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## Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie Counties of Indiana\*

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The great prairie section of Indiana stretching from the Wabash to the Kankakee today challenges the attention of agricultural economists and social planners because of the high rate of farm tenancy, the large average size of farms, the declining population of the rural areas, the poor tenant homes that do not harmonize with the richness of the surrounding soil, and a type of farming which for two generations has been depleting the soil and reducing its fertility.<sup>1</sup>

This section, a continuation of the Grand Prairie of Illinois, has had an agricultural history sharply different from that of southern Indiana. In three prairie counties, Benton, Newton, and White, more than half of the farms are operated by tenants and in three others, Jasper, Warren and Tippecanoe, over 40% are tenant operated. On the Illinois side of the Grand Prairie the rate of tenancy is even higher. Contrast this with the sixteen counties in southern Indiana which have less than 20% of their farms operated by tenants. The largest farms in Indiana are also to be found in the prairie counties. Two farms totalling over 17,000 acres are reported from Newton County, and Jasper and Newton each contain eleven other farms over 1,000 acres in size. In Benton and Newton Counties, the average size of farms is well over 200 acres, and, in White, Warren and Jasper, it is over 160 acres. In few southern counties does the average size of farms exceed 125 acres. Furthermore, the

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present tendency is toward larger farms in the prairie counties while in the rest of the state it is in the other direction. Counties having the highest land values per acre have the largest farm units and counties with low land values have on the average small farms. One may not be surprised, therefore, to note that the rural population of the richest counties in Indiana has declined in recent years more, in some cases, than the rural population of less wealthy counties.

Another striking fact concerns Benton County, the richest of the agricultural counties in proportion to its size. Despite its great agricultural wealth, the farmers of Benton County do not seem to be as well housed as are the farmers of eleven other Indiana counties which report higher valuations of farm dwellings. One reason for the disparity is that these other counties have lower tenancy ratings than Benton, and the value of dwellings on owner-operated farms is generally higher than on tenant farms. Perhaps the residents of few areas of Indiana today feel satisfied that their past farming policies have been based on proper soil conservation practices but it is in the prairie counties that the greatest concern should be felt. Here the soil has been depleted to an alarming degree, particularly on tenant operated farms, here the land has been tilled more consistently to grain production, and here, in the twentieth century, livestock has been somewhat neglected.<sup>2</sup>

A study of the early settlement of the prairie counties reveals that responsibility for the high degree of tenancy, the large farms, the declining population, the poor tenant homes, and the soil depletion is to be attributed in part to the operation of the land system in the nineteenth century.

Solon Robinson, writing in February, 1835, from his home in Lake County, Indiana, expressed the view that if the public lands of northwestern Indiana were not offered for public sale until 1836 and if preëmption rights were granted by Congress, the area would be well taken up by settlers who would be able to acquire ownership of their claims. This, said Robinson, "will prevent non-residents from obtaining large bodies of land; a circumstance which always injures the rapid growth of a country."<sup>3</sup> Robinson was over-optimistic

<sup>2</sup> The statistics in this and the preceding paragraph are taken from the *Fifteenth Census of the United States* (1930), I-III.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Anthony Kellar, editor, *Solon Robinson, Pioneer and Agriculturist, Indiana Historical Collections*, XXI-XXII (Indianapolis, 1936), I, 62.

as to the number of settlers who would be dwelling in that part of the state in 1836, but he was correct in calling attention to that feature of the national land policy to which many of the later land and agricultural problems owe their existence—the cash sale system.

The Land Ordinance of 1785 and subsequent laws had placed no restrictions upon the amount of public land that individuals or groups could acquire at the government offices, and it was not until after 1862 that any serious attempts were made to restrict land entries. The policy of unlimited sales and unrestricted transfer of titles made possible land monopolization by speculators, who acquired most of the choice lands in certain areas, notably in the Military Tract of Illinois, the prairie sections of Indiana and Illinois, and the timber areas of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota.<sup>4</sup> This resulted in the early disappearance of cheap or free land and the emergence of tenancy. In Indiana the dead hand of the speculator created many problems which were to stunt the growth and waste the resources of some sections of the state. It is interesting to note that Robinson criticized non-resident owners, but did not raise his voice against resident speculators, with one of the largest of whom in Northern Indiana he had close business relations.

Unimproved lands and town lots were the chief items of speculation in the United States before the era of wide scale stock distribution.<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, New England, the Middle States, and the older Southern States poured great sums of money into land investments in the new territories and states as they were opened to settlement. In the boom years 1835 to 1837 and again in 1847 to 1857 whole townships were swept into the control of absentee proprietors and holdings of 5,000 and 10,000 acres were widely established while holdings of 50,000 to 100,000 acres were not unknown. The fertile state of Indiana naturally attracted the attention of non-resident capitalists and hundreds of thousands of

<sup>4</sup> There is considerable detail on early land entries in Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa as well as Indiana in the following articles: Paul Wallace Gates, "Disposal of the Public Domain in Illinois," *Journal of Economic and Business History* (February, 1931), III, 216-240; *id.*, *The Illinois Central Railroad and its Colonization Work* (Cambridge, 1934); and *id.*, "Southern Investments in Northern Lands before the Civil War," to appear in the *Journal of Southern History* in the issue of May, 1939.

<sup>5</sup> A. M. Sakolski, *The Great American Land Bubble* (New York, 1932), reveals the propensity of the American people to speculate in lands.

acres of its lands were bought by people who had no intention either of settling upon or improving them.

It was in southern Indiana that the lands were first opened to entry and here they were generally taken up before the speculative boom of the middle eighteen-thirties got under way. This section was early overrun by squatters who settled promiscuously over the land before it was offered for sale, made improvements, and organized claim associations to provide a quasi-legal land and title registration system in the absence of government action. The claim association was also a mutual protective organization to assist its members against claim-jumpers or speculators who might try to seize or buy their homes.<sup>6</sup> Having settled, the squatters petitioned Congress to grant them preëemption rights, and Congress, responsive to appeals from pioneer farmers, granted the coveted preëemption privilege in a series of special acts. When squatters' appeals did not bring congressional action, the pioneers had another means of safeguarding their homes against outsiders who might attend the auction sale to buy the choice claims. This was to appear *en masse* at the sale and by intimidation or force prevent competitive bidding. Of course, the squatters had to purchase their lands at the minimum price of \$1.25 per acre and when they lacked the cash they had, perforce, to borrow from "loan sharks" at extortionate rates of interest—thirty-two and forty-eight percent—but they preserved their equity, at least temporarily. Thus squatters got title to their lands in southern Indiana, even though they took the law into their own hands to protect their "rights," and they made the land system more democratic in its operation than its framers intended.

True, there was some speculative purchasing of lands in southern Indiana. Among the larger purchases were those made by Josiah Lawrence, Lucius Barber and their associates who entered 22,000 acres,<sup>7</sup> Omer and George Tousey of Dearborn County who bought 16,000 acres, and Charles Butler, representing the American Land Company, one of the largest aggregations of capital in the eastern

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<sup>6</sup> An early constitution of a claim association in Lake and Porter Counties is found in Kellar, *Solon Robinson*, I, 69-76. William Clark, presiding officer of the first meeting of this association and one of the three "Arbitrators," was probably the largest of the early landholders in the two counties.

<sup>7</sup> The details of land entries are compiled from the original entry books in the General Land Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, and from plat books and deed records of the counties concerned.

states, who purchased 9,000 acres.<sup>8</sup> New England capitalists were represented in this section by the Boston and Indiana Land Company whose local agent was Judge John Law of Vincennes.<sup>9</sup> Law and his New England associates bought 29,000 acres of land located near the canal connecting Evansville and Terre Haute. In addition Judge Law sold to the Company his interest in the town of Lamasco which he and Judge W. Call and Lucius M. Scott had laid out on the Ohio River. For years thereafter the Boston and Indiana Land Company was engaged in advertising its lands for sale through newspapers and by pamphlets distributed in the east.<sup>10</sup> Other large land purchases made in southern Indiana were:

Name	Entered	Acres
Abraham Blanding & James J. Douglas .....	1836	4,500
John Borden .....	1848	5,120
Rufus Breed .....	1849	7,680
George H. Dunn .....	1836	1,520
James T. Hobart .....	1837	2,600
Eusebius Hutchins .....	1847	3,200
William K Johnston & David Springer & William Fate	1848	2,400
A. W. Leland .....	1836	3,580

Despite these sales, the total amount of speculative purchases in southern Indiana was small when compared with that in northern Indiana. It was neither large enough to retard seriously the development of the area nor to produce in the same degree the agricultural problems which characterize the northern section.

<sup>8</sup> It was this Charles Butler who was later to induce the state of Indiana to compromise with the bondholders of the Wabash and Lake Erie Canal. His associate, Frederick Bronson, likewise a member of the American Land Company, bought a large tract of land in northern Indiana, as will be seen below. G. L. Prentice, *The Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York: Its Design . . . With a Sketch of the Life and Public Services of Charles Butler, LL.D.* (Asbury Park, New Jersey, 1899), 427-531.

<sup>9</sup> Judge Law believed the Wabash Valley to be the "richest country on the face of the globe" and maintained, in 1835, that Toledo, at the northern end of the Wabash Canal and not Chicago, was destined to be the "great outlet from the lakes to the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers." The other major points in Indiana and Illinois for which he predicted rapid growth were Lafayette, Evansville and Alton. Fragment of letter of John Law to his brother William, Vincennes, August 19, 1835, in *Indiana Magazine of History* (March, 1928), XXIV, 52-54; William Wesley Woolen, *Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1883), 332-334.

<sup>10</sup> The lands were entered in the names of William Sullivan, George Pratt, and George W. Thatcher, all of Boston. James W. Seaver, also of Boston, was one of the leaders of the enterprise. Seaver was also interested in the Boston and Western Land Company whose investments were in central and northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, and he bought lands with Henry L. Ellsworth in the upper Wabash Valley. James W. Seaver to William S. Russell, Boston, August 25, 1838, Boston and Western Land Company, letter book I, Woodman Mss., Wisconsin Historical Society. The Boston and Indiana Land Company published an advertising folder of its lands, dated August 14, 1843, *Boston and Indiana Land Company*, a copy of which is in the Indiana State Library. For a newspaper advertisement of the lands see the *Washington National Intelligencer*, March 19, 1844.

In central Indiana there was even less large-scale speculative purchasing than in the south. Here most of the land passed directly from the government to actual settlers.

The land system worked the least satisfactorily in northern Indiana, especially in the prairie counties. Here the speculators, both absentee and resident, acquired enormous tracts of land before the actual settlers appeared and when the immigrants began to come into the country they found that the lands had long since passed into private hands and could only be acquired at high prices. An area which from the outset had labored under numerous handicaps to its settlement had now added to them the retarding effect of large speculators' holdings.

From the first appearance of the white men in Indiana the prairies were regarded with disfavor and they were slow to attract settlers. Their streams were sluggish, meandering and difficult of navigation; their soil was suspected of being infertile; their lack of forest cover gave them no protection against the wintry blasts and greatly increased the costs of building, fencing and fuel; their low relief and poor drainage made parts of them difficult to cultivate until they were drained, and the constant existence of surface water that was used for drinking purposes, produced fevers, chills and other bodily disturbances which were attributed to the unhealthy nature of the prairies. The unfavorable character given to this section by some early writers likewise proved a handicap to the settlement of the region. As Richard Power has well shown,<sup>11</sup> immigrants preferred to go farther west in their search for land rather than settle in an area in such disrepute. Central Illinois and even far off Iowa and Minnesota drew settlers while such prairie counties as Benton, Newton, Jasper and parts of White, Tippecanoe and Warren were almost completely avoided. But if actual settlers disdained the prairies one man from Connecticut had an almost sublime faith in them from his first visit—Henry L. Ellsworth.<sup>12</sup>

The Ellsworths of Connecticut rank with the Adamses of Massachusetts in the number of statesmen, governors, sen-

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Power, "Wet Lands and the Hoosier Stereotype," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (June, 1935), XXII, 33-48.

<sup>12</sup> Although outstanding in American agricultural history Ellsworth has not received the attention that his importance would seem to warrant. There are good short sketches in the following: *National Intelligencer*, January 1, 1859; Elmore Barce, et al., *History of Benton County, Indiana* (Fowler, Indiana, 1930-32, 2 vols.), II, 116 ff.; Elmore Barce, *Annals of Benton County* (Fowler, 1925), *passim*; *Dictionary of American Biography*, VI, 110-111.

ators, diplomats and jurists they have produced. After graduating from Yale, Henry L. Ellsworth became a lawyer, an insurance company executive, a farmer, Secretary of the Hartford County Agricultural Society, and Mayor of Hartford. In 1832 he came to the attention of Andrew Jackson who appointed him a member of a commission to visit the Indian country to pacify the warring tribes. In the next two years he travelled extensively in present Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska, closely observing the soil and farming possibilities of different areas, and keeping comprehensive notes of his observations.<sup>13</sup> His journal<sup>14</sup> reveals him to be a critical and highly interested observer. It is true his opinion of the Kansas country seems strange to us now. He noted with disfavor the "scarcity of timber for fences, firewood and buildings," and concluded that on this account much of the land would never be suitable for farming.<sup>15</sup> One is the more surprised, therefore, to find him selecting the treeless prairie section of Indiana for a field of investment and permanent location. It is probable that on one of his trips to or from the Indian country, Ellsworth first viewed the Wabash Valley. He was enormously impressed with the rich prairie lands of Benton, Tippecanoe, Warren and White Counties and decided to invest his own capital there and to persuade his friends to do likewise.

In 1835 Ellsworth became Commissioner of Patents to which position he was strongly attracted as it enabled him to witness all the important mechanical progress that was being made in the country. He was especially interested in farm machinery such as ditching machines, steam plows, and fencing devices. But more than anything else he wished to make this bureau an agency which would aid the farmers as well as industry. He felt, perhaps, rightly, that "For commerce and manufactures, much has been done; for agriculture . . . much remains to be done. Husbandry seems to be viewed as a natural blessing, that needs no aid from legislation. Like the air we breathe, and the element of water,

<sup>13</sup> Washington Irving and Charles J. Latrobe accompanied Ellsworth on his first trip to the Indian country and both wrote their accounts of the expedition, as follows: Irving, *A Tour on the Prairie*, in the *Crayon Miscellany*, Holly edition (New York, 1895); Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America* (New York, 1835).

<sup>14</sup> Stanley T. Williams and Barbara D. Simison, editors, *Washington Irving on the Prairie, or a Narrative of a Tour of the Southwest in the Year 1832 by Henry Leavitt Ellsworth* (New York, 1937). See also the Report of the Commissioners, M. Stokes and J. T. Schermerhorn, Fort Gibson, February 10, 1834, House Report, No. 474, pp. 78-131, *House Reports*, 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 1834.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of Henry L. Ellsworth to Lewis Cass, Washington, May 13, 1834, *loc. cit.*, 76.

which sustain life, the productions of the soil are regarded by too many as common bounties of Providence, to be gratefully enjoyed, but without further thought or reflection."<sup>16</sup> Ellsworth urged Congress to establish an agricultural museum, recommended that a part of the Smithsonian bequest be used for vocational education for farmers, and requested that funds be provided for the collection and dissemination of information on agricultural practices at home and abroad.<sup>17</sup> The beginning of the publication of an annual volume on agriculture by the Patent Office, and the free distribution of seeds resulted from his efforts and entitle him to be called the "father of the United States Department of Agriculture."<sup>18</sup>

Ellsworth was no swivel-chair farmer, nor did he undertake a mere speculation in lands. He was confident that the prairies of Indiana and Illinois would be dotted with prosperous settlements in a few years time and he became the great advocate of prairie farming. The prestige of his official position as Commissioner of Patents and the *entree* he had to farm journals enabled him to give wide publicity to his ideas. Ellsworth's tremendous enthusiasm for the prairie induced him to abandon his ancestral home in Connecticut and to throw in his lot with the Hoosiers.

During the thirties when credit was easy and the land speculative boom was at its height, numerous eastern and southern capitalists bought large tracts of land in the western states which they tried to develop into great estates operated by numerous tenants paying rent to the landlord. Daniel Webster,<sup>19</sup> the Wadsworths of New York,<sup>20</sup> Thomas Ludwell Lee Brent of Virginia,<sup>21</sup> and Romulus Riggs of Phila-

<sup>16</sup> Commissioner of Patents, *Annual Report*, 1837, *House Reports*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess. (1938), No. 112, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> See the *Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Patents for 1837 to 1844*.

<sup>18</sup> *Dictionary of American Biography*, VI, 110-111.

<sup>19</sup> Webster and Thomas H. Perkins of Boston bought large tracts in Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Northern Indiana but it was in the valley of the Illinois River near Peru, Illinois, that the former planned his estate. Here on a tract of 1,000 acres he proposed to erect substantial buildings for his son, Fletcher, and his manager, N. Ray Thomas, and to build fences, and stock the farm with the best blooded cattle available. Large sums were spent on the farm between 1836 and 1840 but the venture was not a financial success and was abandoned. For correspondence concerning the farming operations see the letters of N. Ray Thomas and Fletcher Webster to Daniel Webster, 1836-1840, in the Webster Mss., New Hampshire Historical Society.

<sup>20</sup> James and William Wadsworth of Livingston County, New York, entered 46,000 acres in Ohio and Michigan. Henry Greenleaf Pearson, *James S. Wadsworth of Genesee* (New York, 1913), has little on the western land venture.

<sup>21</sup> Brent was a clerk in the State Department in 1811 and in the diplomatic service from 1814 to 1834. In 1836 he is reported to have purchased 70,000 acres of land in Genesee and Saginaw Counties, Michigan. Here he cleared a large tract for improvements but died before he could accomplish his objectives. For an account of "Thomas L. L. Brent," by Judge Albert Miller, see the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, *Collections*, IX (Lansing, 1886), 192-96.



delphia<sup>22</sup> are among those who bought large tracts for such a purpose. Ellsworth had a similar plan in mind but, unlike some of the others, he moved into the area which he proposed to develop and gave it his personal attention.

It was the Grand Prairie of Indiana and Illinois that most attracted Ellsworth as a field for investment and he centered his attention on that portion embracing Benton and Tippecanoe Counties, Indiana, and Vermillion and Iroquois Counties, Illinois. This area, he believed had "the best soil and the most favorable climate."<sup>23</sup> He began buying land in June, 1835, when he visited the Danville, Fort Wayne, and Crawfordsville land offices and entered 18,000 acres, 10,000 of which were in Tippecanoe County. He chose the city of Lafayette for his home and made a substantial investment in lots and improvements there.<sup>24</sup>

Ellsworth began to farm his extensive holdings in Tippecanoe in 1836.<sup>25</sup> Laborers were employed to make improvements and they, in turn, were encouraged to become tenants upon the improved sections. There was a ready demand in the southern states for hay and this became Ellsworth's first commercial crop. Like most prairie residents, he plunged into the cattle and hog business in a large way but prairie cultivation interested him more than livestock production. Here he found exercise for his ingenious and fertile Yankee mind. Before part of the prairie could be cultivated it had to be drained and Ellsworth tinkered with various ditching devices, one of which combined ditching and fencing. This machine was designed to provide cheaply for two of the most expensive requirements of prairie farming. He was also fascinated by the new improvements which were being made in the plow in an effort to adapt it to prairies. The first plowing of the tough prairie sod was an expensive

<sup>22</sup> Romulus Riggs, brother of Elisha Riggs, the New York banker, acquired title to 40,000 acres in the Military Tract of Illinois. He planned to sell 16,000 acres as their value rose, and to retain the other 24,000 acres for his children. The reserved lands were to be leased for five years at low rents and the latter were to be doubled at the end of that time and again in ten years. See letter of Romulus Riggs to Elisha Riggs, June 19, 1845, Riggs Mss., Library of Congress.

<sup>23</sup> Letter of H. L. Ellsworth, January 1, 1837, to Henry William Ellsworth, in the latter's, *Valley of the Upper Wabash, Indiana* (New York, 1838), 163.

<sup>24</sup> *Indianapolis Indiana Democrat*, June 29, 1835, quoting the *Lafayette Wabash Mercury*; *Lafayette Journal*, Nov. 13, 1854.

<sup>25</sup> His son Edward, was placed in charge of the work since Henry L. Ellsworth, despite his unbounded enthusiasm for the prairie, was not prepared as yet to give up his position in the Patent Office where he believed he could do much to advertise the prairies. Ellsworth resigned as Commissioner of Patents in 1845 and settled in Lafayette where he undertook the personal supervision of his vast estate. Letter of Ellsworth, to his successor, Edmund Burke, January 1, 1836, Commissioner of Patents, *Annual Report*, 1845, 380; Barce, *Annals*, 55.

operation as it took a special kind of a plow which had to be drawn by three or four yoke of oxen. Only a few pioneer farmers could afford to buy or hire such equipment, but on a large farm the cost per acre of breaking the sod was of course considerably reduced and Ellsworth found his cost of prairie breaking much less than he had anticipated. When the steam plow was introduced in the fifties he was as delighted as a child with a new toy and he was a firm believer in its future importance. Large scale operations and the use of machinery for seeding, cultivating, and harvesting further reduced Ellsworth's costs of production and convinced him for a time that the prairie could be inexpensively cultivated and at large profits but far better in large farm units than in small ones.<sup>26</sup>

Ellsworth wavered in his judgment as to the relative advantages of prairie cultivation and cattle raising. In 1837 he advised absentee proprietors to cultivate their lands through tenants and hired labor and held out to them hopes of high returns on their investments.<sup>27</sup> Four years later, he discovered that prairie cultivation required too large an investment of capital for fencing, plowing, and labor and he urged the non-resident owners to graze cattle on their holdings. They could get \$1 to \$2 per acre for pasturing cattle and, at this rate, he estimated their land would be worth from \$16 to \$50 per acre.<sup>28</sup> In 1846, Ellsworth's faith in grain raising in the Wabash Valley was revived and he wrote a glowing description of it which appeared in the *Annual Report* of the Commissioner of Patents.<sup>29</sup> A year later, however, after a bad grain season, he wrote: "I am satisfied that stock raising at the west is much more profitable than growing small grain. . . . The profits of wheat appear well in expectation on papers, but this prospect is blasted by a severe winter, appearance of insects, a want of harvesting, bad weather in harvesting, in threshing . . . and lastly, a fluctuation of the market itself." That Ellsworth had a foreboding of evils to come is seen by the following quotation: "Constant cropping of corn and small grain carried from the field will . . .

<sup>26</sup> Barce, *et al.*, *History of Benton County*, II, 131-135, prints some exceedingly optimistic descriptions of Ellsworth's farming operations which are taken from Ellsworth's circulars and letters.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of H. L. Ellsworth, January 1, 1837, in H. W. Ellsworth, *Valley of the Upper Wabash*, 166.

<sup>28</sup> *Appendix*, II, letter of H. L. Ellsworth to Elizur Goodrich, Washington, May 25, 1841, 3. (Separate publication, a sort of belated second appendix to *Valley of the Upper Wabash*).

<sup>29</sup> Commissioner of Patents, *Annual Report*, 1845, 380 *passim* (letter of H. L. Ellsworth, Washington, January 1, 1846).

diminish gradually, at least, the fertility, and the farm is at length worn out. On the contrary, by feeding the crop on the land, the farm *every year grows better*."<sup>30</sup> Had Ellsworth's advice been followed the soil qualities of the prairie section might have been less seriously depleted in recent years.

The Panic of 1837 forced the contraction of Ellsworth's plans for a time but by the middle forties, when business conditions were improving, he began to plunge more deeply into the purchase of land. At the Crawfordsville land office between 1847 and 1852 he entered 73,500 acres largely with military land warrants which he could buy from sixty-five to \$1.10 per acre.

Ellsworth wished to attract both capital and settlers to the prairies. He reasoned that each additional investment whether by absentee proprietors or settlers would make the prairies better known and further their development. To call attention to the prairie country he prepared a booklet with the title, *Valley of the Upper Wabash, Indiana, with hints on its agricultural advantages: Plan of a dwelling, estimates of cultivation and notices of labor saving machines*, which was published in 1838. Restrained in tone in comparison with some of the current guide books, the work cannot be considered too optimistic in its description of the prairies. True, the cost of fencing is seriously understated and the probable profits from prairie farming are equally overestimated. Also too much space is devoted to discussions of the cultivation of flax, sugar beets, tobacco and hemp and not enough to problems of pioneer life on the prairies. Nor is the description of the Wabash Valley as well done and as valuable for the historian as are Peck's and Mitchell's guides to Illinois.<sup>31</sup> One is also troubled by the numerous references to large scale farming and the inadequate attention given to the needs and problems of the average settler.<sup>32</sup> But, after all, the book was written not so much for them as for men of capital. It is obviously the work of Henry L. Ellsworth

<sup>30</sup> Commissioner of Patents, *Annual Report*, 1847, 538.

<sup>31</sup> J. M. Peck, *A Gazetteer of Illinois . . .* (Jacksonville, 1834); (S. A. Mitchell) *Illinois in 1837 . . .* (Philadelphia, 1837).

<sup>32</sup> The *Genesee Farmer*, of Rochester, New York, which might be expected to be unfriendly to such a book, wrote about it as follows: "Mr. Ellsworth has drawn his picture of that section [Northern Indiana] . . . in strong and bright colors, but perhaps not stronger than facts would fully justify. . . . We cordially recommend it to the notice of emigrants to the Mississippi Valley." VIII (December, 1838), 394. For a local puff see *Lafayette Indiana Eagle*, January 16, 1839. The editor of the *Logansport Telegraph*, October 20, 1838, while admitting that he had not seen the book, said: "It has been suggested that there are some grounds for doubting its impartiality."

whose hand is seen on practically every page although Henry William Ellsworth, his son, appears as the author on the title page.<sup>33</sup> Included in the book is a letter of the former, written on January 1, 1837, and apparently first published in the *Sangamo Journal* of Illinois. It was also published in S. A. Mitchell, *Illinois in 1837*, and in A. D. Jones, *Illinois and the West*. The following quotation from this letter shows Ellsworth's unbounded enthusiasm for the prairies:<sup>34</sup>

If it be asked, what are the profits of cultivation? I answer, if the land is rented for five years, the profits accruing during this period will repay the capital advanced in the commencement, with 25 per cent. interest per annum, and leave the farm worth \$20 per acre at the expiration of the lease. Probably the profit would be much greater.

The book announced the formation of a partnership between John Curtis and Henry W. Ellsworth and advertised the purpose of the new firm as follows:<sup>35</sup>

They propose to purchase of Government and individuals, lands in Indiana and Illinois, for such persons as are desirous to make investments, and to take charge of the same, or of *other lands* already purchased; pay taxes, and, when requested, to put lands into cultivation, and generally to promote, in the best possible manner, the interests of their employers.

The undersigned will take capital to invest in new lands, and allow the capitalist the legal title and a deduction of 8 or 10 per cent. interest, and divide the extra profits, which, it is confidently believed, will not be less than 25 per cent more.

One of the first persons whom Ellsworth induced to make an investment in the Wabash Valley was William J. Grayson of Charleston, South Carolina. Grayson was an eminent literary figure and a successful politician. He served in Congress for two terms and while in Washington he met Ellsworth. In 1836 Grayson entered into a partnership with Ellsworth for an investment in Indiana lands. Grayson was to furnish \$10,000 for the purchase of lands, was to pay taxes and for such improvements as were jointly deemed advisable; Ellsworth was to manage the lands and to share equally in the profits after deduction of all costs plus six per cent interest on the investment.<sup>36</sup> This type of

<sup>33</sup> Henry L. Ellsworth was Commissioner of Patents at the time the book appeared and it would have been inexpedient, to say the least, to permit his name to appear as the author.

<sup>34</sup> Ellsworth, *Valley of the Upper Wabash*, 167.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-175.

<sup>36</sup> The agreement is registered in the White County Deed Records, E, 23, and in the Benton County Deed Records, 2.

contract was used by Ellsworth with some variations in his land deals with dozens of eastern and southern people who were persuaded to invest their savings in prairie lands.

Southerners from Maryland, Washington and even from Texas invested with Ellsworth in Indiana and Illinois lands. Two Baltimore capitalists, Ramsay McHenry and James McHenry Boyd furnished \$20,000<sup>37</sup> and the Washington banking firm of Pairo and Nourse which had large land holdings in seven western states and territories bought 11,000 acres through Ellsworth, in Benton County.<sup>38</sup>

Most interesting of the absentee investors who were attracted to Indiana lands were the members of the "Yale Crowd," so-called by the local abstractors and attorneys of Benton County. Ellsworth, a faithful alumnus of Yale, had intermarried with the Goodrich family and had close relations with the Chauncey family, both almost as well known in Connecticut as the Ellsworths, and likewise loyal sons of Yale. Six of the members of these families with associates bought 95,000 acres in Indiana and Illinois, of which 45,000 were in the Wabash Valley. Elizur and Chauncey Goodrich bought 5,340 and 3,960 acres respectively in the Crawfordsville, Fort Wayne and Danville districts. Elihu and Nathaniel Chauncey invested \$40,000 with Ellsworth in lands, acquiring thereby 16,500 acres in Indiana and 5,720 in Illinois, together with a valuable farm near Lafayette which was intended as an addition to the city.<sup>39</sup> Isaac Chauncey and Peter Schermerhorn of New York entered 5,800 acres at Crawfordsville and 7,000 acres at Danville. Other Connecticut Yankees who invested in prairie lands through Ellsworth were Robert and David Watkinson, who bought 9,500 acres, Noah Webster and dozens of others, who entered from forty to 2,000 acres.<sup>40</sup>

To the Benton County lawyers, all Yankees who invested in lands through Ellsworth were members of the "Yale Crowd." Thus Joseph S. Cabot and James W. Seaver, of Bos-

<sup>37</sup> Benton County Deed Records, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Compiled from Abstracts of land entries, Crawfordsville Land Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, and the Benton County Deed Records.

<sup>39</sup> White County Deed Records, F, 573. Elihu, Nathaniel and Isaac Chauncey are given considerable attention in William Chauncey Fowler, *Memorials of the Chaunceys, including President Chauncey, His Ancestors and Descendants* (Boston, 1858), *passim*; *The Dictionary of American Biography*, IV, 40-41, has a sketch of Isaac Chauncey; For a sketch of Chauncey Allen Goodrich, see William L. Kingsley, *Yale College. A Sketch of its History* (New York, 1879), 47-50.

<sup>40</sup> The Deed Records of White and Benton Counties, Indiana, and Vermillion County, Illinois, contain innumerable conveyances to and from the members of the "Yale Crowd." The conveyances, as above noted, frequently contain the details of the agreements made with Ellsworth.

ton, more properly associated with Harvard, who bought 7,600 and 3,300 acres respectively, are included. Another purchase made with Ellsworth was by Jeremiah Fowler, a downeaster from Lubec, Maine, who provided money for the purchase of 1996 acres. Mention should also be made of John Thompson of New York who entered 26,000 acres at Crawfordsville and Winamac. All the lands that were entered in combination with Ellsworth were managed by him until his death.

In 1857 Ellsworth, now an old man beset by family troubles, by his own lack of capital which prevented him from developing his vast estate as he had dreamed of doing, and by his inability to secure the profits which he had promised his eastern associates, removed to New Haven. There he spent the last two years of his life, dying in 1858.<sup>41</sup> The great champion of prairie farming had passed on, his dream of prairie development unshattered but still unfulfilled. The settlement of Ellsworth's estate was not easy because of complications arising from a late will which left most of the property to Yale and cut off his children and Wabash College, earlier intended for substantial inheritances,<sup>42</sup> with small portions. The will was contested<sup>43</sup> and Yale was induced to accept a compromise according to which the share to Wabash College was partially restored and the shares of Ellsworth's children and grandchildren were enlarged. Wabash College received 960 acres in Warren and 2,280 acres in Benton County and \$1,000 in cash.<sup>44</sup> Yale received 10,895 acres of which 6,043 was in Benton County, and the rest scattered among nine other Indiana counties, three Illinois counties and two Missouri counties. Yale also received numerous lots in Fort Wayne, Williamsport, Lafayette, and other cities.<sup>45</sup> There

<sup>41</sup> Barce, *et al.*, *History of Benton County*, II, 126.

<sup>42</sup> The Ellsworth children's share of the estate was reduced from one-fifth each to the use of property valued at \$25,000 for each for life.

<sup>43</sup> The story of the contest is well treated by Judge Barce, *et al.*, in their *History of Benton County*, II, 136-40. The authors used the White County Circuit Court, Complete Record No. 3, in the court house in Monticello.

<sup>44</sup> Conveyance of September 24, 1860, recorded in Benton County Deed Records, November 22, 1860; James Insley Osborne and Theodore Gregory Gronert, *Wabash College. The First Hundred Years, 1832-1932*. . . . (Crawfordsville, 1932), 62. This is perhaps the best of the histories of small colleges in the United States. In 1862 Wabash was leasing a part of its Benton County land but in 1866 to 1879 it was selling its holdings at prices ranging from \$6 to \$22.50 per acre. See the Deed Records of Benton County for these years.

<sup>45</sup> White County Circuit Court, Complete Record No. 3. The Treasurer of Yale University and the Librarian of the University Library were kind enough to permit the writer to use the manuscripts dealing with the settlement of the Ellsworth estate but the records are disappointingly meagre. One manuscript contains an analysis of the Ellsworth estate, June 1, 1868, which indicates that Yale paid \$28,342.26 for obtaining the estate. A part of this was used, no doubt, to buy the interests of those who had a share in the lands, and the rest was for legal expenses and other costs in connection with the trial. By 1869 Yale estimated its share of the estate to be approximately \$100,000 of which \$60,000 was in unpaid contracts for lands sold, together with the valuation of land remaining unsold. Of the latter there were 2,076 acres averaging in value \$9 per acre. As late as 1888, Yale still held mortgages on land in Benton County. Copies of mortgages and analyses of the estate, Ellsworth Mss., Yale University Library.

remained to the Ellsworth family 110,328 acres which were located as follows:

In Illinois counties	
Vermillion.....	7,953
Iroquois .....	7,123
Macon.....	240
	<hr/>
	15,316
In Indiana counties	
Allen.....	1,955
Benton .....	74,779
Jasper.....	267
White .....	440
Newton.....	2,014
Montgomery .....	40
Warren.....	2,420
Tippecanoe.....	5,053
Lake .....	8,044
	<hr/>
	95,012
Total .....	<hr/> 110,328

Eastern interests probably had an equity in a substantial amount of this land but the firm of Peckham and Smith<sup>46</sup> of Lafayette, which acted as the agent of the family, advertised the entire 110,328 acres for sale. The Ellsworth heirs, Wabash College and Yale were engaged for the rest of the century in selling and renting these lands, making collections, building some improvements and otherwise trying to capitalize upon their inheritances. But the death of Henry L. Ellsworth, the court battle, and the continued absentee proprietorship left the estate with little personal attention.

It would be equally interesting to study the land operations of Solomon Sturges<sup>47</sup> and his associates in the same detail as those of Ellsworth but space permits only a brief mention of them. Sturges was a resident of Zanesville, Ohio, where he had large interests in farm lands, banks, and railroads. In 1836 he began to purchase extensively in the prairie section of Indiana and Illinois and elsewhere until he and other members of his family had accumulated 142,000

<sup>46</sup> Peckham and Smith, *To the Public*, a 19 page pamphlet with no date, in the New York Public Library.

<sup>47</sup> Sturges was President of the Central Ohio Railroad in 1857. Wm. Prescott Smith, *The Book of the Great Railway Celebrations of 1857* . . . (New York, 1858), part ii, 17.

acres of which 32,000 were in White County, Indiana. These lands were classified as "swamp" but were merely prairie lands which were wet for part of the year. They were considered especially valuable for stock or dairy farms, and, to attract purchasers to them, Sturges advertised them in farm journals and by broadsides.<sup>48</sup> His unique advertising method is indicated by the following quotation:<sup>49</sup>

Now, as I hold in abhorrence all speculators, none such need apply. I wish to sell to actual settlers. . . . I have preached that Congress should only sell lands to actual settlers. Congress never would do right (everybody knows that), so I have tried to take care of the "dear People," as far as I could myself.

Associated with Sturges was Alvah Buckingham, also of Zanesville. Buckingham was president of the Bank of Muskingum in 1839, and was the principal promoter of the Wabash Valley Bank of Logansport.<sup>50</sup> It was doubtless the funds of these banks which made possible his extensive investments in lands and railroads. The Buckingham family entered 86,000 acres of land of which 13,000 was in northern Indiana. Across the state line in Illinois, the Sturgeses and Buckinghams owned 80,000 acres of prairie land. No one except Ellsworth had a larger interest in the Wabash Valley than these land dealers and they directed their efforts to settling their lands with persons who could buy at prices profitable to themselves. Their advertising gives no hint, however, that it was their intention to withhold their vast acreage from sale and to settle it with tenants as Ellsworth originally intended doing.

Numerous other persons of capital were attracted to the Wabash lands in the boom period of the thirties and fifties as the following table shows:<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Broadside of December 26, 1854, Pratt Mss., Indiana State Library.

<sup>49</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, May 20, 1858.

<sup>50</sup> Warren Jenkins, *Ohio Gazetteer and Traveller's Guide* (Columbus, 1839), 525; A. Buckingham to D. D. Pratt, Chicago, June 14, 1860, Pratt Mss., Indiana State Library.

<sup>51</sup> The data for this table were compiled from the records in the General Land Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, the plat books and Deed Records of Benton and White Counties, and the Ewing, Hamilton, Tipton and Pratt collections, Indiana State Library. It is not a complete table of all the large land entries. Data on the swamp, canal, Michigan Road, and other state lands were obtained only in Benton and White Counties.



Name	Residence	Land district	Year	Acres
Armistead, G. G.	Lauderdale Co., Ala.	Crawfordsville	1836	1,460
Aspinwall, W. H. and Howland, S. S.	New York	Fort Wayne	1836	2,400
Baker, W., and Harvey, H.	Otsego Co., N. Y.	Fort Wayne	1836	7,200
Beardsley, Levi, & Morse, J. O.	Otsego Co., N. Y.	Crawfordsville	1835	4,560
Boggs, J., & Evans, J.	Pickaway, Ohio	Crawfordsville	1835	8,200
Bright, J. & Corcoran, W. W.	Indiana Washington, D. C.	Crawfordsville	1858	1,738
Ewing, W G., & G. W.	Fort Wayne	(Scattered)		3,960
Ewings, Taber & Hamilton	Indiana	(Scattered)		21,200
Bronson, F.	New York	Crawfordsville	1836	7,730
Brooks, J.		Winemac	1851-2	19,480
Cabell, L. R.	Campbell Co., Va.	LaPorte	1835	21,050
Canby, M., Naudain, A., & Tatnall, E.	New Castle, Del.	Crawfordsville	1836	9,419
Case, A. S. & Anson Wolcott	New York	Crawfordsville	1852	3,340
Clarke, William	LaPorte	LaPorte	1835	11,040
Delafield, J.	New York	Fort Wayne	1835-6	6,400
DeWolfe, C. E.		Fort Wayne	1853	3,600
Goff, Nathan	Harrison Co., Va.	Crawfordsville	1836	1,560
Grinnell, H. & Joseph, M.	New York	Fort Wayne	1836	2,188
Haas, Isaac		LaPorte	1835	5,200
Hord, Robert	Caroline Co., Va.	Fort Wayne	1836	2,970
Horner, James	Albany, N. Y.	Fort Wayne	1836	2,600
Hurd, O.	St. Joseph	LaPorte	1836	13,850
Jenks, Nathan	Ontario Co., N. Y.	Fort Wayne	1836	3,646
Kent, P. M. & A. J., & Willard, I. P.	Indiana	Winemac	1852-3	11,660
Leech, J. A.	Union Co., Ind.	LaPorte	1835	3,420
Mendenhall, J. R.	Union Co., Ind.	LaPorte	1835	2,950
Milligan, Abel	Washtenaw, Mich.	Fort Wayne	1836-7	14,200
Minturn, Robert B.	New York	Fort Wayne	1837	4,880
Morison, R. S.	LaPorte, Ind.	LaPorte	1835	3,840
Polke, William	Fulton Co., Ind.	LaPorte	1837	4,740
Pomeroy, B.	Stonington, Conn.	Crawfordsville	1852	2,160
Roberts, Jesse	St. Joseph Co., Ind.	LaPorte	1835	1,574
Rockwell, John A., & Charles W.	New London, Conn.	Fort Wayne	1836	2,049
Van Rensselaer, J.	Oneida Co., N. Y.	Crawfordsville	1836	3,000
Switzer, W. N.	LaPorte, Ind.	LaPorte	1835	6,117
Walker, John	Shelby Co., Ind.	LaPorte	1836	5,120
Whithead, Swepson	Norfolk Co., Va.	Crawfordsville	1837	1,280
Williams, J. & W. B.	Dutchess Co., N. Y.	Crawfordsville	1836	3,140

These large speculative purchases in northern Indiana must not be regarded as unique. Investments on an equally large scale were made in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa at the same time. But nowhere was there a greater concentration of absentee and speculator ownership than in the prairie counties of Indiana and in few other sections did the dead hand of the speculator have such a far reaching influence.

By 1855 all the public land in Indiana had been disposed of and yet vast stretches of the state were totally unimproved. Absentee proprietorship and high land prices were to a large extent responsible for the tardy development of such areas, especially the Grand Prairie. By the eighteenth-fifties, when the agricultural pattern of central and southern Indiana was already well established, Benton, Newton, and Jasper counties remained almost untouched by settlers, and White, Warren and Tippecanoe still contained a large proportion of undeveloped land. As late as 1860, scarcely six per cent of the land in Benton County was improved and but thirteen per cent was improved in Jasper and Newton.<sup>53</sup> Only two other counties had a smaller population than Benton in 1860. It was not until well into the eighteen-sixties that these counties began to develop and much of their land was not improved until after 1880. The words of Solon Robinson, written in 1841, in which he deplored the unfortunate effects of land speculation were proving only too true:<sup>54</sup>

It is evident that no man can cultivate such large tracts as many have been anxious to possess, of such a soil as ours. It were better by far that our uncultivated lands were occupied by hardy and industrious laborers, whose every stroke of plough, hoe, or spade, would add intrinsic value to it, than to lie dormant, waiting some hoped for rise in value. It is a subject well worthy of our careful inquiry, whether our greediness has not driven many good citizens to look further, without faring better, while we have fared worse. Our settlements are too sparse, and we ought to use all honorable means to invite immigrants to fill up our waste lands. To do this we must be more liberal.

Many of the absentee proprietors bought their tracts as simple speculations. It was their intention to hold the land until rising prices, which they could reasonably expect within a generation, should enable them to sell at a profit. They had no intention of improving their land or in any other way aiding in their development of the prairies. When taxes were assessed against their property for local improvements many of them delayed payment as long as possible. The Ellsworth lands and those of other easterners were delinquent in tax payments in Benton County in 1860 as much as eight years. Thus the speculators not only kept the land out of the hands of actual settlers but prevented the collec-

<sup>53</sup> Computed from Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, *Agriculture*, 38, 42. The percentage of improved land for the state in 1860 was 35.

<sup>54</sup> Kellar, *Solon Robinson*, I, 217-18.

tion of taxes which were needed for road improvements, school expenses, and other local government costs. Where actual residents insisted upon public expenditures for schools and roads they were forced to tax their own property more heavily to compensate for the unimproved lands of the non-residents who paid little or nothing into the treasury.

Farm tenancy early appeared in the prairie counties of Indiana and developed rapidly there in contrast to the southern counties where its growth was slow. From the outset Ellsworth had planned to improve his possessions by placing tenants upon them who would after the initial start, continue to break up and cultivate new land, construct fences and buildings and otherwise increase the value of the property. Meantime, they would be paying rent amounting to one-third of the crops they raised. Ellsworth's *Valley of the Upper Wabash* described his plan of placing tenants upon the land and it was set forth as an inducement to attract capitalists to prairie investments.<sup>55</sup> It is remarkable that Ellsworth was criticized neither by the press of Indiana, including the farm journals, nor by politicians for proposing to introduce into pioneer Indiana an institution which all agreed was un-American. Indeed, until well after 1860 one finds politicians praising the American land system because it was, according to them, building up a nation of farm owners, and was not permitting such an alien institution as tenancy to develop. Yet here was Ellsworth publicly inviting capitalists to invest funds through him in Indiana where tenants could be attracted to the lands.

Ellsworth was not solely responsible for the introduction of tenancy into Indiana. As early as 1823, Lazarus Noble of Lawrenceburg advertised his farm for rent,<sup>56</sup> and, after 1835, one finds scattered advertisements in the Indiana papers of farms for rent.<sup>57</sup> The Pottawatomie and Miami reserved sections, lying adjacent to the Wabash River and the route of the Wabash and Erie Canal, were regarded as choice lands

<sup>55</sup> In his letter of January 1, 1837, he said "It is customary to rent land (once broke and fenced) for one-third of the crops, delivered in the crib or barn. At this rent the tenant finds all." He advised the employment of young men "to take the farm on shares." *Valley of the Upper Wabash*, 166. In his subsequent circulars and letters he frequently mentions his tenants and the success he has enjoyed in their employment.

<sup>56</sup> Lawrenceburg *Indiana Oracle and Dearborn Gazette*, October 4, 1823.

<sup>57</sup> *Lafayette Free Press and Commercial Advertiser*, May 27, 1836; *Logansport Canal Telegraph*, March 18, 1837; *Logansport Herald*, January 29, 1840; *Lafayette Tippecanoe Journal*, February 2, 1843; *ibid.*, July 31, 1845. The *Monticello Prairie Chieftain*, December 23, 1852, contains an advertisement of R. Bury of Lafayette, who wanted to purchase or rent a farm of 40 to 160 acres.

and were much in demand by the early settlers. The Ewings of Fort Wayne who, with Cyrus Taber, Allen Hamilton and Senator John Tipton had succeeded in wresting most of these lands from their untutored owners, rented them to incoming settlers who preferred to settle upon them, temporarily, rather than to take up more remote locations back from the river.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere in Indiana, lands were being rented by local proprietors to new arrivals, some of whom, after a short period of tenancy, were able to purchase farms of their own.<sup>59</sup>

Nor were Ellsworth and the "Yale Crowd" the only non-resident capitalists who intended to develop their estates through tenants. In fact, in practically all the western states easterners bought tracts of land as permanent investments to be developed by tenants. When such easterners appeared in a community where the land office was located, they were welcomed by the local press, feted by the "prominent citizens," and encouraged to invest in the area provided they did not attempt to encroach upon the rights of squatters who had claims on public lands. Thus as early as 1825 the *Michigan Sentinel* of Monroe, Michigan, exulted over the fact that a number of "robust capitalists" from western New York had arrived to purchase lands.<sup>60</sup>

Ellsworth secured tenants for some of his land by advertising them enticingly in the local papers. In 1854 he announced for sale 50,000 acres of "farm lands" near the Wabash in Tippecanoe, Warren, Vermillion, Montgomery, White, Cass, Miami, Wabash, Allen, Whitley and other Indiana counties. If immigrants could not buy, they might lease the lands for two or three years for one half the crops and at the end of the period receive a deed for the land without further payments. Stock and labor were acceptable in place of cash.<sup>61</sup> In 1848, Ellsworth advertised 30,000 acres of land for sale and ten houses in Lafayette for rent.<sup>62</sup> His tenants found their lot by no means an easy one and not many remained on the land. In addition to plowing, fencing,

<sup>58</sup> The Ewing, Hamilton and Tipton manuscripts in the Indiana State Library contain frequent allusions to rents received by W. G. and G. W. Ewing, Allen Hamilton, and John Tipton from these Indian sections in the years following 1837.

<sup>59</sup> It was not customary to record leases in the deed records but one finds numerous leases in the Deed Records of Benton and White Counties for the forties and fifties and of course later.

<sup>60</sup> Monroe *Michigan Sentinel*, September 23, December 1, 1825.

<sup>61</sup> Lafayette *Wabash Standard*, July 18, 1845; Lafayette *Tippecanoe Journal*, July 31, 1835.

<sup>62</sup> Lafayette *Courier*, December 29, 1848. Included in the advertisement is a statement that persons returning from Lafayette may get freight to Benton County.

and building homes there was need for draining part of the land. Few sections could be drained satisfactorily without securing the coöperation of owners of adjacent lands but where the owner was a non-resident, or Ellsworth himself, the chances of assistance were slight. Immigrants were unwilling to put themselves to much expense of time or labor to ditch lands, the benefit of which would largely go to the landlord in increased land values. The alternative to farming was the cattle industry, but capital was necessary for this and the ordinary immigrant lacked it. The prairie possessions of absentee proprietors, therefore, had little to offer impoverished immigrants who were seeking cheap land.

The more substantial immigrants who brought with them to the West considerable sums of money were likewise not attracted to the prairie counties. Ellsworth, Sturges, and other proprietors were holding their lands for five and ten dollars an acre which, added to the cost of bringing the prairie under cultivation, made them high in price, even taking into consideration their great fertility. From 1840 to 1860, there yet remained equally fertile public land in Illinois and Iowa which could be bought for \$1.25 an acre. Later, lands in Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas and Minnesota were thrown open to entry. After 1862 land could be acquired free under the Homestead Act. Some of this land was as close to railroads as was the Benton County land which until the late sixties, remained quite distant from transportation lines. Immigrants with capital, unless they were attracted to a particular area because of the earlier settlement there of friends or other members of their own nationality, frequently, preferred to move to undeveloped areas where the land was still open to entry or where they could acquire it cheaply. By so doing they could profit from the rising value which subsequent settlement would give to their claims and they, like the absentee speculators, generally bought more than they could carry.

It may be argued that it was not the speculators but the wet lands which deterred immigrants from settling in the prairie counties. It is true that the extremely wet lands could not be cultivated until they were drained and that their drainage would call for heavy financial expenditures. Unfortunately, the absentee proprietors were either unable or unwilling to invest more capital in lands which still brought

them no revenue, and the tenants, as has been seen, could scarcely afford to invest their money or very much of their labor in improvements of which they might be dispossessed at any time. Had the lands been democratically owned by farmers operating quarter-section tracts coöperative ditching systems might have been arranged, the reduced costs would not have been insurmountable, and the wet lands would doubtless have been brought under cultivation much sooner.

Absentee ownership not only kept both the impoverished immigrants and those supplied with capital away from the prairie counties but it also delayed the construction of railroads. Many Indiana counties aided materially in their own developments by liberally subsidizing the construction of railroads through grants or loans. But absentee proprietors were loath to make contributions for this purpose, even though they might be benefitted greatly by the transportation lines. Furthermore, the virtually non-taxable lands of the absentee proprietors so reduced the tax base of the area that the counties could not sell bonds to finance railroad subsidies. Railroad lines which did not need to depend upon local aid for their construction, such as the Wabash, the Monon, and the Logansport and Peoria, were built through the prairie country in the fifties<sup>63</sup> but there yet remained vast stretches of land so far from railroads that transportation costs were prohibitive. Other railroad schemes were proposed but they had to wait until the 'seventies and 'eighties when prairie development had progressed sufficiently to make possible their financing. Before 1870 Benton County could not boast a single mile of railroad. Settlers who would have worked hard to secure them by voting county subsidies and by exchanging mortgages on their own lands for bonds of the railroads were not encouraged to settle in Benton or other prairie counties, despite the publication of the colorful advertisements of Ellsworth and Sturges.

In the late fifties most of the prairie land still owned by the original speculators was sold to another group of capitalists who took their places as great landlords.<sup>64</sup> Ellsworth's eastern associates had grown tired of waiting for their promised \$10 and \$20 per acre and were glad to sell for much less

<sup>63</sup> Frederic L. Paxson, "The Railroads of the 'Old Northwest' before the Civil War," *Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, Transactions* (October, 1912), XVII, Part 1, 243-274.

<sup>64</sup> These sales can be traced through the deed records of the prairie counties.

rather than to continue to suffer tax penalties and especially further loss of income from their capital. This second stage of large land ownership was not characteristically speculative in its nature but was more constructive. The new owners were generally Hoosiers who lived in the prairie counties where they had already built up considerable fortunes from the cattle trade, railroad construction, banking and the sale of town lots. They were a part of the community, had grown up with it, and were now showing their confidence in it by investing their surplus at home. They were an aggressive group of men who had the capital and the driving force to make the prairies productive.

One of the most able of this later class of landlords was Moses Fowler, Lafayette banker, cattleman, partner in a large meat-packing firm and railroad contractor. With Adams Earl and others he bought 20,000 acres in Benton County and in White and Warren Counties he acquired 25,000 acres.<sup>65</sup> Fowler became a power in Benton County. He pastured great herds of cattle and raised with the aid of his numerous tenants tens of thousands of bushels of corn. His sales of grain and stock from his Benton County farms were said to amount to as much as \$150,000 per annum.<sup>66</sup> He moved the county seat from Oxford, where Henry L. Ellsworth and David Watkinson had been influential in locating it, to Fowler which town he laid out.<sup>67</sup> He aided in financing and constructing the Big Four Railroad which runs diagonally through Benton County to Chicago. The completion in the 'seventies of this railroad running through the Fowler lands made possible their more intensive development.

Edward C. Sumner, another of the great cattle kings of Indiana, bought 30,000 acres in Benton County, the greater part of which was acquired from Ellsworth and other members of the "Yale Crowd." For most of the land he paid \$5 per acre but for a part he was forced to give as much as \$30 per acre. Judge Elmore Barce has described the extensive cattle trade in which Sumner was engaged during the 'seventies and 'eighties on his Benton County lands, and he

<sup>65</sup> Information as to the acreage of the Fowler, Sumner, Boswell, Raub, Atkinson, Milk, Gaff and Goodwin estates is from the following sources: Benton County Deed Records; *Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper and Newton, Indiana. Historical and Biographical* (Chicago, 1883); Barce, et al., *History of Benton County*; George Ade, "Prairie Kings of Yesterday," *Saturday Evening Post* (July 4, 1931), CCIV, 14ff.

<sup>66</sup> *Biographical History of Eminent and Self Made Men of the State of Indiana* (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1880), II, 9th District, 13-14.

<sup>67</sup> Barce et al., *History of Benton County*, II, 147; *Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper and Newton, Indiana*, 233 ff.

has noted the sale of 1100 head of cattle in 1882 for a price of nearly \$100,000.<sup>68</sup>

Lemuel Milk and his associates operated on an even larger scale than Fowler or Sumner. They are said to have owned 65,000 acres of land in Indiana and Illinois of which 40,000 were in the Beaver Lake region of Newton County, Indiana. Here, after a part of the tract was drained, there were pastured 10,000 sheep, 2,500 cattle and 300 horses. One field of corn contained 2,000 acres.<sup>69</sup>

Other large holdings in Benton County, most of which were established in the 'fifties were: those of Parnham Boswell, 12,000 acres; of Cephas Atkinson, 12,000 acres; and of Adams Danforth Raub, 6,000 acres. In Newton County James M. Gaff of Cincinnati bought 11,000 acres and Alexander J. Kent acquired 25,000 acres. In Warren County perhaps the largest landholder was James Goodwin who built up an estate of 10,000 acres. In White County John Kious owned an estate of 4,000 acres and Miller Kenton one of 5,000 acres.<sup>70</sup>

These men did not make the mistake of sinking all their money in land but had funds left with which to develop their holdings. Under them began the real improvements upon tracts which had been in private ownership for a generation. They grazed great herds of cattle upon their lands and gradually fenced their tracts. But grain feeding was necessary for part of the year and these prairie kings, so picturesquely described by George Ade, turned to raising corn.

Increasing land values and taxes made necessary more intensive use of the land than the great proprietors were able to introduce. Cattle and hog raising with grain production as a side line had to be reversed and grain raising became the principal method of farming the prairies. The large estates were gradually broken up into small tenant farms and a system of crop sharing was introduced. The tenants were frequently drawn from the laborers previously employed by the proprietors.

When the estates were divided into tenant farms, the owner-manager was no longer needed. Thereafter, the gener-

<sup>68</sup> *History of Benton County*, III, 64 ff.

<sup>69</sup> George Ade, *loc. cit.*, 77. Cf. Illinois Central Railroad, *Sectional Maps . . . 850,000 Acres yet for Sale* (Chicago, 1867), 66.

<sup>70</sup> In 1876 Raub advertised 6,000 acres of pasture for rent. *Benton Democrat*, March 24, 1876. The following year Parnham Boswell advertised 1,550 acres of grazing or grain land for sale for \$30 per acre. The property included a large residence of eleven rooms, tenant houses, orchard, and 150-200 acres of timber. *Id.*, May 25, 1877.



ation of cattle kings slowly faded from the picture and their heirs moved to Lafayette, Indianapolis, Florida, and California. The second generation, being out of touch with the land, became more concerned with the income to be derived from it than with such problems as erosion, soil exhaustion, and declining fertility. They wanted immediate returns, and forgot that land is not inexhaustible. Grain was the principal and safest cash crop from the point of view of the absentee proprietors and tenants, in some cases, were actually discouraged from keeping cattle. A local historian wrote as early as 1883, "Jasper County is still too new, its soil too little exhausted, to encourage or feel the necessity of a regular system of agriculture,"<sup>72</sup> but conditions became progressively worse as time passed. The soil was gradually depleted and of course production per acre declined.

The land system which had worked fairly satisfactorily from the settlers' point of view in southern Indiana in the early part of the nineteenth century failed in its objectives in northern Indiana where great landlords first acquired titles to the land and democratic ownership was subsequently impossible. The preëemption law of 1841 was a gesture to actual settlers (squatters) but it did not check speculation, and the homestead act of 1862 came too late. By then all the public lands in Indiana had passed into private hands. There yet remained a large acreage of undeveloped land which, however, was withheld from impoverished immigrants by its high price. Indiana could no longer be a refuge for the poorer class of immigrants who were seeking free or cheap land.

The first generation of speculators contributed nothing to the development of the prairie country. Even Ellsworth, less a speculator than a promoter, did more harm than good by helping to bring about a speculators' monopoly in the prairie country. When these speculators sold their land it went to a second, more dynamic group of promoters who could partially develop their holdings but who still prevented democratic ownership. When the second series of owners divided their estates into tenant holdings, it was too late for

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<sup>71</sup> *Monticello Prairie Chieftain*, October 2, 1850. Large ownership of land in Jasper and Newton Counties was revealed in the twentieth century with the publication of the *Standard Atlas of Jasper County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1916). It reports B. J. Gifford as the owner of 24,000 acres in Jasper County and John J. Lawler as the owner of 18,000 acres in Jasper and Newton Counties.

<sup>72</sup> *Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper and Newton*, 419.

tenants or other small farmers with little capital to buy the land. Rising land prices, \$50 per acre and more for improved sections, fastened the tenancy system and absentee ownership upon the prairie counties. The much vaunted land system had failed of its objective in the Wabash Valley and the prairie farther west. It had not established democratic farm ownership but had produced a system much at variance with American democratic ideals.