story of Jack McIntyre, sketch to be sent from Vandergrift)

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Mr. Bodman says that as long as Jack had lived they had had no other Mayor in town because they liked him so much. He was a Democrat in a town that was 95% Republican but he was a wonderful Mayor. He loved to make speeches, to have celebrations, to brag about Vandergrift and he aided and abetted the Fire Department in building the grandest in the state. I did not see the Fire Department in its uniform but as I gather from the conversation it must be as red as the hose cart and I saw big cups they have taken in contests in this vicinity, 25 or 30 of them at least. It seems to be one of the great activities of Vandergrift. There is a woman's Auxiliary and they are as busy as bees helping on the Relief Association. One thing they have recently done was to make 300 gallons of apple butter, boiled it all behind the Methodist Church in big copper pots.

Any town I know, any Relief Organizations, New York City particularly, could learn something from Vandergrift's Relief organization. The Heights and the Home Town each have Societies, The Philanthropic Society downtown, The Community Welfare League on the Heights, The Catholic Daughters and The Red Cross. To avoid interference the town is divided between these Societies. They know every family. The welfare Agency of the mill works with them in perfect harmony, also The Red Cross. The Company does what the Agencies cannot do and they certainly do an immense amount of all kinds of things. They are ingenious in these times in saving the people money. Take shoes. Among the mill men they found one who had been a cobbler. Set him up in the yard, gave him old leather and old rubber and told the town to dig out from their garrets and junk heaps all the old shoes they could find.

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They salvaged hundreds of pairs that had been thrown away, so long that many of them were mildewed. Nothing was more touching than seeing these little children, these silly high-heeled white and suede slippers of the dressy ladies of Vandergrift coming in to get their soles repaired; their heels fixed up. It cost the company about 48¢ a pair to put them in condition and the people get them turned back for nothing.

The health of children is particularly looked out for and the Welfare Association takes out scores of tonsils, provides scores of layettes for the coming babies but you have got to prove that you need this Relief. You will not get it if you have Savings Accounts, if you have three days work a week at a fair wage. It is when you do not have work, when you have had to look down and out that you get what you need to carry you over. Of course, this fraud. I do not know why we should complain of fraud among working men when we find so much of it among bankers and promoters but nearly always they give themselves away. They told the story of one chap who was foolish enough to get tipsy and brag about his money. He had it in a belt, took off the belt and began to lay $20. and $50. a piece end to end along the side-walk to see how far it would reach. In a minute he had a crowd of boys around him snatching the bills. Then came a policeman who arrested him but $200.00 was gone and he was fined $15.00 for disorderly conduct, also the Relief for that family was shut down but it is very exceptional. It is as exceptional as a person in jail. You remember in my first article of the story that was told of one person who was causing so much trouble when he was there the first week they had him in Vandergrift so

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that the whole community was stirred up. You remember how I told you that the jail and library was side by side but it is still so. The library has been enlarged and my old friend Miss McKenzie is still there, very much now as at first, healthier than ever, she is a kind of institution, what they will do without her when she goes I do not know. The library is still connected by a locked door to the jail and it was she who took me in to see the jail quarters there now but not being familiar with prisons I do not think it could be worse. They put the man or woman, for there are two departments, in a cage. There is a toilet for each lighted from the top. There is an awful story of vermin in a town paper which is attached to this. I had not read it when I went up. There were no prisoners there and had not been for several days. Miss McKenzie has funny stories how sometimes the prisoners are left while the sheriff goes off about his mill work I suppose and they get to howling for water or food or attention of some kind. One night I should think would cure any man. No, Vandergrift jail is certainly not a refuge for which the down and out prefer to go for the winter as they say of some jails in the country. They have more cases but it is still just a funny business, this jail. Jail, library, legion, hall, Philanthropic Society, headquarters for the town counsel, office of the burgess, everythingin the one building which stands at the head of the square opposite to the entrance of the mill and it was really quite imposing.

(what it all amounts to is that) I want particularly

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to call your attention to the scale the workers have of Insurance. Look over your papers and you will see that this is the cheapest Insurance in the world. It is their own scheme. You will see how much they have done in the way of relief and death benefits and look at the dividends that come back to them every year. Last year it was 53% of what they put in, their profits come back to them even though it is absolutely a non-profit making scheme. Of course it would be absolutely impossible to carry this out if the company do not take out of the wages of the subscribers the amounts contributed to relief. It is ingenious, the death benefit. Every man is assessed 50¢ every time a man dies. This last year there has been 3000 subscribers so that the heirs have gotten from $1500. to $1600.00. What impresses me is that Vandergrift proves that too in the way of owning your home, saving money, taking care of yourself, looking out for the future, training their children, being a good citizen for remember these people run their town entirely, the councilmen, etc. are all mill-workers, also the Mayor or Burgess they call him, but you have the most substantial kind of citizenship. They have now thirty-seven years of experience and it is sounder today than it was when it began, that is it has proved it works. It is one of the greatest arguments that I have ever come across for distributing industries, getting them out of great centers, also one of the greatest arguments for my hobby of the farm and the factory so there you have the report of my day and I would like to know what you think of it as a possible paper. I have various little things that I would like to add.

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