

# THE VILLAGE OF TALK

The citizens of Talk carried a heavy burden. Even though they didn't have a long history, with westward expansion only recently begun, they rigidly held to the ideal of oral communication. The identity of the first settlers remained undocumented, because no one bothered to write it down. There are different camps, to be sure, within the populace that claim their ancestors were the first, but no one can prove it. It's rather doubtful, even if someone had some tangible proof, that it would ever surface. For it to come to light, the matter would be settled and there would be no need for further talk.

Now, most everyone can agree that it is important to talk a problem out thoroughly lest a rash decision lead to a disastrous result. That falls within the bounds of reasonable consideration. In fact, there occurred many a discussion in the Village of Talk on such a consideration to determine its reasonableness.

For such a small town at the beginning of what they sometimes refer to as the "Old West", the village produced an exceptional number of fine

orators. Though not initially deserving of representation within the official government, eventually they managed to give birth to two senators, four representatives, two governors, and two presidential candidates. Some say that certain individuals from the village bore the seeds for the modern filibuster of senatorial renown. Fortunately, the United States Senate has wisely not entered into the discussion of that claim.

Late in the year of 1849, one of the village's citizens returned from a trip to California. Filled with gold fever, he couldn't wait to share his findings with his fellow residents. The café, the saloon, and even the pew bubbled over in excitement with the possibilities. They debated about sending a group from the town to do some prospecting (for the good of the town, of course). They talked about what an influx of much needed funds might do for the town (with talk as their dominant commodity, tax revenues often fell short of town expenses). After discussing and dissecting everything that could possibly face scrutiny, they finally appointed such a group. That would have been around the year of 1856. Alas, after seven years of deliberation, their window of opportunity had closed, for the gold rush had essentially ended. On the positive side,

though, the disappointment served as additional fodder for discussion.

One day, Horace Feldkamp, chief among the discussion leaders at the time, noticed a curious thing about the main business thoroughfare of the village—it didn't have an official name. Folks always referred to it as Main Street, and thus they assumed that it had always held that title. After a committee appointed to investigate the matter pored over all five pages of historical documents (a radical citizen felt that they should have some documentation, rather than relying on just what the mayor said), they confirmed that no official name existed. Ten years of talk, debate, discussion, and analysis only produced an impasse. Such a situation did not present as much of a problem as one might think to the people of the Village of Talk. Their skills in negotiation emerged from the fire of conflict with a finely honed edge. They concocted a rather simple, ingenious solution. They took all the names submitted and put them to an oral vote. The name that garnered the most votes would become the well-rutted street's name ... for one year. Every year after that, they would change the name of the street to the next highest vote-getter and so on, throughout time. By the time they used up all

the original names, a new generation controlled the town and started with their own list of names.

Sadly, or maybe not depending on your religious affiliation, even the three churches in the village succumbed to the temptation of talk. At one time, an ecumenical spirit existed among the Catholic, Lutheran, and Baptist congregations—at least in thought. But there reached a limit to how many times one could get mired in the muddy paths between the three—figuratively and literally. Since the women weren't allowed to vote on anything political or religious, the ladies of the quilt guilds of each church staged a revolt and collaborated on several charitable projects. This brought much chagrin to the town and church discussion leaders. Martha Grimsley's comment about Jesus being someone of action fell on deaf ears. Mary Scott also quoted Jesus, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear". But most of the religious talkmeisters mistook it as a quote from Mary, an uninformed woman, rather than from Jesus himself. Visitors to the churches in the Village of Talk wondered how they ever got the church buildings constructed. All of this is not to say that the religious leaders lacked faith or a compassionate heart. They did send money to many worthwhile causes, once they

finally agreed on who, what, and where (as you probably surmised, it often required years of preparation to answer those questions). There simply existed a certain disconnect between words and action that extensive discussion couldn't bridge.

Overthink produced some downright silly (some prefer the word 'stupid') suggestions that resulted in the village council passing some odd laws. They conceived some of their legislative actions with so little common sense that universities from back East sent budding young law graduates to the village to study them. Here are a few of their non-sensical ordinances:

*No dipping of hats into a horse trough on Wednesdays and Saturdays*—Apparently, no one asked the horses if they cared or not.

*No feeding of giraffes on Main Street during the Christmas holidays*—As far as oral historians of the village can recall, no one has ever seen a giraffe in the Village of Talk.

*Anyone who chews tobacco must carry his own spittoon, unless they are an elected village official—I withhold any further comment.*

*Wagons with at least four mules must yield the right of way to chickens crossing a village street—Seems fair, if you're a chicken.*

*It is illegal for a married man to carry another man's wife or his betrothed across a muddy street, unless the mud is at least four inches deep—No one could recall such a situation ever occurring in the Village of Talk, at least no one living.*

Perhaps nothing that has occurred in the Village of Talk since its inception can compare to the Folly of 1884. In 1879, public discourse on the Presidential election between James A. Garfield and Winfield Scott Hancock proved to be quite contentious. Brother often ran into violent encounters with brother. So much discord arose among the villagers that the greater part of five years from 1879 to 1884 could not produce the slightest

consensus as to where to set up the voting sites for the election of 1880. When 1884 came around, no one could cast a vote for Grover Cleveland or James G. Blaine because James A. Garfield and Winfield Scott Hancock were still listed on the ballot. Some historians have suggested that with the 1884 Presidential election so close, the outcome could have been different if the Village of Talk had been able to cast valid ballots.

That old saying, “Actions speak louder than words” seems so shallow, so ‘just too simple’. No further discussion need follow. Yet, it produced a challenge to those people in the village who dedicated their lives to (although, coincidentally, from which they also made money) talk. Any attempt to get beyond the shallow roots of a problem and solve it with such a simple saying quickly hit solid rock.

Fortunately, all the rest of the explorers and pioneers didn’t wait on a lot of talk to plant the prairies, cross the mountains, and discover the gigantic forests of the Great American West.

In conclusion, perhaps it should be noted that the iconic creator of Western stories, Louis L'Amour, once said, "One never realizes how much and how little he knows until he starts talking."