

Ladies In The Shearing Crew Make Previous Crises Look Mighty Tame

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — The shearing season is nearly over. However though most of the flocks seen along the roadways are peeled to a fresh yellow color, repercussions of the busy period continue to occur. Post-shearing nerves are the worst in modern times.

In the coffee houses, ranchers are still having trouble landing their cups in the center of their saucers. Spillage has been reduced, yet the herding fraternity is far from ready to do any fancy hand work. Sudden noises such as the cook flipping pancakes disrupt the gatherings. An early morning session is apt to break up over some thoughtless traveler making too much racket pouring sugar in his coffee. At this time the cases aren't as bad as if the victims had combat fatigue, but the symptoms are by no means encouraging.

The reason the citizens are suffering so much, I think, results from news that one shearing crew was winding up this spring's contracts using female wool packers and handlers. As that report spread a strange stillness came over the land. To many men the joy of this beautiful spring began to wilt. I wouldn't say it was a spell like the one that enveloped us during the great agricultural depressions, but for my money it was bad enough.

Until now the transition hasn't been discussed openly. No one seems to want to talk about what shearing is going to be like when the pens have to be redecorated every morning or the machine has to be shut down while one of the girls takes the curlers out of the wool packer's hair. Not one soul wants to think how a wool table will look with dollies on it. The prospect of the shearing corral gates painted pink or lavender hasn't been mentioned. That's been the hang-up; everybody has been keeping his fears to himself.

Out in the far West, women are contracting to build fence. In the cities the ladies have invaded practically every occupation except being porters in the men's rest rooms. True to form (I can't say what kind of fence they're building), the presence of what was once considered the weaker sex has brought improvement to the appearance of the surroundings. But that doesn't mean that women folks need to get into the sheep shearing business.

I thought we were sunk when cowboys became as temperamental as the dean of an art college. The end seemed near when shearing capitans became so independent that ranchers were afraid to talk to them without doffing their hats. In retrospect, these boogers now seem like low-caliber stuff.

Now I don't want to scare anybody out of the sheep business. Wool production is already critical. But if the strain of the shearing season is going to feature hair pulling, gossiping, pouting, and love battles, the herder who gets on as a roundup man in a shark tank is going to be away ahead of the game.

It'll be fall shearing season before the full impact of the change can be determined right now, the most important thing to do is to be calm. Oldtimers used to say that on the darkest night you can always see a few stars. But the grey whiskered set never faced the knowledge that the day would come when sheep peeling would be linked with beauty shop appointments.