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MAR 6 1979

We Zoom Out of Raw Frontiers

WE LIVE so comfortably and travel so speedily that we seldom pause to realize how close our times are to the years of the raw frontier.

A reminder of the almost incredible transition from the days when many people walked to work and manual labor was in flower comes from Earle E. Emerson of Coalgate in a 150-page autobiography titled "Playing My Part."

Emerson's "part" was that of 49 years as public school teacher and administrator, including service with state boards and committees. His life work kept him in touch with common folk right where they lived and also required contact with those higher up. He recalls his associations with both, and mentions scores of those he met along the way.

His accounts of a day-to-day experiences describe the life of a farm boy in County Line community of western Arkansas who grew up to be a respected, well-known Oklahoma educator.

When he was just a lad, a visitor

to Emerson's school introduced the newly-invented game of basketball. He recalls his family's first telephone. He helped his father clear "new ground" to plant crops, a work experience that may have helped to motivate him to acquire an education and seek another career.

Emerson married his boyhood sweetheart and they became Oklahoma teachers, completing their college education at East Central Normal College, Ada, between rural school terms, as did many others.

Emerson's success story is not a "rags-to-riches" yarn, because like other teachers of his time, he managed to avoid accumulating a fortune. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, banks discounted most teachers' "warrants" on pay checks 15 to 25 percent.

Emerson's first big job came when he was hired as superintendent of the Cromwell schools in Seminole county in 1928, when that riproaring oil boom town was earning its nickname of "Cromwell the Wicked." He was paid \$3,300 a year,

an increase of \$900 over his previous job, and he was furnished a 3-room cottage besides!

After 22 years at Cromwell, Emerson moved to Coalgate as superintendent at \$4,800 a year. That was in 1950. Some metropolitan school superintendents now are paid that much per month.

Other salaries and wages have increased similarly. During the 1930s, a 10-room elementary school building was constructed at Cromwell, using WPA labor, for a little more than \$24,000.

When Emerson retired in 1964 after years as superintendent of Coalgate schools, his career had spanned the age from 18 mph to 18,000 mph, with parallel advancements in education, standards of living, career opportunities, and income.

Will present-day youngsters witness comparable progress in their lifetimes? Is the new frontier as near as the one behind us?