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John H. Shary and the promotion and development of Hidalgo County land, 1912-1930

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JOHN H. SHARY AND THE PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT
OF HIDALGO COUNTY LAND, 1912-1930

A Thesis

by

SYLVIA ZULEMA SILVA-BEWLEY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 1998

Major Subject: History

Copyright

By

Sylvia Zulema Silva-Bewley

1998

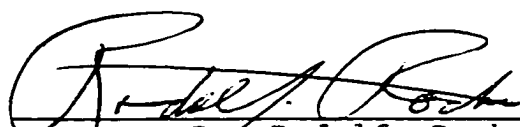
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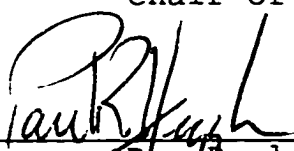
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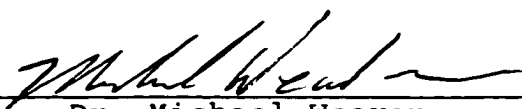
Approved as to style and content by:



Dr. Rodolfo Rocha
Chair of Committee



Dr. Paul Henggeler
Committee Member



Dr. Michael Weaver
Committee Member

May 1998

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The purpose of this study was to examine the role that John H. Shary had on the economic development of Hidalgo County, Texas. It discusses the promotion of the Rio Grande Valley, and details Shary's life and development business.

Shary visited the Valley in 1912 and saw the potential for large-scale citrus production. After buying land in the Mission area, he launched the commercial citrus industry. Under his leadership, Mission became the leading citrus producing city in Texas. However, before his citrus business flourished, Shary developed and sold land in Hidalgo County. He actively promoted the area and sponsored train excursions that brought in hundreds of Midwesterners looking for a good investment or a better life.

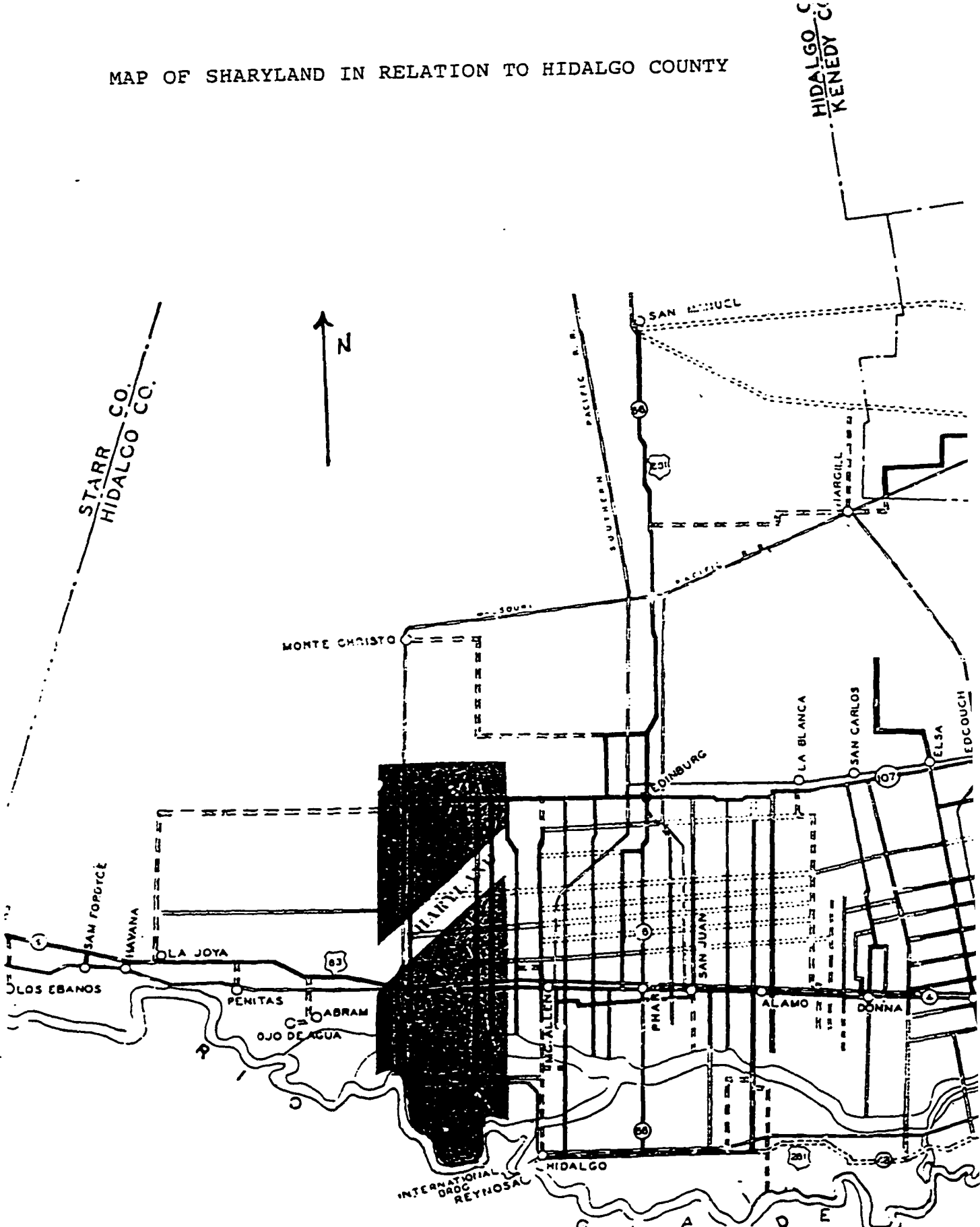
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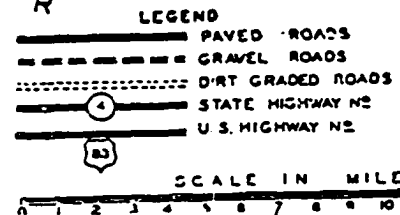
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MAP OF SHARYLAND IN RELATION TO HIDALGO COUNTY



Map copied from The Golden Story of Sharyland Where Nature Produces The World's Sweetest Citrus Fruits, a brochure given to the author by Blaine Holcomb.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For years, a huge billboard proclaiming: "Mission-Home of the Grapefruit" stood proudly on the corner of Business 83 and Shary Road. With the passing of time, the picture of the giant Ruby Red grapefruit that decorated it had faded to a light pink, no longer looking juicy nor delicious. Even the once bright yellow and pink rind had begun to blend into the white background. Then suddenly last year, as if its primary purpose was to put the billboard out of its misery, a land development company tore it down to make room for an Exxon gas station. A sign announcing "Unleaded Gas - \$1.12" stands in its place as a symbol of the rapid growth and change taking place in the Sharyland community. Although Mission still holds sole claim as "Home of the Grapefruit," it no longer thrives on the vast citrus industry as it did in the first half of the twentieth century. Many of the orchards that once dotted the landscape have, like the colors of the billboard, faded away.

Before the turn of the century, the Lower Rio Grande Valley comprised of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties was primarily dominated by ranching and farming Mexicano

families. However by 1904, when the railroad expanded to Brownsville, much of the land had already changed hands to Anglo-Americans who had hopes of capitalizing on their newly acquired property. It was about this time that some land speculators saw the benefit that could be derived from the railroad, since now the Valley was accessible to people throughout the country. Taking advantage of the region's mild climate and the vast amount of land suitable for agriculture, speculators launched a huge campaign to promote and sell land. Its suitability for citrus production made the Valley even more attractive. Before long, the Valley was inundated with people mainly from Midwestern and Northern states. Many visited, bought land, and left, while others stayed hoping to prosper in this new environment.¹

One of the leading promoters of the Valley during the early part of the twentieth century was John H. Shary. He came to the Valley with a vision to commercialize the citrus industry, a vision which he realized. He was responsible for much of the citrus production in Hidalgo County and was given the title, "Father of the Citrus Industry." However, it took a decade for the industry to become a viable economic force. In the meantime, Shary developed and sold land in Hidalgo County, and settled hundreds of families in the Mission area. This paper will examine the role that John Shary played in the economic development of Hidalgo County. The time period under

consideration begins with the year Shary first visited the Valley in 1912 and ends with the start of the Great Depression when most land activity came to a halt.

The fastest growth in population, agriculture, and economy, occurred during the decade of the 1920s. Cameron County's population more than doubled from 1920 to 1930. It rose from 36,662 to 77,540. The same can be said for Hidalgo County whose population grew from 38,110 to 77,004. With the exception of Brownsville, Valley towns prior to 1910 had populations under 3,000. Within ten years, several towns had experienced some growth, and by 1930 they showed significant growth. The city of Donna reported 1,579 persons in 1920, but by 1930 had 4,103 inhabitants. Edinburg showed a significant increase as well. With a little over 1,400 persons in 1920, its population had more than tripled ten years later. Other towns that showed nearly a 100 percent increase were Pharr, Mercedes, Brownsville and McAllen. Yet no Valley town suffered such a noticeable rise as Harlingen whose population soared from 1,784 in 1920 to 12,124 in 1930.²

The rise of agriculture and citrus in the Valley during the 1920s is also significant. By 1930, Hidalgo and Cameron Counties led the State in vegetable movement. There were 101 counties in Texas that shipped truck crops by the car-lot, yet the Valley region was responsible for most of this crop production. Cameron and Hidalgo Counties were also the leaders in citrus, producing ninety-five

percent of the State's crop. Although small shipments of citrus fruits took place prior to 1920, the first large-scale shipment occurred in the 1922-1923 season. The U. S. Department of Agriculture reported a value of \$446,000 for the 1924-25 export of grapefruit and oranges. By the 1929-30 season, this amount had jumped to \$3,837,600.³

The influx of new people to the area vitalized the economy. New businesses sprang up to keep up with the demand of a booming population. The increase in agriculture stimulated the economy as well. In 1921 Valley bank resources were under \$16 million and rose to \$26 million within a seven-year span. Land that sold for less than \$10 an acre at the turn of the century was being sold by speculators for forty times that amount in the late 1920s. Although Hidalgo County had no oil wells or mineral deposits to boost its value, by 1930 it was one of the ten wealthiest counties in Texas with a worth amounting to over \$52 million.⁴

Land developers were responsible for much of this progress since they financed train excursions that brought in buyers. They subdivided the land and up-graded irrigation projects vital to agricultural and citrus production. Above all, they, together with railroad companies, launched a huge promotional campaign to advertise all the favorable features of the Valley. Without adequate

advertising, people outside of Texas would not have been tempted to come.

One of the biggest advertisers of the Valley during this time was John Shary. However, although he developed an entire community in Hidalgo County, much of his notoriety has been linked to the citrus industry. The 1945 Texas Almanac names Shary as the person responsible for starting large-scale citrus tree planting in the region. It also credits the citrus industry for the growth of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. U. S. Senator Tom Connally described Shary as an "outstanding figure in the business and economic life of Texas...[whose] success was entwined with the advancement and development of the...Valley... [and] with the economic and business development of the entire state."⁵

By the time of his death in 1945, Texas was still third in the nation behind California and Florida in citrus production, but second only to Florida in grapefruit production. Hidalgo County was the leader having over six million citrus trees, and Mission was the top citrus community with 1,957,363 trees. This number almost equaled the total number of trees in all of Cameron County. It had 2,049,227 trees yielding fruit. During the 1922-23 season only 39,000 boxes of grapefruit and oranges were sold and shipped in Texas, but by the 1944-45 season this number had risen to twenty-four million boxes (valued over \$37 million), in addition to five million cases of canned grapefruit juice. At the time of Shary's death, the value

of citrus per box had been rising slowly after a drastic drop in price during the Depression years. In 1945 each box of grapefruit was valued at \$1.40 while a box of oranges cost \$2.35. Before this time, however, the value of both fruits had peaked during the 1925-1927 season at \$2.50 per box, although production was not as high as in the 1944-1945 season.⁶

Shary was right in his assessment of Valley land. It was able to produce citrus en mass. After Shary's death, citrus production continued to rise until 1949 when the first of a succession of severe freezes cut production drastically. The citrus industry in the Valley would not see as much activity as during Shary's lifetime.⁷

Shary did not limit himself to producing citrus. One of the reasons for his success was his ability to diversify and expand his business. He realized that, rather than disposing it, he could sell lower-grade fruit in juice form. Thus, he organized the Shary Products Company and started experimenting on the best method to produce grapefruit juice. This by-product industry proved profitable. By 1945, forty-five percent of Texas grapefruit was used for juice.⁸

Shary was a wise businessman who knew how to make money. In the early days of land sales, he charged customers a flat tax rate to pay for irrigation, plus an additional fee if he cleared or made improvements on the land. Once the citrus industry began to flourish, Shary

sold the land, then sold the customer the trees which he grew in his own nurseries, and "sold" them the water. Once the fruit got to market, he also made a profit since he owned eight packing plants throughout the Valley, one of which was in Sharyland. As founder and president of the Texas Citrus Fruit Growers Exchange, his aim was to ensure that all fruit was graded, shipped, and marketed at a fair price to yield a premium.⁹

Shary's business interests were varied. He became involved in banking, publishing, and education. As such, his role in the development of the Valley should not be diminished. It has, however, like the importance of the citrus industry, been overlooked. The development activities that took place in the Valley following the turn of the century is an area of study that has been largely ignored in Texas history textbooks. Although the citrus industry has been the subject of recent historical writings, this literature fails to include the contributions of Shary and do not detail the methods used by developers to promote and sell land.

Camilo Amado Martinez, Jr. in his master's thesis, "The Mexicans' and Mexican-Americans' Contribution to the Development of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and Its Citrus Industry," (1982) proposes that the Mexicans and Mexican-Americans deserve as much credit as the Anglo-American "pioneers" for the development of the citrus industry. He is correct in his argument since Mexicanos

were primarily responsible for the backbreaking work in clearing land, planting trees, and picking the fruit. Martinez, however, devotes only one chapter to this subject and addresses many issues pertaining to the citrus industry such as its emergence, the biology of tree planting, and irrigation. He discusses topics such as the railroad, land sales, scandals, and propaganda. Martinez also looks at immigration laws and patterns from 1904-1929. Finally he details how the people of Burgos, Tamaulipas, including his family, struggled to emigrate to the United States.

Since Martinez covers such a wide spectrum of sub-topics, he generalizes many important points of land selling and the development of the citrus industry. For example, when writing about its emergence, he mentions a handful of men who showed interest in citrus prior to 1910, and credits J. B. Webb and A. J. Hemminger for discovering the "Red Blush" and "Ruby Red" grapefruits, respectively, in 1929; yet, he fails to mention Shary's role in large-scale planting and production. However, Martinez does make reference to Shary in a later chapter when he names him along with other land speculators of the time who advertised nationwide.¹⁰

Martinez's dissertation, "The Mexican and Mexican-American Laborers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, 1870-1930," (1987) like his thesis, discusses the role of laborers in the citrus industry but also includes their role in agriculture, transportation, and

irrigation and cotton. However, as in his thesis, he again fails to give due notice to the contribution of John Shary and the mass production in Hidalgo County. He seems to concentrate more on activities in Cameron County.¹¹

Another scholar who has added to the historical literature about the Valley is Armando C. Alonzo. In his master's thesis, "A History of the Mexicans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas: Their Role in Land Development and Commercial Agriculture, 1900-1930," (1982) Alonzo investigates the contributions that the Mexicans made to the development of the area through labor in land clearing and irrigation projects, agricultural labor, and share cropping. Although Alonzo focuses more on the activities in Hidalgo County and even details land development in Edinburg, he ignores the development that took place in neighboring Mission. Perhaps he does so because his primary subjects are ranching and farming, and Mission's (Sharyland in particular) greatest growth was due to citrus.¹²

"Texas Citrus Industry," a dissertation completed by James Edwin Hill, Jr. in 1963, is a study somewhat clinical in nature. Hill gives a very brief overview of the establishment of the industry but fails to examine how and why there was such a dramatic rise in shipments of citrus from 1922 to 1930 and then to 1945. His discussion of the great activity at the beginning of the century is limited to the following:

After World War I there was a rapid rise in the population and economy of the Valley. Thousands

of settlers from the Middle West and Northern Great Plains were brought to the Valley in special railway cars by land speculators. The economic boom was based primarily on the rapidly expanding citrus industry.¹³

There is no doubt that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, through their hard labor, were responsible for much of the development of this border region during the early part of the century. This study, however, will concentrate on the activities of the land developers, namely the activities of John H. Shary. Developers were the men who were at the forefront. They were the ones largely responsible for promoting the area. They financed excursions and made land improvements. They were the ones directly involved in land sales. Much of the research for this paper is based on the life and work of John H. Shary, one of the developers of Hidalgo County and the foremost leader of commercial citrus.

This study is divided in three main parts. The first part, Chapter 2, discusses the tactics land development and railroad companies used to promote the Valley during the 1920s. Targeting people from the North and Midwest, they advertised the Valley's warm climate and disposition for year-round crops. They also, however, promoted it as an area where American values and ideals could be exercised. They used imagery that had been used a century earlier to promote the West. They appealed to Anglo-Americans with expansionist mindsets.

The next chapter focuses on the life of John Shary.

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It provides a glimpse into his private and public life. More importantly, it discusses his values. They did after all, have a direct bearing on how he conducted himself with customers and in the community. His ideals were part of what drove him to the Valley and eventual economic success.

The third part shifts to Shary's land development work and business practices. This chapter details how Shary promoted and sold the land. It explains his transactions and customer relations. It is an overview of how he ran his business. No history of the Lower Rio Grande Valley during this time of economic prosperity would be complete without inclusion of Shary's contribution to the development of the region.

ENDNOTES

¹Throughout this paper, the word "Valley" refers to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas unless otherwise specified.

²The World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1932 (New York: World Telegram, 1932), 417.

³The Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide (A. H. Belo Corporation, 1931), 173; Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide 1945-1946 (Dallas: A. H. Belo Corporation, 1945), 207. No value was reported for the 39,000 boxes of citrus shipped during the 1922-1923 season.

⁴"Valley Statistics Show Wonderful Gains in All Branches of Development," Brownsville Herald, 2 October 1922, p. 5 (Afternoon edition); Max Bentley, "Transportation, Water and People Behind Valley Progress," Harlingen Star, 2 December 1928, sec. 1, p. 8; J. L. Allhands, Gringo Builders, (Privately printed, 1931), 179, 184.

⁵Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide 1945-1946, 206-207; Tom Connally, U.S. Senate to Joe T. Cook, Mission Times, Western Union telegraph, 6 November 1945, Scrapbook, n.n., John H. Shary Collection, Lower Rio Grande Valley Historical Collection, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, Texas. Materials obtained from the John H. Shary Collection of the University of Texas Pan American shall henceforth be noted as JHSC.

⁶Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide 1945-1946, 206-207.

⁷Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide 1964-1965 (Dallas: A. H. Belo Corporation, 1963), 364.

⁸Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide 1945-1946, 206; "John H. Shary Awarded Silver Plaque For Appearing on 'Flowers for Living' Program," Scrapbook, vol. 1, p. 21, JHSC.

⁹Yolanda Garcia, interview by author, Tape recording, Mission, Texas, 1 January 1997; Blaine Holcomb, interview by author, tape recording, Mission, Texas, 4 December 1997.

¹⁰Camilo Amado Martinez, Jr., "The Mexicans' and Mexican-Americans' Contribution to the Development of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and Its Citrus Industry" (Master's thesis, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas, 1982), 26-27, 29, 43.

¹¹Camilo Amado Martinez, Jr., "The Mexican and Mexican-American Laborers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, 1870-1930" (Ph. D. dissertation, Texas A & M University, 1987), 102-111, 125-132.

¹²Armando C. Alonzo, "A History of the Mexicans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas; Their Role in Land Development and Commercial Agriculture, 1900-1930" (Master's thesis, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas, 1982).

¹³James Edwin Hill, Jr., "Texas Citrus Industry" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1963), 13.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROMOTION OF THE VALLEY

After John Shary visited the Valley in 1912, he saw the potential for commercial citrus production and began buying large tracts of land in the Pharr-McAllen and, later, Mission areas. The commercial citrus industry, however, would take several years to mature and flourish. In the mean time, Shary capitalized on his past experience as a developer to promote and sell part of this land to help finance his citrus enterprise. At first, Shary promoted the region as ideal farm land and sold it as such. He was an avid promoter, but he was not the only one advertising the Valley during this time. Developers stood to benefit from selling irrigable, fertile land to Midwesterners tired of long winters. To understand Shary's role in the development of Hidalgo County, it is necessary to widen the scope and look at how the Valley was promoted. It is important to capture the spirit of the time.

The Valley experienced significant economic growth and an influx of Anglo-Americans in the early twentieth century. Because of its suitability for agricultural production, and with Anglos now owning huge tracts of land, much of the Valley was put on the market. Many land

development companies invested liberally in promoting the Valley. In 1904, the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad expanded into Brownsville from Houston through Robstown. Several years later other railroad companies such as the Gulf Coast Lines, which was part of Missouri Pacific Lines, and Southern Pacific Lines became actively involved in the promotion of the Valley.¹

Land and railroad companies participated in an aggressive campaign to advertise the Valley. They devised different methods to promote this section of Texas as a citrus paradise, as a winter garden spot, and as the ideal place to live. They relied on photo brochures, newspaper articles, and word-of-mouth. Operating on the premise that "a picture is worth a thousand words," brochures displayed scenes of beautiful homes, bountiful crops, and people enjoying life. Newspapers reported on the best features of the Valley and often printed visitors' favorable impressions. Moreover, promoters hoped that visitors would return to their home towns speaking of the wonders of the Valley.

Some promoters likely exaggerated features of the area. Brochures were often too selective and biased. Some people criticized them for not presenting a true picture of Valley life. Even newspaper articles could be suspect as to their accuracy. Yet all of these "advertising" tools were effective. They enticed people to come to the Valley and to see for themselves.

Promoters targeted individuals with enough money to invest in land. Their primary audience was people from states such as Kansas, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Oklahoma. Aided by the Valley Chamber of Commerce, these two groups, the land and railroad companies, advertised the attractions and prosperity of the Valley as well as the character of "its people." Although more than half of the population was Mexican, to the promoters, the valuable people of the Valley were the Anglo-Americans, and their ideals and work ethic were widely publicized. Promoters sought to attract more Whites into the area and they produced results. By the late 1920s, there were more English-speaking people moving to the Valley than Mexicans.²

The first large-scale effort to sell Valley land occurred around 1912. Land brokers swarmed the Valley in large numbers. However, it is difficult to determine their success. During 1912-1916, the Valley experienced a series of border raids that resulted in thousands of United States troops being dispatched to the area. Some prospective settlers understandably shied away from settling in this part of the country during this time. In January 1916, a story in the Mission Times mentions a number of persons from Illinois (one of them had purchased a farm in Mission), who were on their way to the Valley late in 1915. However, they decided to remain in Houston for two months because of the "lurid accounts of bandit troubles."³

By 1918, conflicts along the border had subsided, but a postwar economic depression soon followed. Between 1918 and 1922 the Valley's population increased. There was an overall business slump, a decline in farm prices, and widespread unemployment throughout the country. Investments were down. By 1924, however, the postwar depression lifted and land companies renewed their efforts to sell land. There was a time when some thirty to forty large land development companies sponsored excursions to this section. There were also some smaller companies that brought down a handful of people every so often.⁴

It was from 1924 to about 1929 that the greatest promotion of the Valley took place. One train excursion alone brought 700 tourists to Harlingen in January of 1927. They were brought from throughout the United States by eighteen different land companies. The contingent required three special trains for the trip, and several hundred automobiles for the tour through the Valley.⁵

Land development and railroad companies made a tremendous effort to promote the Valley in the 1920s. Not only would selling property benefit the land companies, but the railroad companies undoubtedly stood to benefit from increased shipments of agricultural products due to more land coming under cultivation. Missouri Pacific was responsible for a tour in 1925 of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Citrus Fruit and Vegetable Exhibit car. The train car exhibited samples of Valley crops as evidence of

agricultural prosperity. It toured through Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and Oklahoma, and during the first seven days of its excursion, it attracted more than 20,000 Texans. To ensure that the car would have an audience, a representative of the Gulf Coast Lines traveled in advance of the car, heralding its arrival. Such great interest was taken in the exhibit and "so enthusiastic did one Dallas man become that he wired a land man in the Valley that he would take a certain tract of land. He was convinced by the exhibit that he would not lose on his investment."⁶

Land development and railroad companies did not limit themselves to bringing investors and homeseekers to the area. They also targeted journalists to publicize this section of the country in their respective home newspapers. In 1927, the Missouri Pacific Lines entertained editors of leading farm publications in the United States and Canada. According to J. E. Bell, president of the Secretaries Association of the Valley Chambers of Commerce, "the bringing of the farm editors here will prove one of the most important single things ever done to get the Valley fairly and accurately known by the bulk of the country's farmers."⁷

The Missouri Pacific, Gulf Coast Lines was responsible for bringing two women staff writers for the Houston Chronicle and the Houston Post Dispatch to view the Valley in 1927. Accounts of their visit ran in the Harlingen

Star. The article describes how after touring the region, the writers "went away with an 'armful' of facts and figures about the Valley...[and] expressed their amazement at the wonderful growth of this section, the development made in such a short space of time."⁸

Land development companies obviously spent much of their advertisement money on "wining and dining" potential customers. They were given royal treatment on their trip to the Valley and entertained lavishly once they arrived. Southwestern Land Company used other means to attract investors, and it is likely that other companies did the same. Southwestern held an annual banquet and dance at Altus, Oklahoma to promote Sharyland, a community in Hidalgo county. Persons who already owned property in the area would speak about its wonders and newspaper articles describing the Valley would be shown to the guests. These annual banquets served their purpose. By 1929, Southwestern had sold nearly one quarter of a million dollars worth of Sharyland citrus land to Oklahoma investors.⁹

Valley newspapers actively advertised the area, and it is important to note that these papers circulated outside of this section as well. The Harlingen Star, for example, circulated in thirty-three states outside of Texas, and in Canada and Mexico. The states with the leading subscribers were Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Oklahoma, Kansas, Michigan, and Arkansas. It is no wonder that land

and railroad companies wanted their activities published in Valley papers.¹⁰

The Valley Chamber of Commerce also played a role in the promotion of the Valley. At a time when the promotion campaign was at its peak, the Chamber of Commerce completed a two-reel film "depicting various Valley activities and the wonderful fertility and the wonderful resources of the Valley." The managers of all Valley theatres committed to showing the film. Proceeds from these showings were used to distribute the film to other states to attract homeseekers and investors.¹¹

In 1922, promoters made their first large-scale effort to publicize the Valley as a possible contender for supreme citrus-fruit producer. Until then California and Florida had taken the honors. Houston newspapers and its Chamber of Commerce, together with local merchants, devoted much time and space to the festivities of "Valley Week in Houston." The following season, San Antonio organized and participated in "Valley Week." These events focused on the citrus industry which was becoming more important to the economic development of this section. A local writer and promoter, Julia Cameron Montgomery, touted the Valley as another "promised land" and its fruit was being compared to the one discovered by the Israelites in the true promised land, Canaan. Yet, of all the citrus fruit, grapefruit was the most popular. A Valley citrus grower, believed that there was nothing "that will make a man rich in less

time than grape fruit [sic]. If I had ten acres of grape fruit [sic], I would not worry much about the future."¹²

Citrus had been grown in the Valley for many years, but it was not until 1916 that people began to realize the profitability of the industry. Since the Valley is located 400 miles farther south than Southern California, the fruit was ready for market before the California fruit. During the 1921-1922 season, fifty-four carloads of fruit were exported. It was the first commercial large-scale shipment of citrus. By 1920, farmers had increased plantings of citrus trees and were doubling with each season. By the 1923-1924 season, the Valley had produced 12,000 carloads of fruit. The increase was almost entirely in grapefruit. There were 2,000,000 trees bearing grapefruit in 1924 and another 1,000,000 were in nurseries ready to be planted. By 1928, there were over 3,400,000 citrus trees in about 60,000 acres of land. Of these, eighty-two percent were grapefruit.¹³

Citrus growers were successful in the Valley for several reasons. First was the access of transportation. Improved roads helped to get their fruit to market, but the railroad became the chief distributor. Without it, farmers would not have prospered.

A second reason for the success of the citrus industry was its extensive irrigation system. Because grapefruit roots do not go very deep into the ground, the trees require much water. It was necessary for growers to flood the

orchards four times a year to produce sufficient fruit. Land companies interested in profiting from their sales wisely invested in irrigation improvements. By 1938 there were twelve large irrigation systems in the Valley and other smaller systems operating. Two-thousand, three-hundred miles of canals reached 435,000 acres. Of 945,000 acres of irrigable land, 450,000 acres were irrigated in that year alone.¹⁴

A final reason for the success of the citrus industry lies in the fertility of the soil. Although this area is considered to be semi-arid, the Rio Grande always brought in new soil with each irrigation, and Valley growers did not have to fertilize the land as those in Florida and California. Scientists claimed that the Rio Grande had deposited rich silt in the Valley for thousands of years, and the irrigation helped to revive the soil.¹⁵

Prior to 1929, William Clendennin, secretary of the American Association of Popular Research in Soilology and Irrigation came to the Valley to make an analysis of the Rio Grande waters. He believed the vegetation to be the richest in the country, and by scientific comparison, proclaimed it to be the richest in the world. He believed scientific data supported his claim that the Rio Grande Valley surpassed even the Nile Valley in soil fertility. He claimed that twenty-four inches of Rio Grande irrigation water contained over 80,000 pounds of potash and other materials by which scientists measure the fertility of

alluvial waters. It is difficult to determine whether Clendennin's assertions were accurate or exaggerated since there is no evidence that any other scientist made the same claim. Regardless, the large amounts of crops harvested were evidence of the land's fertility.¹⁶

This fertile soil made it possible to grow other crops in addition to citrus fruit. Before the 1920s, the Valley was known for its cotton and agricultural products. The Gulf Coast Lines began shipping fruits and vegetables to Houston and New Orleans in 1907. The 1907-1908 season showed 761 cars with a steady increase of shipments in every season. During the early years of production, onions and cabbage were the most common Valley exports. By 1928, the diversity of crops had increased to twenty-seven products being exported. The most popular vegetables were cabbage, potatoes, carrots, beets, green corn, and tomatoes. However, the Valley also shipped such rare products as endive, romaine lettuce, shallots, and chickory.¹⁷

Because of the year-round mild climate, farmers were able to plant different crops through the entire year, and Valley promoters emphasized this point to attract farmers from the North and Midwest. As soon as the cabbage and onion crops were harvested, farmers planted corn, broom corn, and feed crops. They rotated the crops year round.¹⁸

By the early 1920s, cotton had become one of the most prolific products, but farmers were able to successfully plant hundreds of acres mainly because of the "unlimited"

supply of Mexican labor in the Valley. Promoters boasted that the Valley had the best cotton industry in the world. In 1922, the Brownsville Herald predicted that every available acre of land on the Mission and Sharyland tract would be under cultivation the following year, most of it with cotton. By 1928 there were 175,000 acres of cotton planted in the Valley, and thirty-six gins were operating.¹⁹

Advertisers were not shy about describing the profits that could be made from cotton or from agricultural products, especially if those products could be grown in the winter when out-of-state farmers did not have a crop. Northern farmers who only planted corn had that one crop to rely on the whole year. The same could be said for wheat or any other crop which they grew. For this reason, many people considered the Valley an ideal winter garden spot. After describing the state of crops and other farm prospects, an article in the November 1915 Mission Times concluded:

All of these things in the dead of winter when our Northern brother is wrapped in his furs, fighting a furnace and trying to keep from freezing to death in a plastered house. We of the Valley are still wearing Palm Beach suits, eating ice cream three times a day, snap beans, radishes, peas, young onions, tomatoes, venison, quail on toast, wild turkey, golden honey and basking in the smiles of the goddess of everlasting springtime.²⁰

A letter written in December by a Valley visitor and published in the Harlingen Star reveals a similar sentiment. It reads, "I certainly am surprised at the wonderful climate here. This is as fine as a June day for Minnesota as you

could possibly imagine. We get fresh peas, beets, carrots, tomatoes, etc., right out of the gardens."²¹

Numerous newspaper articles described how pleased visitors were with the climate of South Texas. Austin Tims, in a newspaper article, claimed that the average summer temperature in the Valley was 81.5 degrees and 42.2 degrees for the winter months, without extremes of hot or cold. Although for those of us who have experienced summer temperatures in the Valley, 81.5 degrees may seem a bit preposterous, the Texas Almanac for 1931 reported 83.9 degrees as the average temperature in July for Hidalgo County. Therefore, Tims was correct in his description, even though an average can be misleading since daily summer temperatures rise well above 95 degrees with high rates of humidity.²²

More misleading was a visitor's description of the Valley's climate as "most salubrious, made so by close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, where a cool breeze is constantly blowing both day and night." Cool breezes from the Gulf do not extend more than a few miles inland. This story, which ran in an Arkansas newspaper, no doubt helped tempt northerners to visit and even settle in this area. The Valley also experienced milder winters than the northern states, as it does today. An article from the 1928 Harlingen Star states, "Hundreds of northerners, tired of the long, dreary, cold months, with its consequent inactivity, are looking towards the Rio Grande Valley and

are headed this way this winter." Even today, winter visitors flock to the Valley.²³

Although winter visitors contributed to the flourishing economy of South Texas, the land development companies and railroad companies did not make a great effort to target this audience. One of the principal groups on which they focused was the Northerners or Midwesterners who had enough capital to invest in land. Valley newspapers frequently announced which businessmen and their families were purchasing property or moving to the Valley. There were even reprints from out-of-state papers giving note of departing townspeople. A typical reprint from the Vienna, South Dakota Standard is found in the Mission Times:

With Mr. Knadle going out of business this week Vienna loses [sic] one of its livest [sic] and best known business men....We regret to say that he expects to move to Sharyland, Texas and make his home there, part of the time at least. His going will be felt by many.²⁴

Dellos Urban Buckner interviewed eighty-six residents of the Rio Grande Valley and found that before 1920 most of the people who moved here were farmers. After this date, however, the majority of the newcomers were from urban areas. They were businessmen or retired capitalists whom the land development companies targeted because they could pay cash for the real estate they bought.²⁵

Some of the people who invested in Valley land, specifically those who bought into the citrus industry, did not move to the area immediately. These absentee owners bought the land with the agreement that the seller would

take care of the trees anywhere from three to five years. Citrus growers would sell the orchards, already planted with citrus, at about \$1250 per acre. They would tend to the orchards to ensure their production and would even pay the taxes.²⁶

Promoters advertised the area's economic progress through pamphlets to ensure that potential buyers had no doubts that they were making a wise investment. Newspapers also periodically reported the progress which the Valley was making. In 1904, the Valley had two banks with resources amounting to \$309,276, but by 1921, it had twenty-eight banks with combined resources of \$15,724,946. The assessed valuation in property in 1904 was \$6,141,553 and had climbed in 1921 to \$53,323,572. Much of this prosperity had occurred in the previous ten years. By 1928, there were thirty banks with \$26,000,000 in resources, and the assessed valuations of the four Valley counties stood at \$110,000,000 with \$220,000,000 in real value.²⁷

Through their publicity agents, the land and railroad companies were successful in luring investors to South Texas. Yet once the potential buyers arrived, it was the salesman's job to promote the enticing features of the Valley. On occasion, land companies were dishonest in their business practices, and salesmen used unscrupulous means to bait their customers.

Many buyers accused several Valley land companies of fraud. The two most prominent of these were the Alamo

Land and Sugar Company, and the W. E. Stewart Land Company, both of which were under the leadership of R. B. Creager, then National Republican committeeman from Texas. Because of the many complaints of land buyers from these and other companies, U. S. Senator Thomas Heflin of Alabama led a Senate subcommittee investigation in January 1924. These companies and their representatives were accused of misrepresenting the land they sold. Agents allegedly took buyers to "show farms" where properly irrigated land produced beautiful crops, yet the acreage which they sold did not have adequate access to water. Purchasers complained that they were shown one piece of land and sold another. They accused land companies of selling property for which they did not hold a deed. They said that the literature put out by the companies was attractive and alluring but represented opinions as fact. Promotional literature or land agents allegedly stated, that farmers in the Valley could make more money off forty acres of land than off 320 acres in the North. Customers alleged they were told that there were no crop failures or droughts in the Valley, nor were there mosquitos or other insects. Investors were told that it was "a country where every grain and every fruit spring almost spontaneously from the earth to gladden and reward the labor of men."²⁸

Senator Morris Sheppard from Texas, testifying on behalf of the citizens of the Valley, urged the investigation committee to visit the Valley as soon as

possible, so that the truth could come out. The committee agreed to do just that and decided to stop taking evidence relating to conditions until it could conduct the trip. But this was never realized. The full committee, Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, reversed their decision. By February 1925, the Senate resolved to discharge the subcommittee and turn over the investigation to the Department of Justice. The investigation faded into oblivion.²⁹

One of the companies under investigation, the W. E. Stewart Land Company for which the city of Weslaco was named, was embroiled in land fraud controversy for several years. In February 1923, Stewart was convicted of using the mails to defraud people in the sale of land in Hidalgo County. He was sentenced to serve five years in the federal penitentiary and fined \$1600. However, he was later acquitted in a federal district court during a second trial in March 1925. A short time later in December 1925, five persons sued W. E. Stewart Land Company again for fraud and won. The company was found guilty of misrepresentation in land sales.³⁰

Any accusations of fraud obviously made all land companies in the Valley nervous. They feared the bad publicity would hurt them regardless of its accuracy. Even citizens of the Valley became defensive. They felt the Valley was on trial rather than the land companies. As a result, David Hinshaw, a journalist, organized a

program of publicity to offset damage done to the area. The Valley Chamber of Commerce endorsed the program which, among other tactics, called for the creation of a news bureau to supply free news service to 500 or more leading United States newspapers located in the Midwest and South. The bureau was to send illustrated and feature articles advertising Valley conditions. An article in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram expresses a similar sentiment.

Somebody, a way off somewhere, may get the idea that the character of the country is crooked rather than the character of some of the trades that seem to have been made in the country. We are not saying one word about the land deals that have been made in the Rio Grande Valley. We do not know the facts regarding the commercial side of the Valley....There is nothing wrong with the Rio Grande Valley....Why anyone should ever misrepresent such a land no one knows.³¹

Since the least sign of deception frightened homeseekers back to their home states, land agents were careful to keep them away from any negative influences. This is one reason why clubhouses were built in secluded areas away from disappointed investors known as "knockers." Sometimes these knockers were loafers who would wait on unsuspecting visitors and disillusion them about the Valley. One land developer even resorted to hiring two ex-prize fighters to accompany each excursion. It was their job to keep the knockers away, and on occasion resorted to violent means when the knockers were persistent.³²

In the later years of large-scale promotional activity, land and railroad companies targeted investors who would deposit money in the citrus industry, some as absentee

landlords. But in the earlier years, their largest target group were men with families with enough money and courage to move to this section. They were looking for young, hard-working, family men who could take a piece of land and make it productive in a short time. Railroad companies, in particular, stood to benefit from an increase in population and agricultural production. They were, after all, in the business of transporting not only agricultural goods, but people as well. Consequently, much of the advertisements mentioned the prospects of the land and portrayed the Valley as the ideal place to live. They emphasized the abundance of recreational activities, social clubs, hospitals, public schools, and a healthful environment.

Since the 1920s was a time of prohibition in the United States, newspaper articles sometimes mentioned that a trip across the border offered visitors a unique dining experience and also the opportunity to enjoy a drink or two of Mexican "Hootch." Some literature glorified the mystique of a foreign land, and it was very easy to cross the border and enjoy some of the diversions in towns such as Reynosa and Matamoros. In 1925, the Valley Bridge Company was building a new bridge connecting Hidalgo and the "picturesque little city of Reynosa," and by 1926, a much better bridge would be constructed between Brownsville and Matamoros.³³

A pamphlet published by Missouri Pacific Lines entitled

The Beautiful Valley of the Lower Rio Grande of Texas gives a splendid description of this area through photographs. Although the pamphlet illustrates the farming aspects of this section, it also shows people participating in recreational activities and contains many photographs of the Valley's schools, hotels, churches, hospitals, train stations, and palm trees.³⁴

Illustrated pamphlets were popular and effective as advertising agents. Though some people may not have embraced them as accurate representations of the Valley, others defended them. A speaker at a joint banquet of the Rotary and Lions Clubs criticized publishers for sending out pictures because he felt that in general "show place" photographs were not true reflections of Valley life. In response, an advertising publisher immediately came to their defense. He countered that photographs were the one form of advertising that did not lie. Boosters could exaggerate through words or script, but unless pictures were altered, they could be taken at face value. He pointed out how foolish it would be to select a "commonplace farm" for publicity, since no one would want to make a trip to see "ordinary every-day scenes." As evidence of the power of pictures he noted that in Life magazine alone, 25 of 28 national advertisers had illustrated ads. As far as the Valley was concerned, from 75 to 90 percent of prospective settlers had seen pictures of the area. The advertising executive contended that the natural beauty

of the Valley spoke for itself and was the best form of promotion.³⁵

Because of the power of pictures, most pamphlets have beautiful color layouts followed by descriptive prose. A pamphlet by the Gulf Coast Lines gives a summary of why the Valley is the ideal place to live. It details the extensive highway improvement plan. The pamphlet describes the good morale of the schools and the activities in which students could participate such as football, baseball, basketball, Boy Scouts, and Camp Fire Girls. There are scenes of people bathing at Padre Island and sportsmen fishing, hunting, and sailing. It includes a layout of some of the more elegant Valley homes, and concludes with a page entitled "The Best Crop in the Valley" which displays seventy-two photographs of seventy-four smiling (white) children's faces.³⁶

A promotional booklet illustrated and described Valley attractions as well as those in Reynosa, Matamoros, and Monterrey. Concentrating on the Valley's climate it states:

Statistics give the Lower Valley of the Rio Grande the palm on health record. The quality and quantity of sunshine and balmy atmosphere covering an all-year period furnish perpetual invitation to those who hold physical well being of paramount importance.³⁷

Promoters knew that it was important that the wives of homeseekers agree to move to the Valley. Therefore, advertisements often mentioned different women's organizations, and displayed beautiful homes and other attractions that would interest women. A booklet written

by Julia Cameron Montgomery for the Southern Pacific Lines includes a chapter entitled "Choosing a Place to Live."

In it, the author writes:

A man naturally considers investment and financial possibilities above other things. A woman reckons upon the basis of proper environment for the rearing of her children, the servant problem, and the chances for a measure of congenial church, civic, and³⁸ social affiliation, either rural or community.

The author assures there were plenty of clubs and civic groups for women, and the servant problem was solved by Mexican labor. She also gives advice to those newcomers unfamiliar with Mexican people:

A welltrained Mexican servant gives good satisfaction under firm, kindly treatment. A fair and friendly dealing with a Mexican usually begets loyalty and dependability, a response to whatever is received.³⁹

Pamphlets also promoted a frontier mythology which dated back to the Jacksonian democratic belief of Manifest Destiny. Believing that Americans had a divine right to possess land and spread their ideals, Anglo-Americans continued to settle the "frontier." Enticing to a young, rugged "pioneer" was the knowledge that he was moving to a place where hard work guaranteed economic prosperity, and where American values were highly esteemed. The back cover of a promotional pamphlet declared:

If you really desire to accomplish more, and are willing to work hard for the reward of happiness, using your mind with your hands, and putting your soul into your efforts, then the Lower Rio Grande Valley affords you your opportunity.⁴⁰

Another booklet distributed by the Progreso Development Company addresses this same issue. It speaks to older men awaiting retirement and to younger men looking for better opportunities. Yet even the retiree was discouraged from idleness.

Included in the dreams of every man and in his plans for the future is an underlying purpose...that someday--before he is too old--and after the battles are won, after the hum drum and hurly burly of making his place in life--he will get away from business--its duties and disappointments...to find some ideal spot where life is easier and simpler....Not--mind you--to rest and rust but rather to find some manner of life that will be comparatively easy but not TOO easy, with some kind of congenial creative work that will keep him from the loafer class and his mind clear and his heart and spirit young....

You young men must not think that the Valley has no place for you. Any young man with some capital who wishes to farm or gradually build up an orange or grapefruit orchard can find in the Valley a farming country that presents opportunity for success, for large returns upon farm products and for increase in land values....

The Valley farmer looks to his land for help and not to Congress....⁴¹

Mrs. John C. Myrick, Mrs. J. Y. Harvey, and Miss Florence Bell, members of the Good Roads Committee agreed completely with the ideal of hard work, but they were even more emphatic in their views. They believed this section, because of its remoteness, floods, and other such hardships, was only for the strong. They asked that weaklings turn back from where they came, for the Valley was raising up a "chosen people."⁴²

The Valley was gradually infused with new blood. These newcomers were seen as a progressive lot, not bound

by tradition or set in their ways. These were people who were not afraid to tackle projects, and they did all they could for the sake of town progress. The December 24, 1925 McAllen Daily Press trumpets these men as the "bone and sinew" of the land from which they came. They were "helping infuse that great strain of Anglo-Saxon into the land of the Manana." As proof, it describes the way these men were turning a land of rattlesnakes and cactus into a Garden of Eden.⁴³

Advertising strategies such as these were used in the nineteenth century to describe the West, and during the eighteenth century to promote the Northwest. A common belief of nineteenth century American society was that control of the future lay not in the wild West, but in the domesticated West. These farmers and their families transformed the virgin land into a garden: "for the imagination, the Garden of the World...a poetic idea that defined the promise of American life." Writers such as John Filson who described the earliest settlements in Kentucky in the 1700s used similar biblical references. As Canaan was the promised land for the Israelites, so was the vast "untamed" territory for the Americans. Filson illustrated a country "like the land of promise, flowing with milk and honey, a land of brooks of water,...a land of wheat and barley, and all kinds of fruits."⁴⁴

These images evoked not only beauty and prosperity but a sense of decency for they represented the promises

of God. These advertising strategies continued through the centuries since they appealed to many Americans whose ideals and morals were based on biblical principles. Advertisers also apparently believed that the frontier mythology appealed to people moving to the Valley.

According to the 1920 U. S. census, Mission had a population of 3,847 in 1920 and ten years later the population had increased slightly to 5,120. For the same years, McAllen's population increased from 5,331 to 9,074. However, the population of another Valley town, Harlingen, showed a dramatic increase. It grew from 1,784 inhabitants in 1920 to 12,124 in 1930. In a two-page write-up of the town, Max Bentley asserts that this increase was not from people within Texas who were simply shifting the population from one part of the state to another. He claims that it was all new folks from places such as Iowa and North Dakota. They were from the Midwest, and they were leaving their mark not just on Harlingen, but on the whole Valley.⁴⁵

The Mexican population was ignored for the most part. Promotional literature concentrated on describing how wonderful Valley life was, and would be, for the Anglo-Americans. Mexicans were classified as servants or laborers, and in an effort to romanticize Anglo ideals, publications often stereotyped and downgraded the Mexicans. In an article which first appeared in the Dallas News and later in the McAllen Daily Press, the writer, in describing Brownsville, notes that while there was a lot of "Mexican

background" around the city, Brownsville was "huskily American...and a good example of a frontier city vivified with American ideas." Another article contrasts Mexico and the Valley declaring them to be as different as black and white. It describes Mexico as a place of hot, dusty streets and run-down shacks, but portrays the Valley as a paradise of swaying palms and rosy children.⁴⁶

A cogent example of how some people viewed the Mexican is seen in a two-page report which the Harlingen Star published in 1928. The writer, Max Bentley, claims that, although Zapata, a border town, is "intensely and hopelessly" Mexican, the Mexican is nothing but scenery. To prove his point he gives the following illustrations:

- (1) We see lounging in the shade of the beautiful mission style depot at Harlingen, a peon. As the heat grows intense he languidly moves the brim of his sombrero to shade his eyes. They don't see what is going on in front of them. He, the peon, doesn't belong. A step away in [sic] Mexico, but this is American country--
- (2) From the top of the grain tower...we see the river....Beyond the south bank is Mexico. Darkness there, a dark land of dark people, 300 years behind the times....On the north bank, the American side, a string of night fires burning along the road as far as the eye can see. In the flickering glare we descry the silhouette of the American farmer, and his wife beside him, burning the brush, by night, clearing their land for the morrow.

Similarly, a clipping from an Arkansas newspaper describes the impressions of a Valley visitor. After praising the Valley, L. E. Quinn describes a trip to Matamoros and writes, "I could not help but contrast the beaming intelligence depicted upon the faces and

countenances of our American citizenship as compared to the evident lack of intelligence, culture, or refinement among the native Mexicans." Other visitors shared his beliefs and it is likely that their prejudices extended to Mexican-Americans as well. Sadly, land companies were recruiting and settling some of these persons.⁴⁸

Yet, not every newspaper account that mentioned Mexicans cast them in such a negative manner. An article which appeared in the McAllen Monitor defended the Valley's Mexican population against the prejudices of Northerners; views which had been "colored" by stories of bandit raids. It described the Mexicans as "moral, honest, peace-loving, industrious, and law-abiding." It also credited them with making "the Valley possible as one of the outstanding sections of the nation as a place of comfortable and happy residence."⁴⁹

However, such stories were not common, and the Black Legend was very much alive in South Texas in the early 1900s. Publicity literature, for the most part, omitted any reference to the existence of a large Mexican population. When mentioned in newspapers, they were often portrayed as insignificant, backward, and lazy, reflecting preconceived racist views. It is likely that these views contributed to growing tensions between Anglos and Mexicanos and spurred ethnic divisions for years to come.

Land and railroad companies waged a huge campaign to publicize the Valley. They invested much time, effort,

and money to attract Anglo-Americans to this area and they were very successful. Attracted by the possibilities that a new region could offer, Anglo-Americans moved south. In the early twentieth century, the Rio Grande Valley became infused not only with new capital, but with the habits and values of people who had never lived in a border area.

It is during this time that Shary became a leading promoter of the Valley, specifically, a promoter of Sharyland in Hidalgo County. His advertisements avoided negative themes and concentrated only on the positive and favorable characteristics of the Valley. They were effective, for he was responsible for settling hundreds of persons in Hidalgo County.

ENDNOTES

¹Dellos Urban Buckner, "Study of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as a Culture Area" (Master's thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 1929), 74.

²Ibid., 68, 69.

³Max Bentley, "The Rio Grande Valley, What It Is and How It Happened," Harlingen Star, 25 November 1928, sec. 4, p. 6; Max Bentley, "All About Harlingen, Wonder Town of a Wonderful Valley," Harlingen Star, 14 October 1928, sec. 2, p. 2; "More Settlers," Mission Times, 7 January 1916, p. 1.

⁴Buckner, 62; and, Virgil N. Lott and Virginia M. Fenwick, People and Plots on the Rio Grande (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1957), 128.

⁵"700 Tourists Arrive Here to See Valley," Harlingen Star, 11 January 1927, p. 1.

⁶"Valley Exhibit Drawing Big Crowds on Tour of Country," McAllen Daily Press, 24 December 1925, n. p.

⁷"75 Editors to Visit Valley on March 25," Harlingen Star, 18 March 1927, sec. 2, p. 4.

⁸"Features Writers Attracted by Valley," Harlingen Star, 24 May 1927, Scrapbook, vol. 9, p. 2, JHSC.

⁹"Oklahoma Owners of Sharyland, Texas Land, Have Enjoyable Banquet and Dance in Elks Club at Altus," National Elks Horn 28 (October 1929): 10, Box 43D, JHSC.

¹⁰Bentley, "All About Harlingen," sec. 2, p. 6.

¹¹"Two Reel Film Showing Valley Activities Made," Scrapbook, vol. 7, p. 12, JHSC.

¹²Austin Tims, "With San Antonio's Trade Excursionists in Southwest Texas," Scrapbook, vol. 7, p.3, JHSC; Julia Cameron Montgomery, A Little Journey through the Lower Valley of the Rio Grande: A Story Written for the Southern Pacific Lines (Houston: Southern Pacific Lines, 1928), 35, Box 43D, JHSC; "The World Wants Our Grape Fruit," Mission Times, 5 October 1917, p. 1.

¹³"Many Buyers Here Last Week," Mission Times, 25 February 1916, p. 1; Raymond Burrowood Birkhead, "History of the Growth of Citrus Production in Valley," Hidalgo County Independent, 1 November 1929, p. 10; C. B. Gillespie,

"Valley Grape Fruit Growers Seek New Rail And Sea Outlets; What Visitors Saw on Two Days Trip," Houston Chronicle, 20 July 1924, Scrapbook, vol. 9, p. 15, JHSC; Max Bentley, "Transportation, Water and People Behind Valley Progress," Harlingen Star, 2 December 1928, sec. 1, p. 8.

¹⁴Gillespie; "Many Buyers Here Last Week," 1; Bentley, "Transportation," sec. 1, p. 8.

¹⁵"Editors Enthusiastic Over Valley, Surpasses California or Florida They Say; Give Views on Mexico," Scrapbook, vol. 7, p. 8, JHSC.

¹⁶"Oklahoma Owners of Sharyland, Texas Land."

¹⁷"Growth of Truck and Fruit Shipments in Past 20 Years," Hidalgo County Independent, 8 November 1929, p. 9. Although precise financial statistics are not available, it is very likely that these crops were profitable. Had they not been, farmers would not have diversified. They would have planted the one crop that guaranteed financial success.

¹⁸"Gold in Sharyland Soil," Mission Times, 5 October 1917, p. 1.

¹⁹"Cotton Mills President to Visit Valley," Brownsville Herald, 26 September 1922, p. 1 (afternoon edition); "All Vacant Land in Vicinity of Mission Rented," Brownsville Herald, 19 September 1922, p. 2 (afternoon edition); Bentley, "Transportation," sec. 1, p. 8.

²⁰"Gold in Sharyland Soil," 1; "Good News for the Optimistic," Mission Times, 26 November 1915, p. 1.

²¹"Letter Shows Valley's Lure to Visitors," Harlingen Star, 7 January 1927, p. 1.

²²Tims; and, The Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide (A. H. Belo Corporation, 1931), 110.

²³L. E. Quinn, "A Land of Liquid Sunshine," De Queen Bee, 21 July 1922, Scrapbook, vol. 10, p. 6, JHSC; "Willacy Expects Big Influx of Visitors Soon," Harlingen Star, 15 October 1928, sec. 1, p. 4.

²⁴"J. M. Knadle Coming to Sharyland," Mission Times, 17 August 1917, p. 1.

²⁵Buckner, 70. Buckner, a former resident of the Valley, conducted the interview in the course of researching for his master's thesis (1929).

²⁶Ibid., 52; Bentley, "The Rio Grande Valley," sec. 4, p. 6.

²⁷"Valley Statistics Show Wonderful Gains in All Branches of Development," Brownsville Herald, 2 October 1922, p. 5 (afternoon edition); Bentley, "Transportation," sec. 1, p. 8. For 1921, the average of resources per Valley bank was \$561,605 which was slightly under the \$752,270 average for U.S. state and private banks for the same year. (Figures from The World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1932, published by The New York World Telegram, 1932, Robert Hunt Lyman, editor, p. 339).

²⁸Congress, Senate, Senator J. Thomas Heflin of Alabama introducing Senate Resolution 133 to investigate land fraud in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, 68th Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record (28 January 1924), vol. 65, pt. 2, 15511553; "Daugherty and Hays Accused in Land Case," New York Times, 29 January 1924, p. 3.

²⁹"Mayor Cole Returns from Washington," McAllen Daily Press, 15 May 1924, p. 1; Congress, Senate, Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas speaking on behalf of the Valley, 68th Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record (28 March 1924), vol. 65, pt. 5, 5136; "Course of Valley Land Fraud Probe Appears Uncertain," McAllen Daily Press, 3 June 1924, p. 1; Congress, Senate, Senator J. Thomas Heflin of Alabama introducing Senate Resolution 348 transmitting the fraud investigation to the Department of Justice, 68th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record (26 February 1925), vol. 66, pt. 5, 4707-4708. It is unclear what happened to the investigation after it was turned over to the Justice Department. The Attorney General may have decided not to act upon it since newspapers did not carry the story after this time.

³⁰"Stewart Acquitted of Fraud Charges; Verdict Found after 20 Hours by Second Jury," Brownsville Herald, 7 March 1925, p. 1; "Judgment Against Stewart Land Co.," McAllen Daily Press, 24 December 1925, n. p.

³¹"Farmers Want Investigation of Land Deals," McAllen Daily Press, 31 March 1924, p. 1; "Proposes Valley News Bureau for Valley Publicity," McAllen Daily Press, 28 March 1924, p. 1; Phoebe K. Warner, "Advertising the Valley," Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Scrapbook, vol. 7, p. 4, JHSC.

³²Lott, 130.

³³"Letter Shows Valley's Lure to Visitors," 1; "Santa Claus Visiting Valley with Many Gifts," McAllen Daily Press, 21 December 1925, n. p.

³⁴Missouri Pacific Lines, The Beautiful Valley of the Lower Rio Grande of Texas (1927), n. p., Lower Rio Grande Valley Historical Collection, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, Texas.

³⁵Monty, "Do Pictures Lie?" McAllen Daily Press, 26 June 1924, p. 1, 3.

³⁶"Happiness Is the Reward of Hard Work--The Gulf Coast Country--The Lower Rio Grande Valley (Houston: S. Deane Wasson for Gulf Coast Lines, 1923), 16, 17, 29-30, 32, Box 43D, JHSC.

³⁷Julia Cameron Montgomery, A Camera Journey through the Lower Valley of the Rio Grande--The Garden of Golden Grapefruit (Brownsville, Texas: Monty's Monthly News, 1929), 37, Box 43D, JHSC.

³⁸Montgomery, A Little Journey through the Lower Valley of the Rio Grande, 5, 7.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Happiness Is the Reward of Hard Work, back cover.

⁴¹Progreso Haciendas Citrus Fruit and Farm Lands in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas (Weslaco, Texas: Progreso Development Company), n. p., Box 43D, JHSC.

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⁴⁴Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), 123, 129, 278.

⁴⁵The World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1932 (New York: World Telegram, 1932), 417; Bentley, "All About Harlingen," sec. 2, p. 6.

⁴⁶"Joe Taylor 'State Press' in the Dallas News Has the Following to Say about the Valley," McAllen Daily Press, 16 December 1925, n. p.; "Editors Enthusiastic Over Valley."

⁴⁷Bentley, "The Rio Grande Valley," sec. 4, p. 6.

⁴⁸Quinn.

⁴⁹"Baiting Texas," McAllen Monitor, Box 43B, JHSC.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIFE OF JOHN H. SHARY

Although John Shary's claim to fame was the development of the commercial citrus industry in South Texas, his first venture in the Valley involved promoting and selling small tracts of farmland to people from the North and Midwest. He was not a Texas native, yet within two years of his first visit to the Valley, he had decided to make it his home. Here is the story of a man who saw the potential for personal economic gain, and in the process, he set the tone for an industry that gave the Valley national status.

John H. Shary arrived in the Valley in 1912. By the time of his death in 1945, he had sold thousands of acres of Valley land to Midwesterners, had organized the Texas Citrus Fruit Growers Exchange, had dabbled in newspaper publishing, banking, and politics, and moreover, had successfully planted the first commercial citrus orchard from which the Valley's citrus industry developed. Shary became a leader in commercial citrus production and in civic affairs, and through the years he became known not only for his good business sense but also for his generosity.

Long before he arrived in the Valley, Shary's knack for enterprise had been keenly sharpened. Not much is known about his early life. Shary was born on a farm three miles from Wilber, Nebraska in Saline County. He was the youngest of four boys and one girl, and his parents Robert and Rose Wazob were apparently of modest means. In a letter to L. J. Bouchal, Shary described his parents as being "land poor." He said they had endured great hardships as early pioneers of Nebraska after emigrating from Europe. In describing his father, Shary wrote of his love for "America and its Democratic Government." Robert Shary was highly educated. He had been a student at the University of Prague and spoke several languages. He was from the "well-known" Sary family (Sary eventually became Shary) from Prague, Bohemia (in present Czechoslovakia). Robert's brother, J. L. Sary, had even been elevated to the ranks of nobility by Emperor Franz Joseph.¹

For the Sharys, life in America must have been very different. John Shary remembers walking barefoot to a country school located about three miles from the farm. At about the age of twelve or fourteen, Shary went to live with his sister May Chmelir in Crete, Nebraska, and attended school there. Later, he entered high school and to help with expenses, Shary worked at a local drugstore in the evenings and on Saturdays. The proprietor, Mr. Whittlesey, paid him \$1.50 per week to wash bottles. Although his salary was not substantial, the experience he gained from

working at the drugstore must have been invaluable. Before long, Whittlesey had promoted his bottle washer to work behind the counter. Shary waited on customers and quickly learned the trade. When he was eighteen years old, Nebraska's State Pharmacy Law went into effect. Shary passed the State exam as a registered pharmacist, and with his apprenticeship for experience, became one of the youngest pharmacists to be registered in Nebraska.²

Shary's talent for business was evident early in his life. After graduating from high school, he attended Doane College in Nebraska for two years, but left before graduating because his parents needed his help. Since he now had a license, he started working as a pharmacist in Crete. Rather than work for someone, he entered into a partnership under the firm name of Clayton and Shary. Although he changed partners several times, his business prospered and he even bought a half interest in a drugstore in Rockport, Missouri.³

Shary eventually sold the store in Crete but kept the one in Rockport. Shortly thereafter, he began working as a salesman for a San Francisco redwood lumber company known as Korbl Brothers. His job required that he travel quite extensively throughout the country, and it was during these travels that he began to seriously consider engaging in land development. He was earning a high salary of several thousand dollars annually with Korbl Brothers, but apparently his desire to do development work was just

too strong. With \$5000 to \$6000 of his savings, he began land development work while employed with the lumber company. Although Shary maintained that his land business did not interfere with his job, the manager of Korbl Brothers was not happy with the arrangement. So, after ten years of being with the firm, Shary quit and went with another company that offered him \$2500 more annually. Eventually Shary left the California firms altogether and concentrated strictly on land development.⁴

Between 1900 and 1904, some of Shary's Texas friends decided to buy a 30,000-acre ranch south of San Antonio for \$50,000. The terms of the deal were for \$15,000 to be paid in cash with the balance to be paid over a period of ten years. The Texans asked Shary to raise most of the \$15,000 and he turned to his old friends for the needed funds. Everyone turned him down except Frank Nedala, one of his former pharmaceutical partners from Crete. However, when the time came to hand over the money, even Nedala backed down. Apparently his family had talked him out of making a huge mistake and investing in Texas. But Shary was not discouraged. He and his Texas friends purchased the ranch and within three years had sold 23,000 acres of it at \$100,000 profit. Every time Shary received dividend checks he carried them with him until he reached Crete. He did not cash them until he had shown them to Nedala. He apparently enjoyed teasing him about his poor decision not to invest in Texas.⁵

This initial investment in Texas seems to be the event that launched Shary on his career as a land developer. Shortly thereafter, he started the International Land and Investment Company of Omaha, Nebraska. The initial worth of this company was \$25,000. Apparently Shary and his partners only paid in ten percent of the \$25,000 and then assessed their stockholders ten percent of their investment whenever they needed money to keep the company running. Although at the beginning some of the investors were concerned that the company would go broke, Shary never lost faith in it. International Land not only stayed afloat, but prospered. By 1930, it had a rating of half a million dollars.⁶

Around this same time, in 1904, Shary started the largest land development in which he had ever engaged. Together with George H. Paul, he developed 118,000 acres of the Driscoll Ranch and about 75,000 acres of the Taft Ranch, both in the Corpus Christi area. They next purchased the 75,000-acre Welder Ranch which lies northwest of Sinton. Shary took much of the credit for converting over a quarter million acres of mesquite brush land into the greatest cotton producing area in the country. He built the first brick building, and the only building for that matter, where Robstown now stands. During his development work in Corpus Christi, he brought in nearly one thousand train car loads of potential buyers and settlers. He had over 1300 land agents operating throughout the United States

and Canada, and he ran special trains out of Omaha and Kansas City almost every week. In one excursion, International Land brought 150 homeseekers to the Corpus Christi area. In another excursion of approximately 100 people, fifty-four were settlers who had already bought land and were coming to develop it. By the time Shary died in 1945, cities such as Taft, Sinton, Gregory, Robstown, Driscoll, Odem, Tynan, and Portland thrived on the area which he and Paul developed.⁷

Around 1911, Shary and Paul began running out of lands in the Corpus Christi area, and so they looked for another tract to buy. In the process of searching, they were forced to sell scattered lands and had to cut their business considerably. The land agents were reduced to five hundred. At this time, Shary and Paul split as partners. They had some holdings from the Welder Ranch which they divided equally. Paul left for Colorado to continue development there, and Shary stayed in the Coastal country selling whatever remnants of land he could. It was also during this time that someone suggested Shary go to the Valley. He ignored the suggestion not once, but twice, because what he had heard of the Valley had not impressed him. It was not until someone urged him a third time that he decided to visit the region.⁸

When Shary arrived in the Valley in 1912, much of the area was brush land. He could not have been very impressed with the layout of the land, but he was struck

by the quality of the soil and the grapefruit that grew on about a half-dozen one-acre orchards in "backyards" at the time. He was so enthused about the fruit, that before he returned to Nebraska he had purchased 10,000 acres of irrigated land from the Judge Brooks estate where the towns of Pharr and San Juan now stand.⁹

This first 10,000-acre tract sold quickly and in 1913 Shary purchased a 7000-acre piece of land in what is today McAllen. Shary continued selling and developing this land and soon began looking into a third tract of land, adjoining McAllen's west side, which would become Sharyland. By then Shary was so confident in his talent for developing irrigated lands, and so optimistic about the future, that he decided to give this subdivision his name. In 1913, he contracted for the 16,000-acre Sharyland tract and quickly started the commercial citrus industry by planting 360 acres of orchard a year later. By 1917, he had purchased approximately 17,000 acres west of Sharyland, where Mission now stands, from the Bankers Trust Company of Houston. This section was known as the Mission Tract or the West Addition to Sharyland. In 1922, Shary bought approximately 16,000 acres north of Sharyland. Under his direction, much of these 49,000+ acres (generally referred to as Sharyland) became the most highly developed citrus lands in the Valley.¹⁰

Apart from land development, Shary devoted much of his time to civic affairs. Ralph G. Bray, editor of the

Mission Times, believed Shary gave more time to promoting the Valley than his personal interests. He served on many committees at no salary and frequently paid his own way when these organizations required that he travel. Shary served on the committee to repeal the Robertson Insurance Law in an effort to cut interest rates so farmers could get more financial help. He also served as chairman of the committee to secure the extension of the Intracoastal Canal from Corpus Christi to the Valley. He was instrumental in creating the Sharyland school district and served as president of the school board for seventeen years. During the Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him to the State Advisory Board for Public Works. The committee, composed of four men, was responsible for examining public works applications and recommending to Washington those that merited funding.¹¹

Shary was involved in many enterprises in the Valley and had a variety of business interests. He was president of First State Bank and Trust Company of Mission, First State Bank of Edinburg, Citizens State Bank of Donna, Southwestern Land Company, International Land and Investment Company, Southtex Mortgage Loan Company, United Irrigation Company, and Texas Citrus Fruit Growers Exchange. He was president of Time Publishing Company and so was publisher of the weekly newspaper, Mission Times. He was also president of News Publishing Company and publisher of the weekly Edinburg newspaper, Hidalgo County News.¹²

At the time of his death in 1945, a preliminary inheritance tax report shows that Shary owned over 1.8 million dollars in real estate, almost 1.4 million in stocks and bonds, and had over two-hundred thousand dollars in cash. Although this was a good deal of money, the Depression years had obviously taken their toll, for in the early 1920s, Shary's net worth was approximately five million dollars. In spite of the setback, Shary managed to do quite well. The once bare-foot boy from Wilber, Nebraska left a net worth of three million dollars.¹³

Because of his numerous business interests, his many accomplishments, and his determination to promote the Valley, Shary was well-known not just in the state, but also the country. He was considered by many to be a good friend and gracious host. He was known to swear freely and talk frankly, and he befriended people from different walks of life. He spent many evenings playing cards with farmers new to the community and spent the summers fishing at his home in the Missouri Ozarks where, on occasion, his good friend Vice-President John N. Garner was his guest. Among his friends and acquaintances were the famous journalist Ernie Pyle, the noted singer Galli-Curci, ex-Secretary of Commerce Jesse H. Jones, Governor Coke R. Stevenson, Texas poet laureate Judd Mortimer Lewis, Dale Carnegie, Lloyd M. Bentsen, and Emil Schram, President of the New York Stock Exchange.¹⁴

Shary has been given much credit for the economic development of the Valley during the first part of the twentieth century. He was responsible for developing, selling, and settling much of the land in the Mission-McAllen area and was credited with developing the commercial citrus industry of South Texas. At the time of his death, Senator Tom Connally sent a telegram to the Mission Times which read in part:

In the death of John H. Shary the State has suffered a greivous [sic] loss. He was an outstanding figure in the business and economic life of Texas... His success was entwined with the advancement and development of the Magic Rio Grande Valley but in a larger way with the economi_g and business development of the entire State.

What started off as a gamble for Shary paid off. He invested not only his money, but much of his life in the Valley. He spent his energies promoting this area and developing Sharyland. After having traveled extensively throughout the country and having engaged in development work in other parts of South Texas, Shary decided to make the Valley his home. By 1914 he began construction of his immense house on Shary Boulevard. It would be three years before construction of the house would be complete. Perhaps this single act speaks more clearly to the fact that Shary loved this part of the country and had great faith in its potential for agricultural enterprise.¹⁶

There is no question that Shary's influence on the growth of the Valley was immense. But simply knowing of his accomplishments is not enough. It is important to

understand the type of person Shary was, the things he valued, and what drove him to such success.

Shary guarded certain aspects of his private life. Although he talked and wrote freely about his accomplishments and business interests, only those very close to him must have known details about his personal life. Shary married Mary E. O'Brien in a civil ceremony at Carthage, Missouri on November 13, 1922. Prior to their marriage, Mary had run Shary's Omaha office of International Land and Investment Company. Shary's Last Will and Testament dated May 12, 1922 indicates that Mary O'Brien had moved to Hidalgo County prior to their marriage. After they married, she continued to help her husband with his business. In a story that ran in June 1939 in the Brownsville Herald, Shary said that his wife's "cooperation and loyalty had played a major part in the development of his business interests." Blaine Holcomb, the Shary family accountant, admired her as well. He describes Mrs. Shary as the most intelligent woman he ever met. Shary must have had great faith in her abilities and enormous trust and affection for her because before they were even married he named her as executrix of his will and left her the bulk of his estate.¹⁷

Mary was not Shary's first wife, and being a devout Catholic, she went against her religion and married a divorced man. Shary never claimed to belong to any religion. He was a 32nd-degree Mason, belonged to the

Elks Club and Modern Woodmen, but was not a member of an organized faith. However, he did become a "death-bed" Catholic. Perhaps he became a true believer or simply converted for Mary's sake so their union could be recognized by the Church. At any rate, Shary had a Catholic funeral service with rites administered by Father Frank A. Kilday of San Antonio.¹⁸

Although Mary O'Brien was the only wife Shary publicly acknowledged, he had been married twice before. His first wife died and he divorced his second wife. He had no children throughout his life and this might have been a disappointment for him. He had no offspring to carry his name or his legacy, no one to follow in his footsteps. He did ask to adopt his grand-nephew at the time of his birth. His nephew Robert B. Shary, who worked for the Shary company for many years, and his wife refused to give up their child, but as a token promised to name him John H. Shary II. In spite of this gesture, Shary's relationship with his namesake remained distant. There was always an emotional barrier between the two men. Shary was an astute businessman who knew how to make money and keep it, but he seemed to lack the skills necessary to maintain a warm connection with his nephew's family. When John H. II joined the American army during World War II, Shary promised his worried nephew that no matter what happened, he would "take care" of John upon his return. When John returned after being wounded, he immediately went to see "Uncle John"

Shary. Expecting a hearty welcome from his grand-uncle, he was greatly disappointed. Shary was playing cards with Doc Neuhaus and friends, and did not even bother to get up from the table. He simply stretched his hand out to his grand-nephew. This cold welcome likely left a deep impression on John II.¹⁹

Although Shary had no male heirs, he and Mary did adopt one of her nieces, Marialice, daughter to her sister Ann Roetelle from Elkhorn, Nebraska. Life on the farm in rural Nebraska was difficult for a young girl. Marialice experienced hard winters where she had to walk through the snow to get to school. She endured hardships to which Shary could relate. Just as his sister May had taken him in as a youngster, so did he with Marialice. Because the Sharys believed they could provide an easier life for her, and because of the milder climate, Marialice permanently moved in with them around 1925 at the age of fifteen. Surprisingly enough, they did not legally adopt her until she was twenty-one years old. However, prior to this time, Marialice used the Shary name for all purposes and the Sharys always acknowledged her as their daughter. Allan Shivers, Jr., one of Marialice's sons, describes her relationship with Shary as close. Shary was apparently protective of her and never felt that any man was good enough for her. Marialice eventually married Allan Shivers (who served as Lieutenant Governor of Texas from 1946-1949

and then Governor from 1949-1956), in a very elaborate ceremony at the Shary mansion in 1937.²⁰

The life Shary experienced as a boy determined what type of man he was to become. It appears that Shary engaged in land development not only because he expected great financial returns, but because it was a job that he truly loved. He grew up on a farm, but opted for pharmaceutical work in his early adult years. Even though he was a very successful pharmacist, he returned to agricultural work. Development work was obviously quite different from working on a small Nebraska farm, but Shary must have still gained great satisfaction from taking barren land and making it productive.

Shary kept an article by Bruce Barton cut from the Houston Chronicle. Perhaps he did so because he and Barton shared the same beliefs in the good that can be derived from working with the soil. Or perhaps Shary felt Barton was describing him when he wrote, "It is not by chance that so large a percentage of our successful men grew up bare-footed on the farm... No boy who has weeded a garden on his hands and knees...is likely to grow up to be a spendthrift or a snob." In the same article, Barton quoted Charles Dudley Warner as saying, "So long as we are dirty, we are pure... There is life in the ground. It goes into the seeds; and it also, when stirred up, goes into the man who stirs it."²¹

Shary had a reputation for being reliable, honest, and giving. He apparently gauged his own success not by the amount of money he had or could make, but by what he could do with his wealth. In a newspaper clipping entitled "How to Gauge Success" which Shary kept, the writer quotes Reverend William Ralph Inge who believed "To be successful...is to have made a right use of our life; to ask what we have got by it is irrelevant." A second article by Bruce Barton found among Shary's papers follows the same theme. Barton writes that the only way to know if a man's life on earth has been worthwhile is if he has tried "to live straight and simply; to do a little kindness...; to love useful work; to raise a worthy family; and to leave the world a little better than [he] found it...."²²

Shary apparently tried to live his life according to these principles. He was an idealist who offered his talents and resources to aid the country in its times of crisis. In 1933, while President Roosevelt was developing New Deal programs, Shary was developing the "Shary Plan for Social Stabilization" to solve the problem of unemployment during the Depression. The plan had three purposes. The first was to move the unemployed city dwellers to work on farms and in so doing, increase the number of employed people. The second purpose was to increase consumption of agricultural products, and finally, to provide financial relief to the over-burdened farmer.

Shary detailed his plan, produced it in booklet form, and recorded it as a speech. He believed the plan could be carried out successfully by having families share only those cultivated lands already under production. Shary thought the U. S. Government should finance this program just as it had financed World War I through the sale of bonds.²³

Shary believed this program would be very effective, but it was never realized. A few years later when the United States found itself embroiled in the Second World War, Shary, an ardent Democrat, again believed he could help the country in its time of crisis. To alleviate the food shortage in wartime, he offered, free of charge, his own idle Valley lands to people willing to farm them. His only stipulation was that the farmers furnish their own equipment, labor, and living arrangements. He expected them to turn over 1/4 of their crops to the U. S. Government, but could keep the profits of the other 3/4 after paying for irrigation. Again, Shary believed in this cause and his offer ran in several newspapers. There is no evidence that anyone took Shary's offer. Nevertheless, through his patriotism and generosity, he hoped to contribute to the greater good of the country, and perhaps "leave the world a little better than he found it." Shary died shortly after the end of World War II.²⁴

The Sharyland community appreciated Shary's serviceability to an extent that the rest of the country

never did. Examples of his generosity are numerous. He was very giving especially with those close to him. According to Joe T. Cook, former editor of the Mission Times, the most definitive characteristic Shary had was his generosity and his love of giving. He possessed a patriarchal love for his employees who he referred to as his "boys." Cook recalled Shary gathering his employees a couple of weeks before Christmas and distributing turkeys, bonus checks, and War Bonds. Since Shary had no offspring, his employees in essence became his children. As any father would, Shary gave liberally asking only for loyalty and love in return.²⁵

Yolanda Garcia, whose father Olivero Garza worked as caretaker and chauffeur for Shary, remembers Shary's generosity with the school children. At Christmas, he would give gift bags to all the children attending North School (the "Mexican" school). These bags contained goodies such as oranges, apples, nuts, candies, coloring books, socks, and handkerchiefs. Long before Christmas, he instructed the Principal at North School to make a list of the things each child needed, and he then purchased all these items. The day that school was let out for Christmas vacation, the children received their gifts. Garcia recalls her father and uncle driving trucks full of the gift bags and items such as sweaters, coats, and shoes. In Garcia's opinion, no other "gringo" did as much for the Mexican community as Shary.²⁶

Shary's generosity extended beyond Christmas. He insisted that all the Mexican children of the community receive dental and eye exams before starting school and he footed the bill. He also paid for dental work and eye glasses when the parents could not afford them. Garcia and some of her siblings attended college through Shary's benevolence. He put her older brother, Edelmiro, through business school, bought him his first typewriter, and gave him a job with his company. Edelmiro is still employed by the Shary estate. Garcia admits that growing up, she and her family never lacked for anything. Shary always made sure that the children had everything they needed.²⁷

Shary's generosity made a great impression on Blaine Holcomb when he was a young boy. To help his family during the Depression, Holcomb sold newspapers in Port Isabel. Shary owned the Yacht Club there and frequented the area. On one of those occasions he gave Holcomb fifty cents for a five-cent paper. This was an act that Holcomb never forgot. He probably could not have predicted then that years later he would become the accountant and manager of Shary's estate.²⁸

As an employee of the Shary family, Holcomb witnessed this generosity first-hand. Not long after he had started working for the family and after Shary had passed away, Holcomb met Olivero Garza for the first time. This happened at the Shary office building in Mission. Garza came to Holcomb with a hospital bill for his wife who had just

given birth. When Holcomb asked what he wanted him to do with it, Garza replied that Mr. Shary had always paid their hospital bills. Holcomb inquired about this and found that Garza was correct. He was then instructed by Marialice's husband, who at that time directed the finances, to pay Garza's bill. Holcomb had received one of his first lessons on Shary's generosity. Throughout the years he would see that this charity had extended to most, if not all, of his workers in one way or another. Shary had from 500 to 600 laborers in citrus and farming, most of which were Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Besides supplying them with generous gifts at Christmas, he also provided many of them with houses.²⁹

Shary's giving spirit extended to close family members as well. Letters to and from his sister May, who continued to reside in Nebraska, suggest that Shary periodically sent her money. On January 28, 1918, he sent her one hundred dollars. A few days later, on February 3, he sent her two hundred dollars. This second amount was so that she could travel to Houston to visit their dying brother Adolph, and also so that she could buy herself some new clothes. Shary writes, "...do not worry about spending it, as when you need more I will always provide all you want." Shary also apparently paid for the hospital bill and Adolph's funeral when he died a few days later.³⁰

Shary was also generous with his land. He donated land to several clubs and organizations. He deeded seventy

acres to the city for the Shary Municipal Airport, along with thirty-three acres for the Shary Municipal Golf Course. He also donated Legion Park, which was the old Hidalgo County fair grounds, to the Mission American Legion Post.³¹

Shary's generosity did have its limits, however. At the beginning of 1940, after Ernie Pyle wrote an article about Shary's success, Shary was inundated with letters from all over the country asking for his help. Since this was towards the end of the Depression, most of the people asked for money, some asked that he invest in certain businesses, a few asked for employment, and at least one person asked that he adopt her grandchildren for whom she could no longer care. Shary denied all these requests, but it appears that he took time to answer every letter. Some letters, written by his secretary, were short and to the point, while others written by him were more drawn out and sympathetic. In these, he expressed how the Depression had affected him as well. He explained that when he could, he preferred to help his friends in his community. In one letter he somewhat humorously states:

I wish it were possible for me to extend help to everyone in distress like yourself, but if these requests do not stop pretty soon, I am going to be asking help myself to pay the postage stamps necessary to answer these₃ distress letters from all over the United States.³²

Shary considered himself an honest businessman. He valued integrity and believed a man should be as good as his word. He was apparently also a good boss. Most of his employees were with him for over a quarter of a century.

He valued loyalty from his employees. In return he respected, encouraged, and praised them. Even after his death, some employees continued to work for the Shary family.³³

Shary also respected his laborers and treated them fairly. Evidence suggests that he also respected and even somewhat admired the Mexican community. In a letter to Roy L. Garis of Vanderbilt University, who had requested information on Mexican immigration, Shary wrote:

They [Mexican laborers] are a splendid class of people, very trustworthy, live to themselves and make good citizens.... I am in the banking business and we have something like 150 Mexican customers in the bank. We loan them money and seldom do we charge off a Mexican note.³⁴

One might argue that Shary was simply protecting his interests, since cheap Mexican labor was vital to his economic growth. It was, and Shary depended heavily on Mexican labor to dig and build canals, clear land, plant and pick crops, and plant and care for orchards. Shary was, in fact, against the immigration laws passed in 1929. He was one of the Directors of Rio Grande Valley Incorporated which was organized in early 1930 to investigate the immigration problem and fight deportations. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that Shary scorned the Mexican and Mexican-American population and was motivated purely by self-interest. Shary credited the development of the Valley to the Mexican labor. He believed they did much of the work which the American White farmer did not want to do.³⁵

Shary conveyed this respect to the Mexican population in the Valley and they reciprocated. He was admired not only by his employees, but by the community as a whole. This was evidenced by the hundreds of people who attended his funeral on the afternoon of November 8, 1945. Mission stores, banks, and the post-office closed that afternoon and the post-office flag was flown at half-mast during the day. So that as many as wanted could attend the funeral, classes were dismissed at noon for the Sharyland schools. Students and employees from the Mission school were also given permission to attend the funeral service.³⁶

Shary lived at Sharyland in Mission, Texas with his wife Mary until a few months prior to his death. A few months earlier, they had moved to San Antonio so that Shary could be treated for high blood pressure and complications resulting from it. He died at Nix Hospital in San Antonio on November 6, 1945 at the age of 73. After his passing, Mary Shary continued to reside at Sharyland. Today, the magnificent home is still part of the Shary estate and is a private dwelling used occasionally by the surviving members of the Shivers family.³⁷

The remains of Shary and his wife, who passed away in 1959, are resting in a small chapel across the street from the Shary home. The caskets lie above ground and are encased in what appears to be marble. They are surrounded by stained-glass windows depicting Valley life. Shary had picked this spot, a beautiful ebony grove, as

his burial place some twenty years prior to his passing. These beautiful trees still surround the chapel. Beyond the trees one can see a large citrus grove like the many that covered the area during Shary's time.³⁸

Sharyland became Shary's living legacy. He had no sons to carry on his name, so he gave it instead to the vibrant community he had created. Many of his projects also bore the Shary name. It was a way of ensuring that his role in the development of Hidalgo County was not forgotten. Yet the one thing that every man leaves behind is his reputation. As a businessman, Shary went to great lengths to protect his name. As a land developer, he made every attempt to treat customers fairly and tried to run his business honestly. It was important that he leave not just a name, but a "good" name.

ENDNOTES

¹ John H. Shary to Miss Rose Rosicky, Omaha, Nebraska, 13 December 1929, Folder--J. H. S. Biography, Box 46B, JHSC; "Copy of Who's Who in America," questionnaire answered by John H. Shary, 1 February 1929, Folder--J. H. S. Biography, Box 46B, JHSC; John H. Shary to Mr. L. J. Bouchal, Wilber, Nebraska, 25 January 1940, Folder--J. H. S. Biography, Box 46B, JHSC.

² John H. Shary to Mr. L. J. Bouchal; John H. Shary to Miss Rose Rosicky; "John H. Shary Dies in San Antonio Hospital," Brownsville Herald, 6 November 1945, Scrapbook, n. n., JHSC.

³ John H. Shary to Miss Rose Rosicky.

⁴ Ibid.; "Life Began on Nebraska Farm for John Shary Whose Vision for Valley Influenced Fate," 9 November 1945, Scrapbook, n. n., JHSC; "Dedication Program for the John H. Shary Addition to the Capital Area Radiation and Research Center," 10 December 1980, n. p., Box 46B, JHSC. Although Shary does not give the nature of his work with Korbl Brothers, all evidence seems to indicate that it was a lumber company since he worked for redwood lumber companies in California. However, there is one article in the Houston Chronicle from July 19, 1931 entitled "John Shary Gambles with Opportunity and Wins," (Scrapbook--Reprints Exchange and Miscellaneous, Box 94, JHSC) that mentions that Shary traveled for a San Francisco drug firm.

⁵ John H. Shary to Miss Rose Rosicky.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.; John H. Shary to Mr. T. M. Bainbridge, Auditor, Mission, Texas, 7 June 1940, Folder--J. H. S. Biography, Box 46B, JHSC; "Homeseekers at Corpus," Scrapbook, vol. 11, n. p., JHSC; "Brings 54 Settlers to Corpus," Scrapbook, vol. 11, n. p., JHSC; "John Shary Gambles with Opportunity and Wins," Houston Chronicle, 19 July 1931, Scrapbook--Reprints Exchange and Miscellaneous, Box 94, JHSC; "John H. Shary Dies in San Antonio Hospital." An article in the Mission Times from November 9, 1945 entitled "Life Began on Nebraska Farm for John Shary Whose Vision for Valley Influenced Fate," says that Shary and George H. Paul operated in the Corpus Christi area from 1906 to 1912 and developed about 250,000 acres of land. A program for the dedication of the John H. Shary Addition to the Radiation and Research Center in Austin, (Box 46B, JHSC) mentions that Shary and a partner developed 250,000 acres in the Corpus Christi region between 1906 and 1910.

⁸John H. Shary to Miss Rose Rosicky; John H. Shary to Mr. T. M. Bainbridge.

⁹Ibid. Several newspapers report that the Brooks estate was 12,000 acres. ("John H. Shary, No. 1 Citizen of Valley, Is Buried Thursday as Hundreds Pay Last Tribute--Pioneer Developer Passes Away After Prolonged Illness," Mission Times, 9 November 1945, p. 5; "John Shary, 'Father' of Citrus Industry, Dies," Valley Evening Monitor, 6 November 1945, Scrapbook, n. n., JHSC; "John H. Shary Dies in San Antonio Hospital," Brownsville Herald, 6 November 1945, Scrapbook, n. n., JHSC).

¹⁰Ibid.; John H. Shary to Mr. T. M. Bainbridge; Untitled autobiography of John H. Shary, n. d., 3 pages, Folder--J. H. S. Biography, Box 46B, JHSC. Newspaper accounts published immediately after Shary's death give contradictory information about dates and amount of land purchased. The 6 November 1945 Brownville Herald and Valley Evening Monitor (Scrapbook, n. n., JHSC) and the 9 November 1945 Mission Times each report the purchase at McAllen in 1913 as the 6,000-acre Briggs tract. They say Shary later purchased the 10,000-acre Swift estate in 1916 and an adjoining 20,000 acres in 1917 from the Oblate Fathers, which he named Sharyland. Blaine Holcomb, the manager of Shary's estate after Shary's death, says that in 1914 Shary purchased three porciones which became the West Addition to Sharyland. Soon thereafter he purchased the next three porciones which became the John H. Shary Subdivision. He bought this land from Omaha Safe Deposit Company and Bankers Trust Company of Houston. These two companies had taken over much of the land after default from Mission Canal Company. (Blaine Holcomb, Mission, Texas, telephone interview by author, Mission, Texas, 14 April 1998).

¹¹Ralph G. Bray, editorial, Valley Morning Star, Box 43B, JHSC; "John Shary, 'Father' of Citrus Industry, Dies; Allan Shivers, Jr., Response from family at Shary Elementary School dedication, 22 February 1997, Mission, Texas; "San Antonio Man on State Board for Public Works--Valley Man Named," Scrapbook--Reprints Exchange and Miscellaneous, Box 94, JHSC; "Shary Appointed to Important Federal Post," Scrapbook--Reprints Exchange and Miscellaneous, Box 94, JHSC. The purpose of the Public Works program was to create jobs for those on relief roles as quickly as possible.

¹²Blaine Holcomb, Mission, Texas, telephone interview by author, Mission, Texas, 4 August 1997; "John Shary, 'Father' of Citrus Industry, Dies;" "John H. Shary Dies in San Antonio Hospital;" "Life Began on Nebraska Farm for John Shary."

¹³Preliminary Inheritance Tax Report, filed by Mary O'Brien, January 1946, Hidalgo County Courthouse, County Clerk, Probate Dept., Case No. 2773; Blaine Holcomb, telephone interview by auther, 4 August 1997.

¹⁴Yolanda Garcia, interview by author, Tape recording, Mission, Texas, 1 January 1997; Ernie Pyle, "The Roving Reporter," Box 46B, JHSC; "John H. Shary, No. 1 Citizen of Valley, Is Buried Thursday;" "'Pioneering Spirit Will Live Forever,' Say Nation's Great at Shary's Passing," Scrapbook, n. n., JHSC.

¹⁵Tom Connally, U. S. Senate to Joe T. Cook, Mission Times, Western Union telegram, 6 November 1945, Scrapbook, n. n., JHSC.

¹⁶Photographs at Shary home in Sharyland, Mission, Texas; and, "John H. Shary Dies in San Antonio Hospital."

¹⁷Marriage Certificate of John H. Shary and Mary E. O'Brien, 13 November 1922, Carthage, Missouri, copy obtained from Blaine Holcomb, Shary estate, Mission, Texas; Allan Shivers, Jr., Austin, Texas, telephone interview by author, Mission, Texas, 7 July 1997; Last Will and Testament of John H. Shary, 12 May 1922, Hidalgo County Courthouse, County Clerk, Probate Dept., Case No. 2773; "Toss of Coin Decided John Shary to Locate His Business in Valley," Brownsville Herald, Scrapbook, vol. 1, p. 20, JHSC; Blaine Holcomb, interview by author, Mission, Texas, Tape recording, 5 May 1997.

¹⁸"Copy of Who's Who in America;" Nancy Shary, interview by author, Tape recording, Mission, Texas, 5 May 1997; "John H. Shary, No. 1 Citizen of Valley, Is Buried Thursday."

¹⁹Nancy Shary, interview by author.

²⁰Ibid.; Allan Shivers, Jr., telephone interview by author, 7 July 1997; Allan Shivers, Jr., Austin, Texas, telephone interview by author, Mission, Texas, 18 July 1997; Ron Tyler, ed. The New Handbook of Texas (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996), s. v. "Shivers, Robert Allan," by Ben H. Procter.

²¹Bruce Barton, "I Would If He Were My Boy," Houston Chronicle, Box 43B, JHSC.

²²A. W. Morse to John H. Shary, 24 February 1915, Folder-A. W. Morse Clearing #2511, Box 16B, JHSC; Yolanda Garcia, interview by author; "How to Gauge Success," Box 43B, JHSC; Bruce Barton, "A Man Asks, 'What Is Your Favorite Book?'" Houston Chronicle, Box 43B, JHSC.

²³John H. Shary, "Shary Plan for Social Stabilization," Box 46B, JHSC; John H. Shary Speech 1933, Tape recording, copy obtained from Blaine Holcomb, Shary estate, Mission, Texas.

²⁴"John H. Shary's Generous Offer," Scrapbook, vol. 11, n. p., JHSC; "Valley Lands Ready for the Plow Offered Rent Free to Farmers," Scrapbook, vol. 11, n. p., JHSC. Blaine Holcomb, the Shary estate accountant and manager, has never heard of such an offer and knows of no one who participated in it. (Blaine Holcomb, interview by author, Tape recording, Mission, Texas, 4 December 1997).

²⁵Joe T. Cook, "Border Bolts," Box 43C, JHSC.

²⁶Yolanda Garcia, interview by author.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Blaine Holcomb, interview by author, 5 May 1997.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰John H. Shary to May Chmelir, 28 January, 3 February 1918, Folder--Adolph Shary Deceased, Box 42, JHSC.

³¹"John H. Shary Awarded Silver Plaque for Appearing on 'Flowers for Living' Program," Scrapbook, vol. 1, p. 21, JHSC.

³²John H. Shary to Mrs. Mattie Fife, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 21 February 1940, Box 46B; Correspondence to and from John H. Shary (approximately 29 letters asking for Shary's help), Box 46B, JHSC.

³³John H. Shary to Mr. S. M. N. Marrs, Austin, Texas, 10 June 1929, Folder-Sharyland School Teachers Applications 1929, Box 44, JHSC; John H. Shary, No. 1 Citizen of Valley, Is Buried Thursday; "John H. Shary to Mrs. Kathryn B. Mansfield, Toledo, Ohio, 10 January 1940, Box 46B, JHSC; Joe T. Cook, "Border Bolts;" Yolanda Garcia, interview by author.

³⁴John H. Shary to Mr. Roy L. Garis, Nashville, Tennessee, 24 August 1929, Folder-Mexican Immigration (Rio Grande Inc.), Box 65, JHSC.

³⁵Yolanda Garcia, interview by author; F. S. Robertson, San Benito, Texas, to John H. Shary, Mission, Texas, 7 February 1930, Folder--Mexican Immigration (Rio Grande Inc.), Box 65, JHSC; S. Lamar Gill, Raymondville, Texas, to Mr. J. E. Bell, San Benito, Texas, 1 April 1930, Folder--Mexican Immigration (Rio Grande Inc.), Box 65,

JHSC; John H. Shary to Mr. Roy L. Garis.

³⁶"John H. Shary, No. 1 Citizen of Valley, Is Buried Thursday," p. 5.

³⁷"John H. Shary Dies in San Antonio Hospital;" Yolanda Garcia, interview by author.

³⁸Chapel at Sharyland, Mission, Texas; Joe T. Cook, "Border Bolts."

CHAPTER 4

JOHN H. SHARY'S DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

When John Shary came to the Valley in 1912, he had the vision to develop and sell this land for citrus production. However, developing any industry takes time and Shary knew this. So, for the first several years, Shary took what was mainly brush land and transformed it into productive farm land. In so doing, he could put valuable land on the market and sell it at a profit to farmers who might relocate to the area thereby boosting the economy of the region. Meanwhile, he never lost sight of his goal to commercialize citrus production. Shary was an astute businessman, and he knew that in order to sell land in a remote part of the country, he had to promote it. Shary had an acute sense and skill for advertisement, a skill which he used frequently and liberally.

Journalist Ernie Pyle once said of Shary, "He was a promoter, but he got to believing his own spiels and he still believes them." Pyle was probably right. The Mission Times, one of the newspapers Shary owned, frequently ran promotional stories of Sharyland and the Valley. The front page alone of the September 28, 1917 issue ran the following stories: "King Cotton in Magic Valley," "Great

Improvements Seen in Magic Valley," "Building Home on Sharyland," "Magic Valley is Wonderful," and "Tops the Broom Corn Market." A week later, the paper carried the following headlines on its front page: "Valley Climate Beats Florida," "Sharyland Investor Gets Large Returns," "Northern Farmer Views His Land," "Gold in Sharyland Soil," "The World Wants Our Grape Fruit," "Oil Found in Starr County," and "South Dakota People Arrived Here Saturday."¹

Shary did not believe that there could be too much publicity where the Valley was concerned. Local newspapers often advertised area interests, but Shary wanted for these stories to run nationwide. It is for this reason that in 1926 Shary gave his support, along with other area businessmen, to hire W. C. Grant, an Associated Press newspaper man, to publicize Valley interests. His plan called for "placing the Valley before the world...through the medium of newspaper and magazine articles." By this time Shary already knew that the only way to sell land or its products was to promote it.²

A classic example of Shary's knack for advertisement and selling strategies is found in a song book published by his Southwestern Land Company. This book was given to excursionists on the way to the Valley for "entertainment" purposes. Many of the songs were American favorites such as "Sweet Adeline," "America," and "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," but others were songs that lauded the Valley and Sharyland. Their lyrics were aimed

at potential buyers and were strictly promotional. A stanza of "The Lower Rio Grande" reads:

Come, all ye people who want to buy land,
And go with us to the Lower Rio Grande;
Where the corn and cotton and the sugar cane grows;
Where the sun always shines and it never snows.³

Along the same lines, the last part of the chorus for a song entitled "Where the Rio Grande Is Flowing" reads:

There is rest for all who labor,
And wealth for all in store,
When we settle down foreyer
On the Rio Grande Shore.⁴

Shary was a dedicated promoter. Even his Christmas cards praised characteristics of the Valley that distinguished it from the north. Several of the cards featured citrus fruit on their covers, two exhibited palm trees, and only one displayed a typical poinsettia. A poem in the 1926 Christmas card personalized by Shary reads in part, "Our snow is blossoms dainty of red and pink and white; Our fires, their flame of color that shines into the night."⁵

Shary was a true salesman. He had a way with words and knew what attracted customers. In a promotional tape that was likely recorded in 1933, during the Depression, he said, "Let's go to Sharyland where life, independence, and the real pursuit of happiness await you." In describing the area's citrus he commented, "It would be no idle talk to say money grows on trees." Even as late as the early 1940s, Shary was producing promotional material. A brochure, The Golden Story of Sharyland, used imagery that

appealed to the senses. The descriptions of Sharyland were enticing. It was described as "a land of romance and color, international in character, with wine-like air and unforgettable skies.... [With] palms lining the roadways...and a cooling Gulf breeze laden with fragrance."⁶

Although these representations may seem a bit flowery, Shary truly believed in the potentials of the Valley, and the productivity of the area backed up much of his claims. He prospered as a businessman in large part because of his avid promotional campaign. Yet his business sense expanded far beyond the advertising arena. He recruited customers, showed them the land, and sold it to them at terms that for the most part satisfied the buyer and provided him with a profitable return. Through all this, the business relationship he maintained with his employees and customers was important to the growth of his business.

Favorable advertisement of the Valley was vital to inducing people to visit and hopefully buy land. The most sincere form of advertising was to have people, happy with their investment in Valley land, relay their satisfaction to their friends and families in the north. David Hinshaw, a Valley booster, believed strongly in this form of personal advertisement. In the 1924 McAllen Daily Press he wrote that the growth of this area depended on every satisfied property owner acting as an "amateur real estate salesman to the extent of trying to interest friends in his old home town to come here and make the Valley his home."

Hinshaw thought that homeseeker excursions would soon come to an end and so it was up to the citizens to continue with development. He noted that the growth of California was due to the faithfulness of their citizens where no "knockers" were found. The Valley also should avoid knockers, after all, "knockers in heaven were kicked out and hell was made for their special benefit." He strongly urged each resident to "spread the true gospel of the Valley's merit twelve months in the year."⁷

Shary may not have had such strong feelings as Hinshaw in this matter, but he certainly recognized the need for personal boosterism. Shary encouraged customers to bring friends or family members to see Sharyland. If any of these second parties closed deals, then the customer was paid an agent's commission or given credit on his account.

George Whitmore purchased a forty-acre tract in January 1915. By March of the same year, he was credited with \$125 commission for a sale to a customer named Casey. Since Whitmore was a store owner from Ransom, Illinois and not one of Shary's agents, he likely recruited Casey to buy land. In a letter to Whitmore, Shary writes, "You are deserving of this nice commission... you are certainly working for Sharyland and I hope you will get many more good credits like this."⁸

A memo from G. F. Dohrn, one of Shary's attorneys, to Shary notes that Julius Janicke was granted a three-month extension on payment of interest that he owed on a note

simply because he had been "quite a consistent booster." Janicke had apparently tried to borrow money from the bank to pay his interest but had been unsuccessful. Because he had been a good promoter of Sharyland, Dohrn decided to wait until Janicke sold his cotton crop before he asked for payment on his past due notes and interest.⁹

The importance of personal recruitment can be seen in the people of Altus, Oklahoma. Southwestern Land Company hosted an annual banquet and dance at Altus. At the first annual event, about ninety persons attended, all of them owners of land in Sharyland. For a time it seemed that the entire population of the city would either be moving to Mission or at least own land there. At the second annual banquet approximately 125 Sharyland land owners attended. That so many persons from the same part of the country had invested in Sharyland indicates that word-of-mouth was effective. Persons who had bought land likely helped to convince their neighbors to do the same. Hosting a banquet only furthered the promotional campaign especially since throughout the evening all speeches focused on the wonders of Sharyland.¹⁰

Once agents recruited people to go down to the Valley, they or other company representatives accompanied them on the train excursions. It appears that from the moment they left their home towns, the excursionists were given promotional tidbits. Roy Olmstead, the vice president and sales manager of Southwestern Land Company, rode with

the Arkansas party from Dallas to Galveston. He undoubtedly mingled with the guests and got to know them on a personal basis. At the dinner given for residents of Altus, he knew and addressed 125 of them by their first names. Surely, this type of personal attention impressed the excursionists. It was Olmstead's job, and that of the other agents on board, to "sell them" on Sharyland and this they tried to do.¹¹

Prospective buyers bought their tickets at a reduced rate and were entertained lavishly. A member of an excursion party from Arkansas, L. E. Quinn, described the events of a six-day trip conducted by Shary's Southwestern Land Company:¹²

After a short stop at Dallas, where excursionists met Olmstead, they were taken to Galveston where they enjoyed a boating tour of the bay and a swim at the beach before a banquet in the evening. Immediately upon arriving in Mission on the third day, excursionists were met by cars driven by local citizens. The drivers gave the prospective buyers a tour of Sharyland orchards and farms. They stopped at those homes where settlers, well-versed in the favorable characteristics of the Valley and knowledgeable about farming matters, spoke to the excursionists. These were basically promotional stops.¹³

It was necessary to make a good showing of Valley land not only to potential buyers, but to persons who had already purchased land. Often, land owners from the North

accompanied excursionists on trips to check on the progress of their crops. In a telegram Shary sent to McAllen, he asked that employees quickly start clearing lot #238, since the owner would be on the next excursion with six potential buyers and it would be essential to make a good showing. Three months later, Shary sent another telegram asking Walter P. Sonderup, his field manager, to start plowing the same tract since the owner was on his way down with others. If land owners were happy with their investment, this would help convince other excursionists to buy. Satisfied owners could prove to be the best form of promotion.¹⁴

Southwestern also distributed a song book to the excursionists so they could enjoy themselves on the long trip, but many of the songs advertised the Valley and Sharyland. Company representatives wanted to keep the potential buyers happy. Consequently, Southwestern kept their customers entertained and gave them preferential treatment after arriving in the Valley.¹⁵

L. E. Quinn described a magnificent dinner at the Shary Club House on his first afternoon there. Later that evening, excursionists were entertained with "music and songs by local talent" at the Club House's auditorium. That night the ladies slept in rooms at the Club House while the men were sent back to the cars. Either the accommodations were not sufficient for large numbers of excursionists, or propriety prevented men and women from

sharing the same building. The former is probably the case since excursions were often large. Edelmiro Garza remembers as a boy sitting by the road at Sharyland and counting up to sixty cars bringing in Northerners.¹⁶

The Shary Club House was no plain structure. With construction underway in 1916, Shary estimated it would cost about \$25,000. Many cooks worked on the first floor which had large dining areas. The dormitories were upstairs. It was situated on the western side of a large artificial lake Shary had constructed in front of his home. The Club House stood on wooden stilts. Canoes, which were used by guests on the lake, were kept under the house. During the Second World War, when excursions to Sharyland had become a thing of the past, the Club House was torn down, and several sections of it were given to community members to add to their existing homes and scraps were used to build new ones.¹⁷

In February 1916, Shary brought 125 homeseekers to the "Magic Valley." Before bringing potential buyers, however, Shary had to make sure that the land was worth its price. Thus, he made continual improvements on it. Shary spent large sums of money on canal extensions throughout his tract of land. The Mission Times promoted his company, United Irrigation, as the best equipped in the Rio Grande Valley. Shary had acquired the properties of Mission Canal Company for \$500,000 in 1915. With the irrigation system already in place, his job was to make

the additions and extensions necessary to supply water to his large holdings. He was able to make much of the improvements through financing provided by the Bankers Trust Company and Southern Trust Company, the former being the same company that financed his land purchases.¹⁸

According to Mr. Shary, irrigation was his greatest improvement. He blamed farm failures in the Valley not on the indebtedness due to the price of the land, but on the poor engineering of canal companies that failed to provide water to the farmers. In an advertisement that appears consistently in the Mission Times, the focus of Sharyland is on its improvements--"Best Canals, Best Irrigation System, Best Opportunities."¹⁹

Shary built roads and canals, and platted his entire tract before bringing in potential buyers. He also made certain the land could produce everything he claimed it could. His consistent improvements may have been the secret to his success. Even though some land companies were unsuccessful and many men failed to profit considerably from the sale of lands during the early years, Shary continued in his attempt to prosper from this enterprise. Anyone who had invested hundreds of thousands of dollars of his own money, just as he had done, would find it difficult to abandon such a venture.²⁰

Believing that such improvements added value to his land, Shary concentrated on selling. After a couple of days of wining and dining prospects, Shary and his employees

were ready to close on the deals. When an excursionist contracted to buy, whoever sold the land wrote a short profile on the customer and sometimes included any unusual circumstances involved in closing the deal. These memorandums were not signed, but gave candid first impressions on each customer. They also offer a glimpse into the manner in which company employees closed deals.

Agents were both tenacious and patient when selling land. George Whitmore had signed a field card (this was apparently an intention to buy) for a piece of land, but changed his mind about buying when the agent in charge brought him in to close the deal. However, after two hours of convincing arguments and some negotiating, Whitmore signed the contract and "went back home happy." In the case of Charles and Peter Johnson, one of the brothers had signed a field card for fifteen acres. Yet, instead of closing the deal immediately, agent Frank Treat decided to wait until the next morning because he was sure that after they saw the land they would want to have more. He was right. After going out the next morning and discussing the terms of the deal, they contracted for forty acres instead of fifteen.²¹

Shary was a first-rate salesman because he was a good promoter and knew how to keep potential customers happy. However, another reason for his success is that he went to great lengths to keep negative comments about himself, his business, or Valley conditions to a minimum. A prime

example of this occurred in January 1917, with a customer named James Beckley.

Beckley had bought a ten-acre Sharyland tract and thought he had not gotten the land that he originally bought. He told a potential customer from Iowa named Hadak about this switch, and Hadak started having second thoughts about buying any land since he felt that Shary could not be trusted. When Shary found out about the conversation between the two men, he was not happy. He wrote a lengthy, angry letter to Beckley in which he explained how the confusion of the tract occurred. Beckley had bought a tract adjoining a 40-acre tract that a customer named Leonard Revard had originally purchased. After a year, Revard could not continue paying for it and so Shary took most of it back. He took the twenty-five acres between Revard's and Beckley's land and sold them to three or four different parties. Hence the misunderstanding on Beckley's part that he had been given a different tract since now his land was not adjoining Revard's. Shary was angry at Beckley for spreading "malicious falsehoods" after accepting Shary's hospitality on the train excursions. Indeed, Shary threatened to sue Beckley for damages if he lost a sale to Hadak or anyone else because of Beckley's statements.²²

In the end Shary asked Beckley to write a letter stating that his remarks to Hadak and others were wrong. In a second letter to Beckley in February 1917. Shary dictated word-for-word what Beckley's letter should state.

Beckley sent a letter back in his own writing saying exactly what Shary had asked for without changing a single word. Apparently this was enough to satisfy Shary since he expected to show Beckley's letter to Hadak to remove his doubts.²³

Shary's success as a business man depended largely on his reputation, and he went to great lengths to protect it. He worked hard to let others know he was a man of his word. An attorney for Hadak wrote to Shary in Omaha with a question about his contract. At the time of the purchase, Hadak had been unable to read it because he was missing his eye glasses. Hadak was concerned about the taxes he had to pay because he had understood that he was not to pay taxes the first year. W. S. Jones, an agent who later became Assistant Treasurer of International Land and Investment Company, answered the letter. After explaining the terms of the contract and when the taxes were due, he assured the attorney that if Hadak had made a verbal agreement with Shary contrary to the contract, then that agreement would be honored. Jones wrote a convincing letter explaining that "any promise that Mr. Shary made Mr. Hadak will be carried out to the letter and he need have no worry over the matter at all because any verbal agreement made by Mr. Shary is just as good as though it was in writing"²⁴

Those who questioned Shary's integrity or business practices, were subject to his anger. When anyone bought

citrus fruit tracts, Shary kept deed to the land for two years because he had a contract with his purchasers to take care of their trees for that period of time. At the end of two years, he deeded them the land provided their notes were paid up. Benjamin Thorp, a land purchaser, apparently did not agree with the practice, demanded deed to his land prior to the expiration of two years, and insinuated that Shary was being underhanded. Shary responded with a scathing three-page typed letter. What upset him the most was the questioning of his business practices. In defense he wrote:

I have been in this business for a great many years and have sold something like Twenty Million dollars worth of land in the last ten years and I have yet the first time to have any trouble about my title or delivery of deed Why I hold this land and how I hold this land and all that sort of stuff which you are writing me, is my own business.²⁵

In the latter part of the letter he managed to curb his indignation and explained to Thorp why he conducted his business as he did. As the consummate salesman, he even assured Thorp that he would always be there to serve and help in whichever way he could. He said this, however, only after reminding Thorp about his lack of appreciation for all the trouble that he and his people had gone through in building Thorp's house at Sharyland.²⁶

When Shary's reputation as a businessman was recognized, he was quick to capitalize on it. A. W. Morse, a land buyer who upon his return home was made to believe Shary was dishonest, made a trip to Texas to investigate

the soundness of Shary's land titles. After talking to several people in the land business, including Banker's Trust, the company which financed much of Shary's business, he was satisfied about Shary's integrity. This he conveyed to Shary in a letter, explaining how he had been assured that Shary and Judge D. W. Glasscock, a business associate, were "men of honor and honest dealing gentlemen." Shary took this letter, made certified copies of it, and sent them to his agents to use as necessary when recruiting potential customers.²⁷

Shary was rather forgiving, however, when customers made honest mistakes that could potentially hurt his business. Shary was very blunt and straightforward when talking to his employees about customers. In the postscript to a letter to Walter Sonderup, the field manager, he writes about the unintentional damage that an elderly customer caused him on the train back from Sharyland:

...he is such a fool he does not know any better,...but ...he made a remark that he killed the largest rattlesnake he ever saw, and told some of the prospects he had the itch, which they got after they lived there a year. I do not suppose he ever took a bath since he went down there which is probably the reason for it.... Conway and some of the boys read the riot-act to him good and strong, but after that was done he babbled out something he should not have said, although boosting the country. Now don't that beat the band?²⁸

However, when customers tried to undermine his business, Shary did not forgive as easily. Frank L. Moehnke had apparently bought more land than he could afford and was having trouble keeping up with the payments. Shary

had helped him along by extending his note and taking in a trade on North Dakota land that was not worth very much. However, Moehnke was not happy with his situation and when a group of prospects came to Sharyland, Moehnke offered forty of his acres near the railroad to a customer who had previously picked fifty-two acres further out by the nursery. The customer, Mr. Smith, apparently had intended to pay cash for the fifty-two acres, but after Moehnke's offer, could not make up his mind and backed out of the deal. The fact that Shary lost out on a large cash sale, and his agent who had been working on Smith for months lost out on commission, infuriated him. From Omaha, Shary instructed Walter Sonderup to talk to Moehnke and let him know that Shary would gladly help him sell his land provided Moehnke brought his own customer down to Sharyland. Otherwise, Shary would not stand for any underhanded dealings. He intended to make Moehnke aware that if he continued to try to conduct this sort of business, he would no longer be welcome on Shary's train.²⁹

Shary's success also depended on the success of his agents. He had agents in key areas of the North and Midwest promoting Sharyland and working diligently to bring potential customers down. They often traveled with the excursionists, and once in the Valley, helped to show the land and close the deals. Their value to the business is a reason Shary tried to protect them from incidents such as the one with Moehnke.

Agents worked on a contract basis, and their contracts were honored only if they were generating sufficient business from their respective territories. In the early years of Sharyland sales, agents received a commission anywhere from one to twelve and one-half percent of the price of the land. Several agents often participated in the contract sale and so they split their commissions. They received commissions on cash sales of land, but if land was taken in on trade, they did not receive their pay until this land was sold. Therefore, it was in the agent's best interest to attract customers who could pay cash for their land. Agents also received their commission in parts as purchasers paid off their notes.³⁰

If agents bought land from Shary, they were also credited with commission on their own purchase. Peter Bentsen, was a well-to-do farmer from South Dakota, who worked as an agent for Shary. He purchased almost fourteen acres in January 1915 and the Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission shows that he earned three dollars per acre on his own purchase. According to a memorandum in his file, all his commissions earned were to be credited on his notes.³¹

This same type of transaction appears on the Record of Sales for Ed Anderson, a realtor from Wisconsin. Although there is no indication that he worked as an agent for Shary, nor even that his contract to buy land was honored, the Record of Sale for his twenty acres lists

him as a sub-agent. He earned a \$300 commission on his own purchase.³²

R. R. Dunn was another employee who purchased 7.65 acres in Sharyland and earned \$191.25 on his purchase. He had an agreement with Shary that when he earned commission on a land deal, it was to be credited to his account. Dunn worked as a real estate agent in Missouri in 1916 when the "Mexican war scare" was keeping prospects from coming to the Valley. As a result, Dunn offered to travel to the Valley and on his return write and publish about conditions from his personal observation. Mary O'Brien agreed to this. She and Shary probably agreed with H. A. Shannon, the manager of United Irrigation Company, that the whole border situation had been exaggerated in the press. Shary paid for his travel expenses and through the years their business relationship appeared to remain cordial. Shary offered to care for Dunn's citrus trees at no extra charge except for the actual expense to keep them in good condition. A year earlier he had waived the interest due on payment of a note.³³

It appears that the agents who worked for Shary were for the most part honest representatives. However, there were two agents whose unethical practices came to light in 1914. It appears that the agents, Black and Boyce, were very likely involved in shady dealings, and calls into question whether other agents were also.

Black and Boyce were land agents who operated in Wisconsin. According to Frank Shultz, a land representative under Shary's employ in the same region, Black and Boyce were running a scam between 1914 and 1915. To help them sell land, Black and Boyce took \$100 from Ed J. Anderson for a down payment on a Sharyland tract. However, they knew Anderson had no intentions on buying land. They simply wanted to represent him as a customer to potential buyers from Fon du Lac where Anderson resided. They promised to return the \$100 to Anderson as soon as their recruiting trip was over. Black and Boyce, however, never returned the money, and to cover up their alleged scam, began correspondence with the home office saying that the money was a down payment on a twenty-acre lot. The home office continued correspondence with Black and Boyce asking them to get a contract from Anderson along with payments. Finally, Anderson wrote to Shary asking for return of this money along with interest due him on the \$100 from October 1914 to February 1915. A few months later, the bad deal came to light. The home office sent a letter back to Shultz informing him that they had already lost more than \$100 in simply keeping the land contracted for Anderson off the market. They regretted the misunderstanding, but felt that Anderson should have informed them immediately of what was happening when they had repeatedly asked for payment on the land. They did, however, remove the agents from the region.³⁴

It appears that Shary tried his best to keep his land owners happy and accommodated them when possible. He wanted families to move down and occupy the land, but sometimes that proved difficult. In 1918, Shary wrote to a land owner, Chris Meyer, who wanted to send his family to the Valley ahead of him, not to do so for several reasons. First of all, houses were pretty scarce; nonetheless, Shary offered the family a shanty near their land until they could build one of their own. However, Shary believed that if the family was forced to live under poor conditions, they would only become discouraged and would want to return home. Instead Shary suggested that Meyer come ahead of his family to build and establish a home. Still, Shary promised to help situate the Meyer family near their land or in town, if Meyer had no alternative but to send them ahead.³⁵

Shary must have made himself available to his customers, for some made frank and personal requests. In a letter likely written to Shary, Mrs. Frank E. Denning asked him to make sure that her house on the farm was vacated and ready for her family to occupy. She also asked him to furnish a storage room for some household items which she listed. A land owner from Illinois, Eunice Askew, who wanted to go down to the Valley to look at her land, asked Shary if she could stay at his home since she did not know anyone in Sharyland or Mission. There is no indication that Shary allowed Askew to stay at his home,

but it is more likely that he found other accommodations for her. These examples indicate that customers felt familiar enough or at least comfortable enough with Shary to ask for special favors.³⁶

A letter from this same customer reveals not only the ease with which some land buyers dealt with Shary, but it also gives a glimpse into the problems involved in relocating. Eunice Askew had originally purchased approximately eighty acres of land in Shary subdivision in January 1915. Although she had the financial means to move, a year later, she had still failed to do so. She had bought the land in the Valley hoping that her only son who was ill would get better in the new environment. Before she could make the move, however, her son died. By January 1916, she was making plans to relocate for the sake of her own health.³⁷

However, Askew was having trouble disposing of her property in Illinois. She wanted to trade her \$6,000 home for the balance due on her Valley land or get an extension on her notes. She had answered an ad in the Mission Times advertising a brick rooming house for rent, but wanted Shary's advice on whether or not she was doing the right thing. She had nine rooms full of furniture to ship to the Valley and did not even know the cost of moving a carload. Still, she was determined to start a new life there regardless of the amount of work and difficulties involved in getting a crop and farm started.³⁸

W. S. Jones answered Askew's letter and spoke for Shary. He politely denied her requests for trade or extension explaining that he needed the money because of the many expenses in his development work. He explained that if he was not so pressed for cash he would certainly give her more time on her payments and promised to give her an extension at a later time if she were to need one. He also promised to check on the rooming house for her.³⁹

By July 1917, Mrs. Askew was still making plans to move to Texas. She had sold forty acres of her Illinois land and had enough money to pay her Sharyland notes and make the move. She asked Shary's advice on whether it would be safe for her to live out on the acreage or rent in town. She still had the nine-room house in Illinois to dispose. In August of that year she paid off her land, but she apparently never made the move to the Valley, since nine years later, she was writing from Donovan, Illinois asking Shary to take charge of renting or selling her land in order to pay the taxes due on it.⁴⁰

Some land buyers delayed in moving to the Valley not only because they found it difficult to dispose of their property back home, but also because not all family members agreed to move. Unable to sell his dairy, H. P. Steffensen, could not pay a \$5,000 note. Shary extended payment of his note by six months. Yet even with this courtesy, it was unlikely that Steffensen would make the move to the Valley any time soon since his wife was opposed to it.

Agents hoped that if they took her down to the Valley to show her the area she would change her mind.⁴¹

Pulling up stakes and moving from one's home to an unfamiliar part of the country was a difficult decision to make, and not all family members always agreed with the soundness of such a decision. For example, L. Young, an eighty-two year-old Sharyland buyer from Illinois and his forty-eight year-old daughter, Leonora, contracted to buy a ten-acre tract in January 1915. Six months later, Young changed his mind and asked Shary to return their money. According to G. P. Drew, the agent in charge, Young was having second thoughts not because he could not meet the notes, but because his second daughter was discouraging him. In a letter to Shary, Drew writes, "The old gentleman would be alright [sic] if his old maid daughter left him alone, but if you are firm with him, he will come through as he can borrow all the money he wants at any time. I was assured of that, by the banker."⁴²

Shary's company refused to take the land back. On behalf of Shary, Mary O'Brien explained to Young that Shary bought his land in large tracts at wholesale prices and could not afford to buy back the land at a retail price. However, Shary was willing to extend the time due on the balance of the note. After this initial exchange between Young and company employees, Young abandoned any attempt to sell back his land and instead tried to make improvements on it. After June 1916, Young's second daughter Lenna

conducted all correspondence with International Land. She continued to try to persuade Shary to buy back the land and frequently expressed her disappointment with the whole business deal. The Youngs never specified why they did not wish to keep the ten acres, but because of Mr. Young's advanced age, Lenna probably felt the foolishness of his moving down or incurring such a debt. Regardless of her reasons, Mr. Young never got to enjoy winter stays in the Valley, nor did he get to reap any rewards from his investment. He died sometime in 1916 and Lenna inherited the debt and property. She finished paying the ten acres early in 1920, but continued trying to negotiate a buy-back for several years after that.⁴³

Buyers who wanted to start earning returns on their investment, but could not move immediately to the Valley, had to rely on others to farm their land. In the early years of land sales when acreage was used for truck crops, this proved to be a problem for some owners. It was difficult to find someone to give the land the care that only the owner could give. When absentee owners could not find a person to plant and care for the crops, Shary's people often took on this task. The owner paid for all the costs of clearing, plowing, and planting the land. At the beginning of 1916 Shary's teams had about twenty-five tracts scheduled for farming totaling in excess of 600 acres. All but three of these tracts were owned by people other than Shary.⁴⁴

Absentee owners were encouraged to hire renters to look after the land. Owners would only get a percentage of the returns, usually one-third, but if the renter was reliable, they could almost be assured that their crop would be planted and harvested. Of course, securing a renter could be a problem. There was an abundant supply of Mexican laborers who could readily do the job, but land was not leased to them. In these early years, Mexicans were hired only for labor purposes.⁴⁵

To secure a renter, owners were advised to make improvements on the land. A "nice" home and barn for the renter and his family could cost from \$700 to \$1,000. However, this was necessary to secure a renter who could be on the land all the time. H. A. Shannon preferred this over having to send Shary's teams several miles each day to farm, especially when they had so many farms to cover.⁴⁶

Occasionally, customers made the long trip to the Valley and after seeing what the land could produce, bought on impulse. After returning home, some of these customers had second thoughts about their purchase, and shortly thereafter asked Shary to resell the land for them. They tried to use Shary's advertising strategies against him. They pointed out that since Sharyland tracts were selling rapidly and their value was increasing, he would have little trouble taking back their land and selling it to someone who could meet the payments. Shary seldom negotiated with customers to buy back land. It was more likely that

customers who could not meet their payment lost their property along with any amount they had already paid.

In answer to a customer's such request, Shary wrote:

I regret to hear so often about selling your land, because I have written you we cannot handle it at the present time. I can't make sales one day and take the land back the next.... Kindly make remittance as you promised.⁴⁷

To another customer who wanted Shary to buy back his tract nine months after he purchased it, W. S. Jones wrote:

In regard to your not being able to meet your payments, I do not believe, Mr. Varble, that you can afford not to meet your payments.... Regarding the sale of this land to me,...I would not consider buying anything at present...until I have disposed my tract which is going very rapidly now.... Sharyland is the center of attraction in Texas. Everybody is anxious to purchase a piece on Sharyland."⁴⁸

Shary often extended the time on payments when customers had trouble paying. He tried to get owners to make some form of payment on the land before he considered cancelling the contract and starting the selling process over again. For example when L. Young could not meet his payments, Mary O'Brien on behalf of Shary replied, "... if you are note [sic] in a position to meet the full payment of your note due July 15th, if you can remit at least part of it, I will give you further time on the balance." To another customer, Lee Varble, she wrote, "your letter at hand and note you are endeavoring to make a loan to take care of your notes, and I will be willing to give you thirty days further time in order to meet the obligation."⁴⁹

Shary was even willing to extend time on payments to a customer who he believed could not possible carry out the contract. Agent Mike Henegan had shown some land to Henry Wirth and had closed the deal. Wirth had initially paid \$130 in cash and had traded in some junk stock in two mining companies, a horse breeding company, and a machinery company. He also owned some land but was having trouble selling it. When Shary found out about the deal, he doubted its soundness, especially since Wirth could not afford railroad fare and soon had a \$2,000 past due payment. Eight months after the initial transaction, Shary decided to cancel his contract but agreed to extend it if Wirth would make some attempt at payment. Shary was willing to accept a few hundred dollars even though the land was very valuable since it was near a lake. Shary was not happy about keeping this tract off the market.⁵⁰

When buyers, after getting extensions on their payments, simply could not fulfill their contracts, Shary did cancel the contract. He usually cancelled without bringing suit and demanding some form of payment. He obviously did not want to tie up the land for years. It was more profitable for him to recover it and try to resell it. To Mary Bryant, who had bought over thirty-eight acres and could not meet the payments, Shary wrote, "This land is too desirable for me to hold it for you any longer. Neither am I going to force you to make these payments, which I could."⁵¹

Jacob Hoffman, a land owner who lived in Mission had a \$850 payment due on his property on the first of the year in 1919. He was been granted an extension until July when his crops would come in. After this time, Hoffman was asked to send in the amount of past due notes plus interest owed. It was not unusual, however, for Shary to grant such extensions to people whose main source of income was from farming.⁵²

However, when a customer fell excessively behind on payments, Shary had no qualms about cancelling the contract and forcing compensation for termination of such. I. N. Compton was on the verge of losing a ten-acre tract in 1921. In April of that year, he wrote to Shary making a passionate plea for his help. Compton had been disabled for fifteen years and had barely made a living for his family during that time. He had made practically no money in the previous year with his real estate business and had experienced illness in the family. Moreover, his only boy who was nineteen years old had just been sentenced to five years at the State Reformatory. Compton had \$1,750 invested in his land and did not want to lose it. Therefore, he asked Shary to help him. Shary responded by saying that he could not extend payment on the notes since Compton had not bought the land directly from him, but through another customer and had assumed the notes. By April of the following year, Compton's contract was cancelled, and he lost all that he had put into the land.⁵³

Since Compton had already paid a large amount on the ten-acre tract, it is unlikely that Shary assessed him an additional fee for terminating the contract. This was not the case with every buyer, however. When G. J. Whitmore was having trouble paying the first four notes of his land contract, W. S. Jones tried to get him to raise \$1,000 to pay off the first two and offered him an extension on the other two notes. When Whitmore could not raise the money, and could not get a loan from the bank, Jones informed Shary of the situation believing that the most they could get from Whitmore for release of contract was \$200. He was in the merchandising business and owned a stock of goods which Shary could sue. Instead Jones thought it would be better to make him believe they would sue in order to get him to give at least an additional \$200 on top of the \$500 he had already paid on the land. One of Shary's attorneys, Arthur H. Shay, wrote Whitmore a letter apparently to make him think that Shary would sue. Whitmore quickly responded agreeing to pay \$200 for release of contract. Shary agreed to take the money rather than have the land tied up in a law suit with no guarantee of a favorable judgment.⁵⁴

Another buyer, George Berge, also had trouble meeting his notes shortly after purchasing the land. Shary wanted him to pay more than the original \$50 he had paid in cash at the time of the land transaction in early September 1916. On November 13, 1916, George A. Heald informed

Shary's company that Berge had turned over \$2,000, as per agreement with Shary's secretary, for notes he had given on the contracts. However, since only a week later, Berge's contract was cancelled, it is likely that this money was part of a deal made to satisfy the termination of contract.⁵⁵

Shary did not always demand an additional payment as a condition to release a customer from contract. Julius Janicke had purchased 7.6 acres but could not meet his payments. He had only been able to pay \$320 in more than three years and was \$2000 past due. E. W. Stenwall once described Janicke as a man who "did not seem to be blessed with too much intelligence....[who] has been driving a dray all his life, but in the summer time bales hay and sells it for a living...." Because Janicke obviously was not a wealthy man, he was given "easy terms" so he could pay off his land, but after three years of debt, T. M. Melden, Shary's general manager, cancelled his contract without additional charges. When Janicke asked that Shary return some of his money, Melden explained that Shary was the loser in this deal and Janicke should be happy to be relieved of any more responsibility.⁵⁶

Shary was an astute businessman who knew how to make money. During the early days when he was selling the land for farming purposes, he sold tracts from \$200 to \$400 an acre depending on their location. Lots closer to the lake, for example were more valuable. Shary financed land

sales through the Banker's Trust Company of Houston. His standard rate of interest was usually six percent. Even though Shary had to pay agent's commissions and deed expenses, he still made quite a profit on each transaction. The case of Eunice Askew is a typical example of how Shary distributed and made money on a deal.

Askew bought 35.45 acres in 1915 at \$200 an acre which amounted to \$7,090. She paid \$1,000 cash and promised to trade in a forty-acre tract of land she owned in Illinois. However, shortly thereafter she sold this Illinois land for \$4,000 and sent that amount to Shary bringing the total amount she paid in cash to \$5,000. From these \$5,000 Shary paid \$886.25 in agents' commissions. After subtracting approximately \$1,330 for other expenses such as recording and cost of deed, Shary's cash profit was approximately \$2,784. Shary financed the remaining \$2,000 for a period of five years. Askew paid off her note in August 1917, more than two years ahead of schedule, and saved some money in interest. If she had paid according to schedule, however, she would have paid almost \$3,900 in principal and interest. Approximately fifty-five percent of \$3,900 was to be remitted to Banker's Trust Company to pay the notes, and forty-five percent was kept by Shary to pay the vendor lien notes. After some expenses, including another \$222 sent to an agent for a vendor's lien commission, Shary's vendor's lien profit was to be

approximately \$1,125. Therefore, Shary's profit on the \$7,090 sale was a little over \$3,900.⁵⁷

In the Sharyland community alone, Shary sold lots to almost 1,000 persons. However, he cancelled the contracts on about seventy percent of them. When Shary repossessed land, he always tried to resell it, and it is likely that some of it had already been improved by the owner. Perhaps one of the reasons that excursions were large and frequent, was because of this significant turnover.⁵⁸

Although Shary sold land to almost 1,000 families, less than 300 families moved to the Valley. The population in Mission rose from 3,847 to 5,120, which is only about a thirty-three percent increase in ten years. About one-fourth of the families who moved to Sharyland probably lost their land since records show that their contracts were cancelled. The low number of settlers may have been due to the high default rate, or because moving from one part of the country to another proved difficult, or simply because Shary's focus was citrus production rather than re-settlement. A voter registration list from 1929 shows approximately 200 Anglo families living in the Sharyland community.⁵⁹

Shary loved to own land and had a great vision for the citrus industry. Although many of his goals were realized, an era came to a close with his death. With the exception of the Mission times, his family sold the

majority of his interests in business ventures after his death, including his banks. They also sold the land located throughout the country which customers had traded for Valley land. Since Shary left very little cash, no life insurance, and no estate planning, his family was forced to raise money to pay the estate taxes after his death. As a result they sold the majority of Shary's Hidalgo County land in bulk to Lloyd and Elmer Bentsen. This land consisted of about 10,000 acres of citrus orchards and 35,000 acres of open land. The Bentsens subsequently sold about sixty percent of the citrus land and half of the open land. Today, the Shary estate owns only 700 to 800 acres of citrus orchards in the Sharyland community near the Shary home.⁶⁰

ENDNOTES

Unless otherwise specified, documents from the John H. Shary Collection pertaining to a certain customer can be found in that customer's file folder in the box listed.

¹Ernie Pyle, "The Roving Reporter," Box 46B, JHSC; Mission Times, 28 September 1917; Mission Times, 5 October 1917.

²John H. Shary to Mr. William C. Grant, Dallas, Texas, 7 October 1926, Box 60, JHSC; "Plan of Valley Publicity," Box 60, JHSC.

³Sharyland Song Book (Dallas: Southwestern Land Co., n. d.) 2, 6, Box 46B, JHSC.

⁴Ibid., 5.

⁵"Christmas Greetings from Sharyland," Box 46B, JHSC; approximately six different Christmas cards, Box 46B, JHSC.

⁶Sharyland Promotional tape, Tape recording, copy obtained from Blaine Holcomb, Shary estate, Mission, Texas; Golden Story of Sharyland: Where Nature Produces the World's Sweetest Citrus Fruits, copy obtained from Blaine Holcomb, Shary estate, Mission Texas, but can also be found in Box 46B, JHSC. The promotional tape was recorded alongside a 1933 Shary speech, therefore it was likely made at the same time. The brochure is not dated. However it contains two letters dated March and April 1941 written by satisfied citrus tract owners. Therefore, the brochure was likely published around this time.

⁷David Hinshaw, "All Pulling Together," McAllen Daily Press, 22 May 1924, p.1.

⁸Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission, Geo. J. Whitmore, 23 January 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; Memorandum on George J. Whitmore, source and destination unknown, n. d., Box 16B, JHSC; John H. Shary to Mr. George J. Whitmore, Ransom, Illinois, 15 March 1915, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁹Memo, G. F. Dohrn to Mr. Shary, 8 July 1920, Box 32A, JHSC.

¹⁰"Banquet Given Purchasers by Land Company," Altus Times Democrat, 30 September 1929, p.2, Folder--Important Clippings 1931, Box 97, JHSC; "Future Mission Citizens Have Great Time at Second Annual Jackson County Sharyland Party," 4 October 1929, Folder--Important Clippings 1931, Box 97, JHSC.

¹¹L. E. Quinn, "A Land of Liquid Sunshine," De Queen Bee, 21 July 1922, Scrapbook, vol. 10, p. 6, JHSC; "Future Citizens Have Great Time."

¹²John H. Shary to Mr. James Beckley, Creighton, Nebraska, 14 February 1917, Box 11A, JHSC; Quinn.

¹³Quinn.

¹⁴John H. Shary to International Land and Investment Company, McAllen, Texas, Day letter, Western Union telegraph, 29 January 1914, Box 11A, JHSC (The telegram is not addressed to a specific person, but it was probably intended and received by Walter P. Sonderup, the field manager); John H. Shary to W. P. Sonderup, McAllen, Texas, Western Union telegraph, 5 March 1914, Box 11A, JHSC.

¹⁵Sharyland Song Book (Dallas: Southwestern Land Co., n. d.), Box 46B, JHSC.

¹⁶Quinn; Edelmiro Garza, interview by author, Mission Texas, 11 January 1997.

¹⁷John H. Shary to Mr. E. W. Stenwall, Omaha, 29 August 1916, Box 25A, JHSC; Yolanda Garcia, interview by author, Tape recording, Mission, Texas, 1 January 1997; Edelmiro Garza, interview by author.

¹⁸C. B. Gillespie, "Valley Grape Fruit Growers Seek New Rail and Sea Outlets; What Visitors Saw on Two Days Trip," Houston Chronicle, 20 July 1924, Scrapbook, vol. 9, p. 15, JHSC; "United Irrigation Company," Mission Times, 24 December 1915, Scrapbook, vol. 11, (loose), JHSC.

¹⁹"How John H. Shary Has Helped in Developing Southwestern Tex.," Mission Times, 13 July 1917, p. 1; and, (Advertisement) Mission Times, 25 February 1916, p. 7.

²⁰"Great Improvements Seen in Magic Valley," Mission Times, 28 September 1917, p. 1.

²¹Memorandum on George J. Whitmore, source and destination unknown, n. d., Box 16B JHSC; Memorandum on Chas. & Peter Johnson, E. W. Stenwall to unknown source, 15 March 1918, Box 32A, JHSC.

²²John H. Shary to Mr. James Beckley, Creighton, Nebraska, 31 January 1917, Box 11A, JHSC.

²³Ibid.; John H. Shary to Mr. James Beckley, Creighton, Nebraska, 14 February 1917, Box 11A, JHSC; James Beckley to Mr. J. H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 26 February 1917, Box 11A, JHSC; Mary O'Brien (CC to Mr. J. H. Shary) to

Mr. James Beckley, Creighton, Nebraska, 2 March 1917, Box 11A, JHSC. Any correspondence attributed to Mary O'Brien had the initials MO but was unsigned. It is highly likely that these initials were hers alone. The spirit and content of the correspondence indicates that Mary O'Brien wrote the letters, and the author assumes such was the case.

²⁴W. S. Jones to Buck and Kirkpatrick, Spencer, Iowa, 4 October 1916, Box 25A, JHSC. Jones' position in the company can be found in Martin Wendt file, Box 13, JHSC.

²⁵Benjamin Thorp to Mr. John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 6 June 1916, Box 24B, JHSC; John H. Shary to Mr. Benjamin Thorp, Humansville, Missouri, 12 June 1916, Box 24B, JHSC.

²⁶John H. Shary to Mr. Benjamin Thorp, Humansville, Missouri, 12 June 1916, Box 24B, JHSC.

²⁷John H. Shary to Mr. G. P. Drew, Chicago, Illinois, 27 February 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; A. W. Morse to Mr. John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 24 February 1915, Box 16B, JHSC.

²⁸John H. Shary to Mr. Walter P. Sonderup, McAllen, Texas, 11 November 1914, Folder--Frank L. Moehnke, Box 11A, JHSC.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰E. W. Stenwall to Mr. A. W. Cotten, Oregon, Missouri, 14 June 1918, 16 August 1918, Folder--Christian Meyer, Oregon, Mo., Box 32A, JHSC; A. W. Cotten to Mr. John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 30 July 1918, Folder--Christian Meyer, Oregon, Mo., Box 32A, JHSC; several International Land and Investment Company's Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission from 1915 to 1918, Boxes 32A, 25A, 16B, JHSC.

³¹Memorandum on Peter Bentsen, source and destination unknown, n. d., Box 16B, JHSC; Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission, Peter Bentsen, 23 January 1915, Box 16B, JHSC. It is interesting to note that Peter Bentsen and his sons, Lloyd and Elmer, would eventually become powerful land owners in Mission. They became involved in real estate in the Valley and maintained close personal and business ties with Shary until his death.

³²H. C. Black to John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 27 May, Box 13A, JHSC; Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission, Ed J. Anderson, 27 August 1914, Box 13A, JHSC.

³³Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission, R. R. Dunn, 25 January 1915, Folder--R. R. Duncan, Box 16B, JHSC; Mary O'Brien to Mr. R. R. Dunn, Cedar City, Missouri, 30 April 1917, 10 August 1916, 25 June 1917, 31 March 1916, Folder--R. R. Duncan, Box 16B, JHSC; R. R. Dunn to Mr.

John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 9 August 1916, Folder--R. R. Duncan, Box 16B, JHSC; H. A. Shannon to Mr. R. R. Dunn, Cedar City, Missouri, 27 August 1915, Folder--R. R. Duncan, Box 16B, JHSC. Shannon's position in the Shary business can be found in "United Irrigation Company," Mission Times, 24 December 1915, Scrapbook, vol. 11, (loose), JHSC.

³⁴ Frank F. Shults to Mr. John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 9 August 1915, Box 13A, JHSC; Mary O'Brien to Mr. F. F. Shults, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 12 August 1915, Box 13A, JHSC.

³⁵ John H. Shary to Mr. Chris Meyer, Oregon, Missouri, 10 September 1918, Box 32A, JHSC.

³⁶ Mrs. Frank E. Denning to source unknown, 13 December 1916, Box 25A, JHSC; Eunice R. Askew to Mr. John H. Shary, 27 September 1926, Box 16B, JHSC.

³⁷ Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission, Eunice R. Askew, 23 January 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; Eunice R. Askew to John H. Shary, 10 January 1916, Box 16B, JHSC.

³⁸ Eunice R. Askew to John H. Shary, 10 January 1916, Box 16B, JHSC.

³⁹ W. S. Jones to Mrs. Eunice R. Askew, Donovan, Illinois, 11 January 1916, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁴⁰ Eunice R. Askew to Mr. J. H. Shary, 23 July 1917, 3 August 1917, 27 September 1926, Box 16B, JHSC; Mary O'Brien to Bankers Trust Company, Houston, Texas, 9 August 1917, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁴¹ G. F. Dohrn to Mr. John H. Shary, Mission, Texas, 27 March 1919, Folder--Peter and Charles Johnson, Box 32A, JHSC.

⁴² Purchaser's Confidential Report, 19 January 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission, L. Young, 25 January 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; L. Young to Mr. Shary, 30 June 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; G. P. Drew to Mr. J. H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 1 July 1915, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁴³ Correspondence (approximately 15 letters) between Lenna Young and Shary or his employees from 23 June 1916 to 1 January 1923, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁴⁴ H. A. Shannon to Mr. John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 26 January 1916, Folder--Wm. Gunderson, Box 11A, JHSC.

⁴⁵ Lee Varble to Mr. John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 31 May 1916, Box 16B, JHSC; E. W. Stenwall to E. R. Askew, Donovan, Illinois, (CC to John H. Shary, Mission, Texas),

14 March 1917, Box 16B, JHSC. There do not appear to be any Mexican buyers in the Sharyland community. Spanish surnamed land buyers appear in Shary files in the San Juan area. (Alphabetical list of buyers--Card Index, JHSC). About a dozen Spanish surnamed persons appear on a list (probably from 1929) of eligible voters in the Sharyland community. However, it cannot be determined if they were property owners. (List of voters, Folder--John H. Shary Collection-Sharyland School-Election 1929, Box 44, JHSC).

⁴⁶E. W. Stenwall to E. R. Askew, Donovan, Illinois, (CC to John H. Shary, Mission, Texas), 14 March 1917, Box 16B, JHSC; H. A. Shannon to Mr. Lee Varble, Carrollton, Illinois, 29 November 1916, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁴⁷H. C. Olmstead to Mr. John Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 15 January 1917, Box 25A, JHSC; John H. Shary to H. C. Olmstead, Mondak, Iowa, 26 January 1917, Box 25A, JHSC.

⁴⁸Purchaser's Confidential Report, 6 February 1915, Folder-Lee Varble, Carrollton, Ill., Box 16B, JHSC; Lee Varble to Mr. John H. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 29 November 1915, Box 16B JHSC; W. S. Jones to Mr. Lee Varble, Carrollton, Illinois, 6 December 1915, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁴⁹Mary O'Brien to Mr. L. Young, Donovan, Illinois, 1 July 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; Mary O'Brien to Mr. Lee Varble, Carrollton, Illinois, 22 February 1915, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁵⁰John H. Shary to J. A. Grosscup, Howard, South Dakota, 31 August 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; John H. Shary to Mr. M. J. Henegan, Flandreau, South Dakota, 6 September 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; Lewis Benson to Jno. Shary, Omaha, Nebraska, 25 October 1915, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁵¹Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission, Mary J. Bryant, 22 May 1914, Box 13, JHSC; John H. Shary to Mary J. Bryant, Pawhuska, Oklahoma, 1 September 1914, Box 13, JHSC.

⁵²I. C. C. to Mr. Jacob Hoffman, Mission, Texas, 17 July 1919, Box 24B, JHSC.

⁵³I. N. Compton to Mr. John H. Shary, Mission, Texas, 14 April 1921, Folder--A. Boyer, Valley Falls, Kas., Box 32A, JHSC; John H. Shary to Mr. I. N. Compton, Valley Falls, Kas., 19 April 1921, 24 March 1922, Folder--A. Boyer, Valley Falls Kas., Box 32A, JHSC; Memorandum, G. F. Dohrn to Mr. Shary, 3 April 1922, Folder--A. Boyer, Valley Falls, Kas., Box 32A, JHSC.

⁵⁴W. S. Jones to Mr. John H. Shary, McAllen, Texas, 12 August 1915, Box 16B, JHSC; A. H. Shay to McGilton Gaines & Smith, Omaha, Nebraska, 25 August 1915, Box 16B, JHSC;

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⁵⁵Source unknown to Mr. J. M. Collins, Spencer, Iowa, n. d., Box 25A, JHSC; George A. Heald to Interstate [sic] Land & Investment Co., Omaha, Nebraska, 13 November 1916, Box 25A, JHSC; Earnest Money Contract (including notes on envelope), Geo. Berge, 9 September 1916, Box 25A, JHSC.

⁵⁶Memorandum, T. M. Melden to Mr. Shary, 15 November 1921, Box 32A, JHSC; Memorandum, E. W. Stenwall to source unknown, 27 February 1918, Box 32A, JHSC; Record of Sale and Certificate of Commission, Julius Janicke, 11 February 1918, Box 32A, JHSC; Blaine Holcomb, Mission, Texas, telephone interview by author, Mission, Texas, 14 April 1998.

⁵⁷Distribution Report, 6 April 1915 and other documents from folder of Mrs. Eunice R. Askew, Box 16B, JHSC.

⁵⁸Estimates on the amount of lots sold and the rate of repossession were derived from an index card file containing an alphabetized list of buyers, JHSC

⁵⁹The World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1932 (New York: World Telegram, 1932), 417; Estimates for the number of persons who relocated were derived from an index card file containing an alphabetical list of buyers, JHSC; List of voters, Folder -- John H. Shary Collection - Sharyland School - Election 1929, Box 44, JHSC.

⁶⁰Blaine Holcomb, interview by author, Tape recording, Mission, Texas, 4 December 1997.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The decade of the 1920s was a dynamic time in our nation's history defined by, among other events, its economic prosperity. The Valley was no exception. Land which had long been held by ranch families was being rapidly subdivided and sold. Lured by attractive promotional advertisements, Midwesterners were coming to the area in record numbers, and some were staying.

John Shary was one of those developers who brought Midwesterners to the Valley. He sponsored large excursions to Sharyland and made sure that on these trips potential customers got a heavy dose of promotional information. He valued integrity and considered himself an honest businessman. He tried to run his business in a fair and equitable manner while making a profit.

Although Shary invested liberally in promoting Sharyland, he did not settle as many people as other developers in other parts of the Valley. While other cities in the Valley were growing rapidly, Mission had only a thirty-three percent increase in population during the 1920s.

This slight increase could be due to several factors. A possible reason is the high rate of repossession. Shary

sold land to just about anyone who had land to trade or a disposition to make payments. However, many customers bought for the sole purpose of making an investment. They preferred to stay in their home towns and pay Shary to look after their crops, or they rented the land to local farmers. If the land did not produce immediate or sufficient returns, customers stopped payment. By then, buyers had already paid for improvements, and Shary either tried to resell the property as improved land or kept it for himself.

Another reason for the low number of settlers was the difficulty that people had in moving. Often a family member, usually the man of the house, came on an excursion and bought on impulse. It was hard to ignore the high-pressure sales pitches. Upon returning home he had a change of heart or found that his wife was not too keen on uprooting. The high price of land kept customers from buying tracts large enough to support a family. If they realized this early on, they did not relocate.

However, the modest number of newcomers to the region was probably due to the fact that Shary's primary business was the development of the citrus industry. He invested most of his energy and resources into citrus. At the time of his death in 1945, Shary still held a large portion of his land. Sharyland consisted of approximately 49,000 acres. When he died, he owned approximately 45,000 acres. Although this amount may have included residual lots from

the McAllen-Pharr region, the greater portion of Sharyland property was still his. Of the land he still owned, one-fourth was in citrus. At the time, 10,000 acres of citrus was likely all that Shary could financially maintain considering that the Depression had slowed his business.

The fact that Shary kept a great amount of acreage for his use, combined with the modest numbers of new settlers, leads one to believe that Shary's primary purpose for land sales was to help finance his budding citrus industry. Homesteads improved the value of the area and encouraged other people to buy and relocate. Shary knew this, and in the early days of land sales he likely encouraged his customers to move to Sharyland. However, as his citrus business expanded, settlement lost priority.

Experience had shown Shary that development and land sales were profitable. In the Valley he had discovered a new venture that would grant him a financial reward and public acclaim. He devoted all his efforts to citrus production because its success would be his achievement.

As a land developer in the Corpus Christi region, Shary had experienced tremendous monetary success. But it was not until he split with George H. Paul and moved to the Valley that he was able to gain public recognition. He founded a community which he named after himself. In promoting it, he was promoting his achievements. As a resident of Sharyland, he became involved in community projects and civic organizations. He was generous to his

employees and people in the community who were less fortunate than he. In the absence of a biological child, Sharyland became his creation. He, in essence, became the "father" of this community. Through his giving attitude and his accomplishments, he gained the love and respect of the community. As the leader in commercial citrus production, he gained the admiration of people throughout the Valley and Texas. His service to the Valley was so well-known that even President Franklin Roosevelt recognized his efforts and selected him to serve on the State Advisory for Public Works.

Shary's legacy was not just the community he founded, but his role in the expansion of citrus in the Valley. He had good business sense. He used available resources to their fullest and kept an eye to the future. Once he knew he had a thriving business on his hands, he did everything in his power to develop and protect it. He became a respected leader in business. His role in land development led to his greater involvement in citrus production. As a result of his skill for commercial citrus development, Hidalgo County took the lead in citrus production. Within a few years of its development, the citrus industry had become a viable economic force in the Valley.

This thesis is by no means a complete study on the life of John Shary nor on the land development that took place in the Valley in the early part of twentieth century.

It is a study limited to Shary's role in the economic development of Hidalgo County. It does not include Shary's role in the social development of the community. This topic is worthy of further investigation. Settlers who did relocate had to change and/or adapt to Valley life. It is likely that any preconceived views they may have had affected their relationship with the existing Mexican-American population. Examining these issues, not just for Sharyland, but for the Valley as a whole would lead to a better perspective of a time in local history when train excursions were commonplace and citrus was "King". It was an era that witnessed the transformation of an underdeveloped territory to one of much activity and industry.

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VITA

Sylvia Zulema Silva-Bewley was born in Reynosa, Mexico in 1962. She was the youngest of five children born to Reynaldo Silva and Juanita T. Silva. At the age of three, she moved with her family to McAllen, Texas. After graduating from McAllen High School in 1980, she entered Pan American University where in December 1984 she earned a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in mathematics. Since 1985 she has been employed by the Sharyland Independent School District as a high school mathematics teacher. She and Mark S. Bewley were recently married in McAllen, Texas.

Permanent Address: 2102 Sunset Lane
Mission Texas, 78572.