Outpost of the Cooperative Commonwealth: The History of the Llano del Rio Colony in Gila, New Mexico, 1932–1935

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BETWEEN 1932 AND 1935, practitioners of the cooperative ideal, occupying a nineteenth century hacienda in Gila, New Mexico, lived and worked while the Depression continued to swell the nation's bread lines. The men and the women were, for the most part, veterans of a successful cooperative community located in western Louisiana, known as Newllano. The Gila colony was intended to one day support one thousand colonists and be one in a chain of colonies stretching across the United States. The Gila unit was the only one in the scheme to have been settled.

Newllano, according to historian Paul Conkin, "was the last and by far the largest of the colonies inspired by the dream of the cooperative commonwealth."2 Established during the second wave of utopian settlements, prompted by the ideas of men such as Edward Bellamy and Laurence Gronlund, Newllano represented the best attempt at secular communitarianism in America. The main colony lasted for almost twenty-five years, considerably longer than any other similar experiment in cooperative living.

Originally, the community was founded in California by Job Harriman, a prominent western socialist. An Indiana native, Harriman began his adult life as a Christian minister. He soon turned to law and opened a practice in California. In the early 1890s, he joined one of the many branches of the Nationalist movement that sprang up after the publication of Edward Bellamy's utopian novel, Looking Backward. In 1900, as the socialists made their first hesitant steps toward becoming a political party, Harriman was chosen to share the national ticket.
with a fellow Hoosier, Eugene V. Debs. Eleven years later, Harriman was seemingly on the verge of becoming the first socialist mayor of Los Angeles. The McNamara brothers had just been accused of bombing the *Los Angeles Times* building during a series of labor disputes. Their proclaimed innocence had united labor and liberal factions of the city. Harriman and Clarence Darrow served as the defense for the accused. As a result, Harriman was, by contemporary accounts, riding the crest of popular opinion that was going to sweep him into office, having already vindicated the brothers. Five days before the election, the McNamaras confessed and Harriman lost.

Faced with defeat when at long last victory had seemed all but assured, Harriman gave up his quest for elective office and instead turned to other ideas. He wrote:

> I was so impressed with the fact that the movement must have an economic foundation that I turned my attention to the study of means by which we could lay some such foundation, even tho [sic] it be a small one as well as an experimental one. After two or three years, I decided to try to establish a cooperative colony.¹

Harriman established the colony forty-five miles from Los Angeles at the mouth of the Big Rock Creek. He choose a public corporation as the best legal structure for the new community. The Llano del Rio (Land by the River) corporation was chartered in Nevada because of the state's liberal corporate laws. In 1913, Harriman and his partners began to sell shares of the new corporation, and on May Day 1914 the Llano colony was officially opened. By 1917 the colony reached its largest population, nearly one thousand.²

The colony also experienced its first significant crisis in 1917. In its first three years, Llano had rarely been able to pay the promised wage of four dollars a day, and the rough terrain of the valley had caused many to give up. Another group purchased adjoining land and sued for the water rights. When the courts ruled against the colony, Harriman decided to start over elsewhere. He secured 20,000 acres of cutover land in Louisiana from the Gulf Lumber Company of St. Louis, Missouri.
In October of 1917, approximately two-hundred diehards moved across the country to try once again. Initially, the colony enjoyed limited success in the lumber town, which they renamed Newllano. Disputes arose, however, over colony policies. After six years of discord, a special election was held, and in 1924 George Pickett gained control of the colony.

Pickett had joined the community when it was in California. Soon after joining, he became an agent for the colony, traveling around the country drumming up new members. From his election as leader of the community until its demise, Newllano reflected the ideas of Pickett. In the meantime, Harriman's health failed, and he returned to California in 1924. Before he died a year later, he wrote:

The purpose of all this was to show that a community could live together in harmony, produce its own living . . . [and] build an institution or a colony that would have the vision and a value beyond mere welfare of the individuals in the colony, and would become a matter of large social interest, teaching the possibilities of community life.4

Although Llano began primarily with the efforts of socialists, by the 1920s that purpose had begun to change. Cooperation was increasingly stressed, while the ideals of socialism fell by the wayside. One of the reasons socialism at Newllano waned was that after Pickett's election, the colony lost many of its most active and prominent socialists. Kate Richards O'Hare, for instance, left soon after 1924. She, along with her husband, published the National Ripsaw and the American Vanguard. Next to Debs, she was considered one of the most popular orators at southwestern socialist encampments.5

During most of the short life of the Gila colony, R. V. Shoemaker served as manager. Shoemaker first heard about Newllano while serving as county organizer for the Progressive-Socialist party in his native Missouri. Faced with the difficulties of farming in the mid-1920s and hoping that his children would find more suitable work if they had vocational training, Shoemaker asked advice of Will Garver, head of the Missouri Socialist party. Garver sent him a copy of The Colonist, the newspaper of Newllano, which
Shoemaker subscribed to for the following year. In 1926, he and his family moved to the Louisiana community and the better life it promised.

George Pickett was eager to expand Newllano beyond the confines of its Louisiana site. In 1932 he launched what Conkin calls "a long-awaited policy of expansion." But this policy, explains Conkin, "coming at a time of greatest financial weakness, did more than any one thing to destroy the parent colony, and was the most fatal managerial decision ever made by Pickett." There is some evidence, suggests Conkin, that Pickett may have been guided by the belief that the economy was near collapse and that his obligations would therefore never have to be repaid. The colony obtained a citrus farm near Fremont, Texas, and a plantation in Terrebone Parish, Louisiana. But Newllano's expansion program was tried on a full scale only in Gila.

Through Roy Graves, who had been in and around New Mexico in the two years since he left Newllano, Pickett learned of a ranch in southwest New Mexico, which could be assumed "without the payment of a dollar down." "I would call it 'Co-operators' Paradise," wrote Graves. The ranch was complete with machinery, horses, cattle, hogs, a creamery and cheese factory, ice and cold storage plant, and hundreds of acres in field and garden crops. Anna Loutrel, who lived in Newllano, remembered later that Pickett was particularly interested in Gila because crops "such as apples, Irish potatoes and wheat did exceptionally well there but not in the Louisiana area." In fact, Pickett told the weekly meeting at Newllano in September of 1932 that the gathering of food was the biggest problem facing the colony that winter. As one report of the meeting noted: "Pickett talked forcefully of the advantages of small groups getting together and solving their own problems by producing and exchanging."10

The ranch, located in the small town of Gila in Grant County, was all that remained of the once-powerful LC Ranch, named for Thomas Lyons and Angus Campbell. At its height in the 1890s, the LC Ranch controlled nearly a million acres of range land, carrying 60,000 head of cattle, employing 100 wagons, 750 riding horses, 400 work horses, 75 cowboys in season, and 100 Mexican workers from Chihuahua to tend the fields. The original portion of the twenty-five-room hacienda was built in 1848. The
next owner, Thomas Lyons, gained many enemies in the process of expanding the ranch. In 1917, one of them assassinated him during a trip to El Paso. After his death the ranch collapsed. The remaining 3500 acres of the ranch fell into the hands of J. D. Armstrong of St. Paul, Minnesota. But another interested person, Julian M. Bassett, contracted to buy the ranch, although he was willing to assign his contract soon after agreeing to buy the property.

Bassett had lived in Crosbytown, Texas (thirty-five miles east of Lubbock), and then in Sanderson, Texas, before moving to Gila. Dorothy Coffey, whose husband was a foreman on the ranch, recalls Bassett had a partner from Texas who gave him the money to make the purchase. But Coffey also claimed Bassett used the funds as payment for other properties, perhaps explaining why he was willing to assign his contract to the colonists and prepare the way for Pickett’s purchase of the Gila Ranch.

Pickett’s first trip to Gila in the fall of 1932 resulted in a front-page story in the 8 November Silver City Independent that read: “Golden Rule Cult of Louisiana May Buy Bassett Ranch.” The article described the “cult’s” goal as happiness, “insofar as it can be attained on earth.” The members, explained the paper, “profess no denominational faith, but endeavor to put into practice the golden rule within its jurisdiction, and in its relations with the outside world. They do not seek primarily to accumulate money, although they have been very successful in their temporal affairs.” The source for this description is unclear, but since later editions of the town’s papers printed extracts of The Colonist, the statement may have come from Newlano itself. An old colony song, for example, included the following verse:

Money slavery abolish for all eternity  
The Golden Rule be practice of all humanity  
For Llano’s marching on.\(^\text{12}\)

The colony had until February of 1933 to buy the ranch. But as of November 1932, colonists were already on the ranch, readying it for others slated to arrive in the spring. According to a letter from Hope Swenson, a member of the Gila colony, the Bassetts and at least six colonists spent Christmas together on the ranch, after baling the last of the fall hay and conducting many repairs.\(^\text{13}\)
Scene at Gila Unit

The Colonist city editor, Robert Williams, wrote that the proposal put forth by Pickett to buy the ranch “thrilled the crowd” at Newllano’s weekly meeting. Pickett launched a campaign through The Colonist to raise money. In January, the headline of the newspaper read: “It’s Gila Now or Never.” The colonists must “get busier than ever and see that the necessary money is in the colony to take the ranch over by the first of the month,” Pickett told the weekly meeting.14

Pickett saw the Gila unit as “another step toward reaching the Pacific Coast and contacting with the thousands of co-operators who are reaching toward us.” With a few more opportunities like Gila, wrote Pickett, “we will have a chain of producing co-operate communities across the country working with each other and supplementing each other in supplying the necessities of life and exchanging upon a basis of cost.”15 (An additional New Mexico colony in Magdalena was considered, but never attempted.)

In early March the Silver City Enterprise reported the sale of the ranch to the colony. Answering a reporter’s query, Pickett described Newllano as “not a religious or political plan but a co-operative scheme to solve the economic problems.”16

Pickett agreed to buy the ranch for $65,000 including the assumption of Basset’s $35,000 mortgage. According to the agreement of 21 February, $12,000 of the total was designated for a chattel mortgage to the J. D. Armstrongs, $4,000 of which was to be paid within five months, the remainder within nine. To pay off the remaining $53,000, the colony agreed to make two $5,000 payments in 1934 and the balance in $4,500 installments, due every February. The agreement also gave the Armstronngs the right to sell 200 acres at any time for no less than $12,000. The credit of any such sale would be applied toward the final payment. As collateral, Pickett put up 800 acres of rice lands in Louisiana. Finally, the agreement gave the Armstronngs the right to sell land if the colony failed to live up to the contract.17

Pickett overstretched the colony’s assets in agreeing to take on the Gila ranch. Mrs. Chester Peecher, who lived in Newllano from 1930 until its demise, told historian Bill Murrah:
"They weren't making enough here in this colony to take care of the people here without all this expansion, you see. If he had stayed here and took care of this one until he got it going and then go out and buy another one, then okay, but he didn't do that." 18

At first Pickett brought Dick Brannon and three couples to manage the Gila unit. In addition, R. V. Shoemaker, who had given Pickett some money for the Gila ranch from a mortgage he held on his Missouri farm, wanted to join the new unit. In March of 1933, Shoemaker, his family, and thirteen others moved from Newllano to Gila.

According to several residents of the town of Gila, the colonists were well received when they came. Dorothy Coffey, who lived up the road from the ranch, recalled that at first the colonists went about distributing pamphlets. Many of the town's residents were favorably impressed with the colony and its ideas. Although Gila was spared the worst of the Depression, any effort that supported and fed people was probably looked upon favorably.

Soon after the colonists took over the ranch they fell behind in their obligations. Unable to make the first payment of $3,000, Pickett travelled to Minneapolis in March to work out an alternate arrangement with the bankers. Soon after he arrived, he wired the colonists a short message: "Gila is ours!" Pickett may have cleared the first payment by giving the bank the colony's entire rice crop for 1933.19 Later, the value of that crop would be disputed when the colonists claimed it was worth in excess of $12,000. Pickett apparently also concluded a deal with Bassett putting off any payment to him for the $35,000 mortgage he held on the ranch. What Pickett offered in return is not clear, but he may have tendered a share in the oil-drilling enterprises of the colony.20 The Gila colonists were concerned about Pickett's deals. Dick Brannon, who later left the ranch because of his wife's health, wrote, "I feel that we at Gila should know the particulars about the arrangement that you [Pickett] made with Bassett." His concern about Bassett's trustworthiness was not masked: "I don't trust that old 'buzzard'; I think the sooner we can get the decks cleared of him the better. He will cause us trouble if he can."21

After March, Pickett went on a lecture tour to drum up support
for the Gila unit, and a council of Dick Brannon, Harold Kemp, Clyde Swenson, Hope Swenson, and Chester Page was elected to run the ranch. In the spring the colonists planted their crops, but concern soon arose about the July payment. "It is unthinkable," wrote Brannon in June, "that the movement should let it [Gila] slip through its fingers."

When Brannon and his wife left the ranch in October, Shoemaker took over the unit. Brannon, apparently with no objections from the council, simply appointed Shoemaker manager. Soon after Shoemaker assumed his new duties, Charley Royall, the attorney for the St. Paul bank, came to the ranch. Royall, says Shoemaker, told him, "You people out there haven't a chance, for by Mr. Pickett assuming Bassett's obligations they will be showing up from now on." This statement may have been apocryphal, but it is clear the colony had gotten in over its head financially. A few of the first arrivals came to this conclusion and left to seek employment elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the Louisiana colony was badly in need of the things that Gila could furnish. In return, Newllano was to supply Gila with building material. A. James McDonald, an opponent of Pickett, wrote in his account of Llano: "Three heavy trucks were kept steadily on the job of hauling machinery, tools, poultry and supplies from Llano to Gila, 1,130 miles, at a cost for upkeep, repair and depreciation of the trucks of probably half the value of the goods sent." Shoemaker claims McDonald exaggerated. In fact, according to Shoemaker, the colony received only lumber from Louisiana and yet returned a considerable amount of its crops.

Despite its initial problems, the colony was slowly growing. The store, according to visitors to the ranch, was doing good business. And Roy Graves was offering his services as barber to Gila residents for fifteen cents less than Silver City barbers.

H. D. Woolley, a member of the colony, wrote a friendly description for The Colonist in the spring of 1933.

Cast your eyes to the nearer foreground, and you will see a vast area of tilled farms, where your fellow colonists are busy putting in
the spring crops. . . . It is friend Shoemaker and his wife and Frank Plaga planting fruit trees, while close by where you see that team working at the plow, is Bert Busick and Chester preparing the soil for a garden and Harold and Clyde with other teams getting the ground ready for irrigation. . . . That white building by itself is the boarding house and do you see those two figures in red just leaving there? . . . That is Hope and Bonnie, going over the store room for supplies, so that they can prepare the evening meal, and if you could peep into that boarding house you would see Helen in the act of making a big batch of corn bread for supper. . . .

-Work was organized by departments. Cleve Campbell was in charge of farming operations; John Neill, poultry; Louis Rodemeister, shoe and harness shop; Clyde and Chester Swenson, the ice plant; Harold Kemp, the range stock; Ray Bradshaw, the store; Hope Swenson, bookkeeping; Lou Mahler, butchering. The rest of the colonists labored in each of the departments. There were no set hours, but like most ranches, work consumed most of the waking hours.

At Gila, women were not liberated from traditional tasks. "Now a word about our women colonists here," wrote Edwin Blank: "For some time there were five of them and all they had to do was cook for about twenty persons, do all their laundry work, help Royall Thompson, our milkman, with our creamery, do all the housekeeping, and look pleasant about it—and they did. All honor to the faithful women." Occasionally, the women had some say about their contribution to life on the ranch. "A new ruling has been made by the cooks," wrote Clyde Swenson, "and our meals are being served cafeteria style. The argument the cooks put up is that it saves a lot of footsteps for them, and it is agreed by everyone that they may be right." The colonists were also landlords. Several acres of land were rented to two Mexican families in return for grain. In addition, two apartments were rented out, one to a government surveyor, another to Dr. Earl L. Clyne, who paid his rent by tending to the colonists' medical needs.

Life on the Gila unit was directed by the manager and the unit's elected council. In February of 1934, with former manager Brannon still away, new elections were held, and Edwin Blank, Arthur
Goodwin, Anton Van Nuland, Ray Bradshaw, Hope Swenson, and R. V. Shoemaker were elected.

The organization and completion of tasks at Gila were similar to those on any ranch, except that the colonists, or their council, formulated the policies of the colony. "We learn here," wrote John Neill in the summer of 1934, "that the function of democracy in industry is not democratic management of industry, but democratic control of the policy of the organization." 28

Pickett told Shoemaker he would send only "true and tried colonists" to populate the new unit, and most were. Yet colonists did not receive wages for their work, and by the time most became members of the Gila colony they had exhausted their savings.

Shoemaker described life on the Gila colony as an almost constant struggle. As a result, several colonists gave up. One resident of Gila reported that, Roy Graves, who first discovered the ranch, became so disillusioned that he told Silver City residents he was being cheated. 20

As if meeting the payments on the ranch were not enough to worry about, some of the colony's cattle were rustled, their irrigation water supply was uncertain, and they suffered from occasional red baiting. Most participants came to see the colony's demise in conspiratorial terms and viewed the difficulties they faced as evidence of such conspiracies. Shoemaker, for example, recounts the visit of an official from the Silver City Health Department. The nurse, he wrote, told him she had been sent to check on reports of unsanitary conditions and an outbreak of smallpox. Finding no evidence for such rumors, she told Shoemaker, "Evidently someone is trying to make trouble for you people." "That wasn't news," wrote Shoemaker; "it was just more of the same." 30

Yet life on the Gila ranch was not without its rewards. Their first Christmas on the ranch, the colonists formed a Sunday evening club during which they held readings and recitals. On Christmas Eve 1933, Woolley wrote:

a log is burning in the grate, and in one corner is a huge Christmas tree that Clyde [Swenson] cut and brought in. . . . The ladies with their usual taste have decorated it with garlands of popcorn and tinsel. . . . Over the entrance in large red letters is the sign 'A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.' 21
Throughout the spring of 1934, social life at the ranch increased. Townspeople began to take part in the Sunday night activities, and occasionally the colony held a dance on Friday nights. A library was organized, and an appeal through The Colonist for contributions brought in 162 books and pamphlets in the first month. By May of 1934 the ranch reached its largest population of fifty.

In the summer of 1934 life on the ranch resembled that of a small village. The colony had at least seven children and five babies to tend to. At the main colony in Louisiana children attended a Montessori school, but in Gila they were enrolled in public school in neighboring Cliff.

By the fall of 1934 Shoemaker reported optimistically that the books of the unit showed that each month it was doing more than $1,200 worth of business. Yet the colony would not last another year.

The Gila colony ended in 1935. In its first two and a half years, it had managed to pay only a little more than $4,870 of its obligations. As of January, the colony had defaulted on its taxes and was at least $19,000 in arrears. Unless a substantial amount of cash could be raised, it was only a matter of time before the colonists would be evicted from the ranch. "A gigantic scheme has been planned and partly carried out," wrote Anna Shoemaker, "to divide and break up the Gila unit, or drive us off the property." Apparently, Pickett and the colonists believed they were due $22,000 in credit for the sale of lands, improvements on the property, and the sale of the rice crop of 1933.

In March, The Colonist featured an article on Gila entitled "Fighting For Its Life." According to the article, the colony had met its obligations, but the landlords still wanted the colonists off the land. Historian Conkin wrote, "Pickett, who was almost as attached to Gila as to the parent colony, fought a hopeless battle to save the unit, arguing that it was a war of the poor against the bankers." Newllano's publication blamed the landlords and absentee owners of the Gila valley of fearing the colony's success, "so they cracked the whip and exerted pressure upon their tools, the bankers, to deprive the Gila self-help group of its holdings."
The article asked readers to flood Silver City Judge George W. Hay, before whom Gila’s case would be heard, with letters of protest.

The article brought Pickett a court date when in April he appeared before Judge Henry Owen of Los Lunas and faced criminal contempt charges for the article. Owen had replaced Judge Hay because Hay had two other colony cases on his docket and had disqualified himself. Pickett was convicted, sentenced to six months in jail, and assessed court costs. The jail sentence was suspended. Even though Pickett was convicted, he was apparently not the author of the offending article.

A defense fund for the Gila colony was launched, but it garnered only $176 after a month of pleas in The Colonist. As of April there were still more than forty-five colonists on the ranch. Letters requesting help were written to New Mexico Senators Bronson Cutting and Orin Hatch. The colonists argued that Pickett had met with the bankers, and they contended they had sold outlying land to meet part of their obligations. As for the back taxes, the colonists claimed none were due until 1936 in accordance with the initial agreement to take over the ranch. (The agreement did not have such a clause.) Finally, the colonists believed the $2,000 bankers demanded as a minimum payment on the overdue obligations could be paid if crops could be marketed.

In the meantime, a rebellion against Pickett was stirring in Louisiana. On 3 May a mass meeting was held, and a new board was elected. The meeting also approved a resolution calling for an end to the expansion program. After hearing of this resolution, the Silver City Enterprise predicted the end of the Gila unit.

Even if Pickett had not been ousted as manager in May, the colony would have been hard put to raise the necessary cash. In January, a complaint had been filed in court, and a month after Pickett’s conviction on criminal contempt charges, the court appointed a receiver for the Gila ranch.

In May, Pickett went to Washington as part of his efforts to save the colony. According to Shoemaker, Pickett had arranged for the wealthy Senator Cutting to assume the ranch’s debts. During the Depression the senator was known in New Mexico for using his wealth to help many of his friends. Shoemaker claimed Pickett
Recent photos of the Gila site. Courtesy of author.
was in the senator's office with the necessary papers when Cutting was killed in a plane crash in Missouri. Pickett was in Washington on 6 May when the plane crashed, but there is no evidence of Cutting's involvement in the affairs of the colony. "He may indeed have been willing to consider assisting the Colony," writes Dean Sagar, the biographer of Cutting; "however, there is nothing in his official papers or in the settlement of his estate that would show any involvement." Carl Dunifon, a Silver City judge who knew Cutting and acted as the colonists' defense attorney, agrees with Sagar's conclusion.

The rebellion in Newllano terminated any support the Gila colonists could expect from the mother colony. The 25 May issue of *The Colonist* excused the colony from offering any financial assistance to Gila and pointed out that the other colonists were intended to be independent. The new board also circulated a letter explaining that Pickett no longer represented the colony. "We are particularly anxious," explained the letter, "that he shall not be in a position to collect any funds for any colony purpose whatever, including the defense of Gila." The May revolt also meant, according to Conkin, the colonists "were completely dispossessed and being Pickett supporters, were not welcomed back to Llano."

The colonists spent a difficult summer. A receiver sold their fruit crop, and those who remained on the ranch helped themselves to the few supplies remaining in the store. At one point, the colonists pulled their plow without a team of horses because their team had been sold. Neighbors finally loaned them a team after seeing the colonists in the field.

The October trial was short. Townspeople and colonists packed the gallery, but the only witness for the colony was Pickett, while the bank paraded seven, one of whom was a former colonist. The colonists were defended by W. C. Whatley, an attorney from Las Cruces, and Carl Dunifon, a former judge. In a later interview, Dunifon said the case was simple—the colonists had failed to meet their obligations. On 2 October the judge dismissed the jury and decided the case, rendering a verdict in favor of the plaintiff. After the trial, Bassett won a $45,000 judgment against the colony in Louisiana for the mortgage he held on the Gila ranch.

Pickett went off to Washington in a last and futile attempt to
find a solution for the colonists being evicted from the ranch. In November, a writ of repossession was approved, and the sheriff served it on the 15th. By March of 1938 all appeals in the case were made and exhausted; the case was finally closed.

Today, surviving colonists place much of the blame for the colony’s demise on Bassett. Shoemaker, for example, believed Bassett conspired with others to gain control of many of the colony’s assets. Pickett was also to be blamed, according to Shoemaker, for having trusted Bassett. Dunifon believes no such conspiracy existed. Even though, says Dunifon, the community may have been sympathetic to the colonists, they simply failed to meet their obligations.

In the fall of 1936, the last of the colonists left the ranch. All were penniless; some scattered to different parts of the country, but a few stayed in the area. Shoemaker spent the next five years paying back as much as $650 of the colony’s debts. Cleve Campbell, who had been in charge of the colony’s farming operation, paid back an additional $250.

Newllano, in the meantime, was also coming apart. Pickett tried to challenge the new board’s election in court, but to no avail. In 1938, the colony was put into receivership in an attempt to clear its debts.

Shoemaker, Pickett, and others made several attempts to reopen the Gila unit. In the fall of 1935, while the colonists were in court, letters were written to the Resettlement Administration in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. Washington officials, acknowledging letters written to Mrs. Roosevelt in support of the colonists’ efforts, turned the case over to W. E. Packard, regional director in San Francisco, whom Pickett wrote in December:

I am particularly anxious to see this [resettlement] done on this garden spot in Gila Valley, because, after twenty-one years, work on sub-marginal properties, demonstrating co-operative action, I would like very much now to make a demonstration as to what can be done with good producing land and proper equipment to work with.40
Perhaps Pickett revealed here the reason for his deep interest in Gila, sometimes to the exclusion of Newllano.

In 1940, Shoemaker, at Pickett's urging, went back to Louisiana. What Shoemaker saw upon his return made him ill. He had spent some of his best years in Newllano, and he believed there had been no better place to raise children. The industrial area, which he helped to build, had been wrecked and sold for scrap metal. The library was destroyed, and thousands of books had been dumped outside the hotel. Worst of all, wrote Shoemaker, was the fate of persons who lost everything in the colony. “The mask of hunger marred their features,” Shoemaker wrote of the survivors; “what I saw has been a nightmare to me ever since I witnessed it. I have tried to avoid bitterness over what we have endured from the vicious, unscrupulous hate-mongers, but it has not been easy to do.”

At the end of the 1970s, surviving colonists were still seeking to reopen their court cases in Louisiana.

NOTES

Because little has been published on the Llano colony in Gila, New Mexico, I relied greatly upon interviews. I wish to thank Carl Van Buskirk, Dorothy Coffey, Mrs. A. Ocheltree, and residents of Gila, as well as Carl Dunifon, the colony’s attorney, and Dean Sagar for information concerning Senator Cutting. I am also grateful to colonists in California and North Carolina with whom I corresponded. The story of the Gila Colony is in many ways based on the recollections of R. V. Shoemaker, who died in May 1980. My thanks also go to Josephine Coates; the Grant County Courthouse and Silver City Museum, Silver City, N.M.; University of New Mexico Library, Albuquerque, N.M.; Louisiana State University Archives, Baton Rouge, La. Materials gathered for this essay have been placed in the archives of the Louisiana State University Library (LSUA).


6. Conkin, Two Paths to Utopia, p. 175.
7. The Llano Colonist (Newllano, Louisiana), 22 October 1932.
8. The Colonist, 5 November 1932.
10. The Colonist, 3 September 1932.
11. The ranch’s present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Ocheltree, have assembled the ranch’s history for placement on the historical register.
15. The Colonist, 29 October 1932.
16. Silver City Enterprise, 3 March 1933.
17. Memorandum from Merchant Bank Building Company to Llano to the attention of Pickett in court records of 1935 trial, Civil Actions No. 8817 and 8756, Grant County Courthouse, Silver City, N.M.
19. Conkin, Two Paths to Utopia, p. 177, and various issues of The Colonist.
20. Pickett often invested money of the colony in attempts to drill for oil. In issues of The Colonist and at meetings, he promised the search would bring about untold wealth.
21. Dick Brannon to Pickett, La Grange, Illinois, 1 December 1933, LSUA.
22. The Colonist, 17 June 1933.
25. The Colonist, 8 April 1933.
28. The Colonist, 4 August 1934.
31. The Colonist, 13 January 1934.
32. Conkin, Two Paths to Utopia, p. 177.
34. Conkin, Two Paths to Utopia, p. 177.
35. The Colonist, 23 March 1935.
36. Interview with Dean Sagar, 30 March 1980. According to Sagar, none of the Pickett-Senator Cutting correspondence in the Cutting papers at the Library of Congress indicates that Cutting was planning a major involvement in the Gila colony.