

*The Law of the Land: Two Hundred Years of American Farmland Policy.* By John Opie. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987. Pp. xxi, 231. Figures, maps, charts, illustrations, notes, index. \$25.95.)

In *The Law of the Land*, John Opie provides an illuminating account of public land policy from the Land Survey Ordinance of 1785 to the present. While the survey system brought order to the wilderness, Opie contends that the public policies that followed often resulted in mismanagement of the nation's primary resource. The policies were formulated in three phases. The object of the first phase was "the speedy and indiscriminating turnover of the public domain into private hands" (p. 161). The major beneficiaries in this phase were squatters, "cash rich" speculators, and, especially, railroad builders who acquired enormous grants of land from the federal government and from the several states to subsidize construction. The pioneer farmer, who is often supposed to have been the beneficiary of federal policy, was more often than not excluded from obtaining land by unrealistically high prices and a lack of cash. The first phase of public land policy came to an end in 1934 with the enactment of the Taylor Grazing Act which placed in grazing districts most of the remaining public land, some 142 million acres.

In the second phase of federal land policy, which overlapped the first, it became evident that there was a limit to public land. The 1909 report of the National Conservation Commission revealed the public domain had all but disappeared, and classification of the remaining land was encouraged. Traditional reliance on the independent farm family and dependence on its productivity was beginning to erode like the soil. With the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allocation Act of 1936, the congressional "mood swung from saving the farmer to saving the soil" (p. 153). Policy shifted from settling the independent farm family on the land to conserving the soil as a means of ensuring abundant crops.

The United States is currently in the third phase of federal land policy. Legislation continues to be directed away from the independent family farmer toward protection of the best farmland and the production of ever-increasing amounts of food. The focus is on large-scale, highly centralized agribusiness. Where this policy will lead and with what results is unclear.

In writing this book, Opie aims to "explore the historical forces that controlled our national capacity to mold an agricultural landscape and our relative ability today to reshape that landscape into something more workable" (p. xiii). He achieves his goal not only by examining federal policies that shaped the landscape but also by arguing for a replacement of the survey system with agricultural districts, zones, conservancies, and other protection plans.

While *The Law of the Land* is not of compelling relevance to the history of Indiana, there is much in it to commend it to students of public land policy. Chapters dealing with railroads, arid lands, water, and California are especially interesting. In view of the recent drought in the nation's heartland, the concluding chapters are prophetic, perhaps even ominous.

DAVID L. WHEELER is dean of the Graduate School and professor of geography at Ball State University. He specializes in the historical geography of the United States. His current research focuses on weather and its effect on the range cattle industry in the southern Great Plains, 1880–1889.

*Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present.* By R. Douglas Hurt. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987. Pp. xiii, 290. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliographical note, index. \$29.95.)

This book is a general history of American Indian agriculture from its ancient origins to the 1980s. As its bibliographical essay and copious notes testify, there is a wealth of historical, anthropological, legal, and economic literature about Indian agriculture, but nobody has tried to tell its whole story in one place. R. Douglas Hurt has performed a real service by summarizing so much diverse scholarship and making the results available in a clear, readable form.

He tells a “story of supreme achievement and dismal failure” (p. 228). The achievement came early; mesoamerican farmers domesticated plants at least seven thousand years ago. Corn, their most important crop, spread into the present United States sometime after 3400 BC. Ancient farmers also developed agricultural processes of various kinds, including irrigation and systems of land tenure. There ends the achievement, which occupies five of Hurt's fourteen chapters. The rest of the book chronicles a long series of failures that resulted from white people's actions and from government policies in particular. Chapters summarize the tactics used to acquire Indian land, generally unsuccessful efforts to instruct Indians in white farming methods, the reservation system, severalty, New Deal reforms, termination, and current struggles over scarce western water. Each topic is presented with exemplary clarity and abundant but not bewildering detail. A brief epilogue offers a convenient summary of Hurt's principal conclusions.

Indian farmers fade into the background when the book's focus shifts from their early achievements to government policy. Eleven photographs show exceptionally successful southwestern Indian farm operations, but the accompanying text depicts Indians as generally passive victims of white blunders, indifference, and cupidity. The United States government tried to make nomadic peoples into