LONE PUBLIC BUILDING—This modest white structure situated at the intersection of county trunks C and N is Washington township's only public structure, the Town hall. Adjoining it is the modern Swiss factory of the Town Hall co-operative. (Times staff photo.)

Swiss Cheeseland—No. 5

Washington Township Remains Truly Rural

Washington is a township unit by itself, having no corporate village. It is wholly rural, the sole occupation being dairy farming.

Of average size in land area, 22,871 acres, it has 21,581 acres in farms averaging 187 acres. Cows being milked are reported at 3,189 with average production per 100 acres of 96,092 pounds of milk. Thus, Washington ranks with Monroe, Clarno, Sylvester and Jefferson as one of the five leading milk production townships in Green county. The population, however, is only 672.

The way in which the various branches of the Little Sugar river reach out over the township has made highway bridges a costly public problem. This has been overcome largely by modern improvements in construction. Substantial steel and concrete structures now cope with the menacing streams.

All highways have been widened and hard surfaced for modern
motor traffic. Except for the two eastern corners, however, the township is without permanent pavement.

Native rock quarried from the hillsides, in addition to being crushed for the hard surfacing of roads, now is pulverized to add to the fertility of the soil in the modern farming methods, contributing an effective step in overcoming erosion and loss of valuable soil.

Highways and bridges were always controversial issues on the county board and the interest of Washington township figured in the forefront. Supervisors recognized the natural situation and regularly conceded the road and bridge chairmanship to the Washington member. Washington township chairman, C. W. Loveland, now holds chairmanship of the Green county board.

The oldest Green county cheese factory still operating is the Wittenwyler-Burgy, located in the southeastern corner of the township. It was started by Nick Gerber in 1870 as the third of his factory enterprises and has been in continuous operation since.

The factory was in Bilton territory although that main settlement was further to the north and west of Monticello. Highway changes removed the old surviving Gerber plant to the side road nearly 30 years ago.

This part of Washington township is interesting since as early as 1837 it was settled by people of English descent, some from New England and others from the south. Interest of the settlement was represented in a rural community surrounding Center Methodist church erected in 1874. Names well remembered with many of the families still represented in Green county life include Holloway, Loveland, Lemon, Harper, Simmons, Fessenden, Crouch, Smith, Perrin, Clayton, Confer, Norton, Gill and Grinnell.

Center church was closed and moved away to the Loveland farm a few years ago eliminating the once active community center.

Bilton settlement organized the Bilton Swiss Reformed church, the structure dedicated in 1876 resembling the house of worship in the old world. This church, now known as Washington Reformed, remains active today with a pastor supplied from Monticello.

The old Gerber factory, Wittenwyler-Burgy, always has made limburger. American farmers at first complained of the odor but when Gerber began shipping cheese east they took note of the checks which came back. It did not take them long to join in the cheese production as a community industry.

Gerber first bought the milk outright and then in 1873 John Boss bought the milk and conducted the factory. It became a farmer co-operative in 1893 under the name of Wittenwyler-Burgy. Jacob Burgy, now 80, who has lived on the adjoining farm since he was three years old, has been secretary-treasurer of the factory since 1893 and has figured the milk payments to the farmers for those 56 years.
MODERNIZED LANDMARK—The Wittenwyler-Burgy limburger factory seen here recently was modernized. Located just off the highway at the west end of the Monticello road section known as Burgy flat, it was started in 1870 by Nick Gerber as the third of his cheese factories. Both its predecessors have passed out of the cheese picture but this plant has operated continuously. Jacob Burgy, grandson of the pioneer family, has been secretary-treasurer since 1893. (Times staff photo).

His grandparents and their son, Jacob sr., came by sailboat from Switzerland in 1847. They first located on a farm north of New Glarus. They moved in 1870 to Washington township, acquiring the Frank Parkin farm. The Burgy farm now consists of 410 acres and is operated by Mr. Burgy and his son, Fred T. Mr. Burgy makes his residence in Monticello.

The township has one public building, the Town hall, located at the intersection of county trunk highways C and N, west of Monticello.

Close by on the east-west highway is the Town Hall streamlined Swiss cheese factory, newest of the farm plants within the township boundaries.

Town Hall factory is owned and in complete control of the co-operative with 30 patrons delivering milk. The plant has been successful beyond expectation after a year of operation.