Hoosier Cattle Kings

Paul W. Gates*

Corn-belt landlords have never had their glorious days writ large in the annals of American history. Nor have their fads and follies, their wealth and their culture, their political influences, and their economic power been intimately pictured in any Gone with the Wind. Yet these country grandees of the corn belt, whose landed possessions outrivaled in size and productiveness anything of which the planter aristocrats could boast in the ante-bellum period, had much of the same flamboyant quality, the haughty pride, the lust for life and possessions, the love of display and political power that characterized the slaveowners of the South.

Nowhere is their influence as far reaching in shaping the early growth of settlement and the land use and ownership patterns of the West as in the Kankakee and Wabash valleys of Indiana. Here in the mid-nineteenth century were established estates ranging from a few thousand acres to great baronial holdings that spread over four or five government townships. Here in the pioneer period which we are accustomed to equate with equality and democracy there developed an aristocracy that “wore beaver hats . . . and broadcloth . . . the high stock collar and the encircling cravat” and maintained “the manners and highly civilized traditions of the East.” Their homes were great rococo mansions set down in lonely splendor in the prairie or in the neighboring cities. The gulf between these aristocratic landlords and the cow

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hands, the hired laborers, and the tenants living in their crude shacks was as great as that which existed between the Eastern industrialist and the low-paid workers who operated his factories.

The landed aristocracy of the prairies had its origin in two notable groups which started with different objectives but ended with much the same results. The first of these coming somewhat earlier to the prairies consciously planned to establish themselves in the new country as the landed gentry. The second, started as cattle feeders and drovers who, finding it necessary to assure adequate pasture for their livestock, bought many thousands of acres of land for cattle ranges.

When land was cheap, the titles easy to acquire, and money flush, numerous men of capital bought great tracts in the Wabash and Kankakee valleys which, unlike other speculating groups, they planned to improve. Their model was not the Southern planter with his army of slaves but rather the rich and cultured families of the Genesee, the Wadsworths, the Carrolls, the Churches, and the Fitzhughs whose broad acres were cultivated by battalions of tenants. Some of these ambitious and proud capitalists planned to entail their holdings in order to assure their continuation in the family for future generations. Ponderous Daniel Webster, democratic Henry L. Ellsworth, and aristocratic Nathaniel West are but three among many who acquired large holdings in Indiana and Illinois on which they undertook to erect baronies tenanted by scores of farm operatives.

Webster, whose twelve thousand acres extended over a number of states, concentrated his attention upon a tract in central Illinois to which he sent a Massachusetts farmer to assume charge at a compensation of two thousand dollars per year. "My wish," he said, "is to have a very large farm, as large as one active man can well superintend the management of— If this estate be not large enough at present, find out what adjoining lands may be bought and at what prices. . . . The farm must be well stocked—you will employ your own

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labourers..." Ill luck in the death of his agent combined with extravagant management, over-optimistic planning, and heavy debts resulted in failure and the property passed out of the hands of the family. West, like Webster and Ellsworth of New England ancestry, bought some thirty-two hundred acres in Indiana which were managed by the family for many years.

Henry L. Ellsworth, a democratic offshoot of a fine old, Federalist family of Connecticut, became the principal propagandist of and leader in the movement to bring settlers to the prairies. After a tour of the West in the thirties, Ellsworth, then Commissioner of Patents, determined that the open prairies which had been almost entirely avoided by incoming settlers were ideally suited for development by men of means. Through the press, the farm journals, pamphlets, and a wide correspondence, he argued that there were no better opportunities for investment than in land and improvements in the Wabash Valley. Inspired by his eloquent defense of the prairies and his own large investments in them, numerous friends and political associates bought and entrusted to his care an area equivalent to an Indiana county, most of it lying north and west of Lafayette.

Table of Indiana Land Purchases By New York Residents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allen, Horace</td>
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<td>Aspinwall &amp; Howland</td>
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<td>Bourdman, Electus</td>
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<td>Bronson, Frederick</td>
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<td>Butler, Charles</td>
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<td>1836</td>
<td>Vincennes</td>
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<td>Otsego &amp; Albany</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>La Porte</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case &amp; Wolcott</td>
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<td>Champion, A.</td>
<td>Monroe County</td>
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See the story of Ellsworth's western-land business in "Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie Counties in Indiana," in *Indiana Magazine of History* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1905- ), XXXV (1939), 4-6. See above (pp. 3-4) the Table of Indiana Land Purchases By New York Residents showing the extent to which people of some means of the state of New York invested in Indiana lands in the period from 1835 to 1855. It should be used in connection with the table in *ibid.*, 17, which it amplifies and corrects. I do not intend to imply that all these acquisitions were made for the same purpose as those of Webster, West, and Ellsworth. Some were definitely planned as speculations. Levi Beardsley has described in his *Reminiscences* (New York, 1852), his own extensive investments in land in Ohio and Indiana and his efforts to improve his property.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Years</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<td>Winnemac</td>
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Ellsworth's connections with Indiana began in 1835 when his first purchases were made and improvements upon the land were instituted. A decade later, he took up residence in Lafayette and thereafter devoted his full energies to attracting settlers to the area. Experimenting with farm machinery, crop rotation and methods of feeding livestock, breaking plows, ditching and corn-cutting machines, fencing materials, and the feeding of ground corn-cob meal to cattle and hogs all fascinated him. In 1849, he was reported to have twelve hundred acres in corn that averaged sixty bushels to the acre, but his one hundred acres in wheat were ruined by the rust. Instead of driving his livestock overland as was commonly done at the time, Ellsworth transported them on his own boat by way of the Wabash Canal to Toledo where they were reshipped by lake vessel. On the return trip, he brought in lumber for construction of tenant houses and twenty-eight miles of fencing.\(^5\) With hired help and tenants

\(^5\) *American Agriculturist* (New York, 1842- ), VIII (1849), 348.
who were settled upon small farms rented on a share basis, Ellsworth brought considerable land into use, but he had over-extended himself. His plans for the larger development of his great estate were not completed, and his death in 1859 was followed by dissension and litigation among the heirs which ended in the breakup of the estate. Much of the land Ellsworth had held passed into the hands of another and equally bold adventurer in prairie development.

Despite Ellsworth’s persistent plugging for prairie farming and his extensive improvements, the settlement of the flat, wet land of northwestern Indiana proceeded slowly owing to its poor drainage, the numerous sloughs filled with a rank growth of reeds and cattails, and the toughness of its sod that resisted the crude cast-iron plow then in use. To drain the land and bring it into cultivation required more capital than the ordinary frontiersman could raise, and the region—the last frontier of Indiana—was long neglected by immigrants and left undeveloped by the scattered few who settled there. George Ade, whose father was a contemporary of the cattle barons who will be discussed, and who himself came to own twenty-four hundred acres in Newton County, has ascribed this lack of progress to the “backwoodsmen . . . [who] preferred to loaf,” and consume whisky. Here Ade was expressing the prejudice of the person of eastern or foreign ancestry against the Hoosier type. Loafing and whisky drinking, however, were not responsible for the slow progress in settling the prairies.

Actually this was not Ade’s best judgment, for none knew better than he the physical characteristics of the area which long impeded settlement and development. His description of the Grand Prairie and the features that made difficult its improvement is almost classic.

Our part of the commonwealth was far away from railroads and so shaggy and waterlogged that it was commonly regarded as a hopeless proposition.

The untouched prairie which was not wholly or partly submerged was a crazy quilt of high-stemmed and gorgeously colored flowers from late spring until the killing frosts of autumn. To break through the ribbed soil, bury this wild growth and convert a tangy and fibrous flower garden into a corn field was a whale of a job. Every low spot on the prairie was a slough rank with reeds and cattails, and breeding ferocious gallinippers by the millions. Also a large kind of horsefly, called the “green head,” which was so warlike and blood-hungry that when it
attacked a horse, in swarm formation, it would either kill him or weaken him so much that he had no value as a work animal. Oxen were used in breaking the raw prairie, and even these tough and thick-skinned animals suffered tortures when attacked by armies of green heads.

The first ditches... were deep furrows made with a thirty-inch plow. As many as thirty yoke of oxen would be used in one ditching outfit. On level ground the big plow could be pulled along, ripping and tearing through the tough roots of the bull grass and needle grass and the ironweeds and all the other knotty growth, by fifteen yoke of oxen. In mushy ground and bad going the whole thirty yoke had to be used, some of them to move a capstan ahead of the gang and also to supply power when the pull had to be made by capstan. You will understand that reclaiming the prairie was no job for a weakling, a lazybones or anyone not prepared to meet a pay roll.

Here in a land possessing little natural drainage and no timber, there was an abundance of government land for sale as late as the mid-nineteenth century, when elsewhere in Indiana it had long since been sold. At the same time the Ellsworth estate was being subdivided, the lands of the Wabash Canal were open for purchase, and the counties were disposing of hundreds of thousands of acres they had received as swamp land. Passed over by immigrants who, lacking capital to develop the flat land, were going to more remote but better drained areas in Iowa and even Kansas, these prairies were later bought by a group of robust capitalists, most of whom had cleared small fortunes for themselves in other enterprises. These were the "driving and untiring Vikings" who "refused to accept anything less than despotic control of widespread domains. They were simply Napoleonic in their aspirations. They owned land by townships instead of sections. They were sometimes friendly with their henchmen and dependents, but never intimate. They were dynamic in energy, forceful of speech, and more than a few of them were picturesquely profane."
These “high geared financiers who came and saw and took possession” were neither sterile speculators whose dead hand would prevent settlement nor were they ambitious landlords hoping to bring to success Ellsworth’s long-range plan of a society of wealthy and cultured aristocrats maintained by the fruits of labor of numerous tenants. Without exception they bought their land for the immediate purpose of assuring adequate pasture for the herds of cattle they were fattening for market.

The rapid growth of the cattle-feeding industry in the prairies of Indiana and Illinois after 1850 was made possible by a supply of cheap corn, a growing demand for beef in Eastern cities, an apparently unlimited supply of rich grassland that was in the early period an open-grazing common and was free and accessible to any livestock. Native stock perhaps not in the best of shape could be purchased from isolated farmers at little cost, turned loose on the prairie blue stem from April to December, provided with salt once or twice a week, and occasionally looked after by a herdsman to see that they did not wander too far from the proper range, meantime, putting on valuable weight. After the prairie grass was killed, the calves were put in covered enclosures, fed on stacked prairie hay with perhaps a small ration of corn or meal, or even corn fodder. Two summers of pasture feeding with some grain put them in shape for slaughter, and they would then be driven to market. All this before the day of fencing, tiling, and ditching, and land values ranging from fifty to two hundred dollars an acre, made for low costs in cattle feeding and high profits from the sale of livestock.

When settlers, speculators, and land companies began to encroach upon the grazing commons of the squatting cattle-men and to engross their pastures, the latter were forced to buy the land they had been using to keep control of it. Swiftly they pushed their purchases until they had acquired much of the prairie in a strip of territory sixty miles wide and one hundred and fifty miles long on both sides of the Indiana-Illinois border extending northward from the line of the Big Four Railroad.

Perhaps the most influential of this group of cattlemen was Moses Fowler of Lafayette who had a large part in

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*Rensselaer, Indiana, Gazette, May 25, 1859.*
shaping the land and social pattern of the region. Fowler was a vigorous, hard-driving, and ruthless man who "wanted property, wanted wealth; had a consuming ambition to be rich, and . . . permitted no maudlin sentimentality to stand between him and his cherished object."19 In 1839, he moved to Lafayette where he soon became one of the leading businessmen. Here on a grand scale and in a spectacular manner, he carried out his numerous business operations, always with substantial material benefits to himself. Drygoods, wholesale grocery, a fleet of steamboats running between Lafayette and New Orleans, banking, meat packing, financing and building the Big Four Railroad, real estate, and livestock were the businesses in which he amassed a fortune for himself. It was said that the Chicago meat-packing firm in which he was a partner was the second largest in the West during the Civil War.11 Fat, war-time profits permitted Fowler in partnership with his brother-in-law, Adams Earl, to buy huge tracts of land amounting to forty-five thousand acres in Benton, Warren, and White counties. When the property was divided, Fowler had twenty-five thousand acres.

On his Benton County tract of twenty thousand acres, Fowler fattened as many as two thousand cattle. At first native-grade cattle were bought. In 1868, he was feeding Texas cattle, but the increasing demand for better quality beef induced him to develop his own herd of Herefords of which he had as many as five hundred. In partnership with William S. VanNatta, an owner of eleven hundred acres in Benton County, Fowler imported from England purebred Herefords in the eighties as a foundation for his herd. Within a short time he had become a cattle fancier who was able to exhibit choice stock at state and county fairs and to advertise for sale fifty "thoroughbred Hereford bulls, 50 thoroughbred Hereford cows and Heifers and 300 grade and cross bred Herefords one and two years old."12

Fattening native or Texas cattle or even purebred Herefords on the Indiana prairies was enormously profitable for a time, but increasing land values and taxes made the cattle

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11 Lafayette, Indiana, Daily Courier, August 20, 1889.
kings consider more intensive use of their holdings. Fortunately, there was at hand a ready supply of immigrants who, in the absence of farms they could buy, were willing to become tenants on the estates of the cattle kings. In this way and without any definite plan, the pastures were slowly divided into quarter, and half, or full-section tracts, which were fenced, perhaps tiled or ditched, and planted to corn. The older generation of cattlemen resisted this change at times and to hold their own turned to better grades of stock or even purebreds. But when the sons of the cattle kings inherited their estates the change to tenant farms with emphasis on grain farming came rapidly. In this way, responsibility was largely shifted to the tenant, and when farm managers were employed to safeguard the interest of the landlord, the latter was completely freed of responsibility. He could thereafter concentrate his attention on banking in Lafayette, he could take up residence at Indianapolis, or remove to remote areas where the winter storms and freezing temperatures were left behind. Absentee landlordism had now arrived for good or for ill. The history of the Fowler estate well illustrates this evolution.

Slowly a part of the Fowler land was broken up and planted to corn under the charge of a superintendent with the aid of hired laborers or tenants. For example, in 1877, arrangements were made with a tenant to break six or seven hundred acres and to farm it for five years in corn, the compensation to be twenty-five cents per bushel for all corn produced.13 About the same time, ditching was being done on some of the wetter land, sixty miles being dug in 1879. Cattle feeding remained, however, the principal activity, and the sales of livestock comprised the bulk of the gross returns of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year from the operations of the Fowler land.14 A decade later more of the land was being divided into tenant farms of a section each, and a considerable amount of tiling was being done. In 1888, it was reported that “a very large force of laborers have been put to work to ditch and tile several sections” of land belonging to Moses Fowler. At the time of his death in 1889, less

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13 This tenant maintained he could produce corn at fifteen cents per bushel. Lafayette, Indiana, Courier, quoted in Fowler, Indiana, Benton Review, June 11, 1885.

than half of the land was being farmed by some fifty tenants who kept it in corn and oats, with a small amount of clover. The tenant holdings were relatively large farm units and did not support a population sufficient to satisfy the business interests of the community.

Little criticism seems to have been directed at Fowler prior to his death because of the slowness with which his land was developed and the few farmers for whom it provided a livelihood. True, elsewhere in the prairies the large estates of the cattle kings were being developed more rapidly first as bonanza farms and then as small tenant farms which supported a substantial population while the Fowler land as late as 1887 had few families living on it. The West respected men of wealth and little criticism of them was permitted in the newspapers, save those of Greenback faith, or in the county histories and biographical volumes that appeared everywhere in the eighties.

Despite their respect for large property owners, the people of Benton and Tippecanoe counties were shocked at the size of Fowler's personal estate on which he had followed the prevalent custom of evading taxes by failing to make complete declarations. The estimated value of the personal property and real estate was between three and four million dollars much of which was in securities, deposits, and notes on which no personal property taxes had been paid for years. The size of the estate was breath-taking for it had made Fowler one of the three richest men in Indiana, the other two being William H. English and Clement Studebaker. The heirs had to settle for delinquencies in taxes covering nine years with heavy penalties.

While no provision was made for charity or education, Fowler's widow and descendants were later to make generous donations to Purdue University.

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16 In 1890, Fowler's executors sold his two-fifths share of the growing corn on 5,495 acres for $7,121. They also sold 76,000 bushels of corn, 40,000 bushels of oats, 660 tons of hay, and 171 head of cattle that he owned. Most of the livestock was held in partnership with William S. VanNatta. Final Record, Tippecanoe County Probate Records, LXV, 95; Fowler, Indiana, Benton Review, December 22, 1887, and April 12, 1888.

17 Fowler apparently had some plan to endow a "female college" for which a square mile of choice land had been designated as the location. Fowler, Indiana, Review, quoted in Lafayette, Indiana, Daily Courier,
More disturbing to the residents of Benton County were the sections of Fowler's will which stipulated that "No part of the real estate in Benton County . . . shall be sold or alienated . . . for the period of twenty-five years" after his death. Such restrictions on alienation are, of course, not uncommon, but this provision seemed to doom the county seat of Benton, Fowler, where most of the lots were owned by the family, and it would prevent the development of the large property west of the town, then in pasture. The Benton Review said the will embodies "some very grave mistakes."

The result is to establish a system of tenantry in this region for twenty years [twenty five] and to perpetuate a condition of things which has done more than all things to make all classes of business in Fowler and Earl Park unprofitable since they were first laid out as towns. This very fact has kept away from us a class of enterprising men who did not dare to hazard their capital in towns surrounded by what they term a "floating population." They had read of the misery, the want, and utter degradation of the people in some portions of Ireland where landlordism prevails and could not do otherwise than associate this condition in Benton County with afflicted Ireland.

We were talking with a gentleman of sound judgment . . . who expressed it as his opinion that in twenty years from now these Fowler lands would be so worn out as to be practically worthless and would fail to yield their increase, whereas if they could now be sold the purchasers would see to it that their improvement would be gradual from year to year and at the end of a score of years their value would be much greater than today.

If sold in small tracts instead of divided into tenant-operated farms of a section each, the land would provide for nearly three hundred families who would be a desirable class of citizens with deep interests in the community.

These murmurings against the Fowler will and the blighting effect it was expected to have upon the county were "loud, deep and prolonged," the local paper reported. Later,

August 23, 1889; DeWitt C. Goodrich and Charles R. Tuttle, Illustrated History of the State of Indiana (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1875), 642.
19 Lafayette, Indiana, Daily Courier, August 27, 1889.
20 Fowler, Indiana, Benton Review, September 5, 1889. The same point of view has been expressed in more recent times by Elmore Barce and Robert A. Swan, History of Benton County, Indiana (3 vols., Fowler, Indiana, 1930-1932), I, 111-112, who say: "With a soil of matchless fertility and a favorable climate, we could easily support a population of ten times" the present population. "If the day ever comes in Benton County when the tenant system may be dispensed with and the farm lands divided into freeholds of 40 and 80 acres each, the whole community will at once advance, both in population and in material wealth."
21 Fowler, Indiana, Benton Review, September 19, 1889.
in commenting upon the move to the West of five tenant families from the county and the larger emigration that was to occur in the spring, the Benton Review placed the responsibility on the large landowners who “are working the greatest injury to our prospects” by the “excessive” and “oppressive” rents they charge. Fowler, Sumner, Earl, and other large owners were a “curse to the community.”22 The Boswell Argus joined in the attack upon Fowler who was pilloried as a “financial monster, born and made possible by bad laws and unjust social conditions,” a speculator, a beneficiary of “unearned increment,” who “neither planted . . . or pruned . . . neither sowed, harvested or garnered . . . never made a brick, carried a hod or shoved a plane, yet he lived in a palace . . . was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.”23 Even the sedate Lafayette Daily Courier spoke of Fowler’s “critics [who] were numerous and severe.”24

Dispute among the children and widow of Moses Fowler led to a part of the will being set aside and the restrictions on alienation of the land were nullified. The heirs did, however, agree with Moses Fowler that “real estate . . . is the best investment” and for many years the hope that the lands would be placed on the market was not fulfilled.25 Despite the long continued intra-family litigation over the control of one-third of the estate inherited by a legally incompetent grandson,26 foreclosure of a part of the property inherited by a daughter, and donations to Purdue University, the third and fourth-generation descendants of Moses Fowler still own approximately thirteen thousand acres in Benton County. Of this amount 7,259 is held in trust for Moses Fowler Chase. James Moses Fowler, a grandson, who died without issue in Miami Beach, Florida, in 1944, left in trust his twenty-four hundred acres for the benefit of his seven nephews and nieces, the trust to continue for twenty-one years after the death of the last of them.27

While the pessimistic prophecies rendered at the time

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22 Ibid., October 31, 1889.
23 Quoted in the Lafayette, Indiana, Weekly Journal, September 6, 1889.
24 Lafayette, Indiana, Daily Courier, August 20, 1889; see also Lafayette, Indiana Weekly Journal, August 23, 1889.
25 Fowler, Indiana, Benton Review, June 12, 1890.
26 Indianapolis, Indiana, News, April 20, 1903.
27 Benton County Probate Order Book, XXXVII, 415.
of Fowler's death have not been entirely fulfilled, it is common knowledge that absent ownership has not been good for the land. In 1938, it was said that improvements were poor and backward, very little livestock was fed on the farms, the land had been cropped too closely to corn, little fertilizer had been applied, and the soil had been seriously depleted.

Adams Earl, after whom Earl Park was named, was closely associated with Moses Fowler for many years in shipping grain and livestock on flatboats down the Wabash, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, operating a wholesale grocery, meat packing, banking in Lafayette, and in the land and cattle business. He also had an ice business and a distillery, the slops and refuse of which were fed to livestock. On his large tract in Benton County, in the management of which his nephew, Adams Raub, had a share, he pastured from two to four thousand native-grade or Texas cattle.

Like other cattlemen whose costs were increasing Earl and Raub found that feeding grade cattle was proving less profitable than it had earlier. They turned, therefore, to purebred stock, and in the early eighties began importing Herefords from England. In 1882, they imported 132 breeding animals most of which were of the noblest blood lines in the British Isles. The best of this stock was taken to a sixteen hundred acre "model" farm in Tippecanoe County, called Shadeland, where Earl and his son-in-law, Charles B. Stuart, developed one of the largest and best-known Hereford herds in the United States. A glance at the Annual Catalogue of the Shadeland Farm Herd of Hereford Cattle of 1896 shows why Shadeland was called "the great American Hereford show place of its time." Here are, described over one hundred purebred Herefords ranging from Sir Bartle Frere, Lady Wilton 77th, Shadeland Climax, and the Earl of Shadeland 22nd, of whom it was said: "His Hereford character was so magnificent, his early maturity so complete, his levelness so perfect, his flesh covering so uniform, his general appearance so taking, and his substance and finish so remarkable, that

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28 In 1876, Raub offered to rent his six thousand acre pasture in Benton County or to take in cattle in lots of fifty or more for summer pasture.

29 Breeders' Gazette, II, 10, 92, 176 (June 22, July 13, and August 3, 1882).

30 Alvin H. Sanders, The Story of the Herefords (Chicago, 1914), 442.
the Championship could not be denied him." The claims may sound exaggerated but an examination of the advertisements of the leading Hereford breeders in 1899 indicates that the foundation of many of their herds was Shadeland bulls. In that year Earl and Stuart sold Shadeland stock to breeders in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Texas, and California as well as in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.31 The large importations of Herefords by Fowler and VanNatta and Earl and Stuart, the large scope of their operations, and their vigorous promotion of the Hereford strain brought them into active participation in the American Hereford Cattle Breeders Association, of which VanNatta was president and Stuart was director.

In the meantime, Earl and Raub introduced Herefords on their ranch in Benton County which rapidly thereafter displaced the grade stock. A principal market for their young bulls was the cattle companies of the Great Plains which were making efforts to improve their stock.32 Fewer cattle were now maintained and a part of the land was divided into small tracts that were fenced, modest dwellings and corncribs were constructed, and fifty-five tenants were settled upon the farms. The death of Adams Earl in 1898 brought to an end the large scale operations in purebred stock both on the Benton County land and on Shadeland. Ultimately, 4,719 acres of the Earl estate were acquired by the children of Thomas J. Watson, President of the International Business Machines. To this amount the Watsons have added a section of Fowler land making their total possessions in Benton and Tippecanoe counties 5,359 acres.33

George Ade has significantly limned Edward C. Sumner, one of the ablest of the Hoosier cattle kings.

He was a Green Mountain boy with a Calvin Coolidge training in thrift and acquisitiveness, and when they turned him loose in Indiana, where his New England gift for absorbing assets could have full play, he tried to annex all grazing land between the rising and setting sun . . . Like other benevolent despots of his generation, he lived in a mansion, and his manner of living was regal as compared with that of his de-

31 Breeders' Gazette, XVI, 389 (December 18, 1889).
32 In 1884, Raub and Hixson with whom Adams Earl was associated sold a carload of grade Hereford bull calves of twelve to fourteen months to C. A. Elliott & Co., Del Norte, Colorado, for one hundred and twenty dollars per head. Breeders' Gazette, V, 234 (February 14, 1884).
33 Another absentee landlord who is well known in other fields is James W. Gerard, owner of 884 acres in Benton County.
pendents...[He] now reposes beside a monument which would be a suitable reminder of any European monarch, which is proper, because the kingdom ruled by Old Ed was larger than some of the kingdoms of the Old World and a good deal more active.\textsuperscript{34}

Sumner commenced buying land in 1846 in Benton County, Indiana, and in 1849 in the adjacent Iroquois County, Illinois. Within a few years, he had built up holdings that exceeded thirty thousand acres. Of this amount, the seventy-seven hundred acres in Iroquois County cost him no more than a dollar an acre.

Sumner's energies were largely devoted to the fattening of cattle upon his land and the production of grain. Four herds of five hundred each ranged over his property. Sumner took pride in his cattle which he loved, and, as he became prosperous and more aloof from the common man, he continued to lavish attention upon them.

In the fifties, Sumner drove his cattle overland to market in New York, the herdsmen starting one hundred cattle every two weeks in the growing season. This was no longer necessary or feasible, however, after the completion of the Big Four Railroad through Benton County. Thereafter, the reputation of his herds for size and quality attracted buyers who vigorously bid for them to a point that assured him high returns. After all, the land had been acquired at low prices, labor charges certainly were not high, and other costs never became heavy. A granddaughter later recalled two large sales made by Sumner, one in 1880 when six hundred steers averaging fourteen hundred pounds brought $42,600, and the other, two years later, when eleven hundred cattle were bought for the export trade for one hundred thousand dollars.\textsuperscript{35}

As the advance of settlers forced Sumner to confine his herds, he “built mile after mile of heavy plank fencing, hauling the material with horses and oxen from the nearest stations.” To drain the low areas twelve yoke of oxen were kept to haul the heavy ditching plow that was said to cut a drain eighteen inches deep and five feet wide. Caring for such large herds and performing the work of fencing, draining,

\textsuperscript{34} Ade, “Prairie Kings of Yesterday,” \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, CCIV, July 4, 1931, pp. 77-78.

\textsuperscript{35} Barce and Swan, \textit{History of Benton County, Indiana}, III (1932), 66.
and tiling the land called for large numbers of laborers. To supply them, Sumner made frequent trips to Chicago to bring back "a carload of farm hands," mostly German immigrants."

Like the other cattle barons of the prairie, Sumner found laborers increasingly unependable, and he slowly turned to tenants to whom he rented a part of his land on a share basis. At first two-fifths, later one-half, of the grain went to the landlord as his share, and the remainder was sold to him at the market price for feeding to his cattle. By 1876, he had fifteen tenants, mostly on the Illinois side in Iroquois County, who were raising nothing but corn on their farms year after year. Not only was the grain regularly taken off the land and fed to cattle on the Indiana land, but the cornstalks were cut off at the roots and fed elsewhere, leaving nothing to put back into the soil. No rotation was practiced. The tenant houses which were little more than shacks did not serve to attract the best type of farmers to the land, and the township in which the Sumner farms were located, despite the high quality of the soil, was regarded as backward.

Sumner's large possessions made him especially vulnerable when farmers began to display unfriendliness toward monopolistic landowners. He came to look with jaundiced eye upon all assessments and used his influence to beat them down through intimidation, legal action, and failure to pay taxes. For this he was charged with being a "tax shirker" by the local Greenback paper. He was also accused of driving his herds of cattle on to his Illinois land the first of April when property was being assessed in Indiana and of reversing the procedure when the Illinois assessors were at work in May.

The size of Sumner's operations are indicated to some extent by the inventory prepared at the time of his death in 1882. It showed him in possession of 600 beef cattle, 11 yoke of oxen, 40 mules, 61 horses and colts, and 19,000 bushels of corn in cribs. His landed possessions had shrunk to twenty thousand acres.

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37 H. H. Beckwith, History of Iroquois County (Chicago, 1880), 487.
38 Watseka, Illinois, Iroquois County Times, March 9, 23, April 6, 13, and July 20, 1878.
39 Inventory of the estate of Edward C. Sumner, September 1, 1882, Probate File 337, Benton County.
In the absence of a will, Sumner's estate was divided among his children, two daughters receiving the Indiana land and a son the Illinois land. In the third generation one granddaughter, an only child, received a third of the Sumner lands while three other grandchildren inherited each a ninth and five inherited each a fifteenth. Such a division was unsatisfactory to those with a small share. When Jennie E. Caldwell, the more fortunate granddaughter and a childless widow, died in 1912, she was in possession of sixty-three hundred acres valued at nine hundred thousand dollars, but on which there was a mortgage of one hundred sixteen thousand dollars. Her will provided an unpleasant surprise to the other grandchildren for none of them were major beneficiaries. After some bequests to other relatives, the will provided that the remaining fifty-four hundred acres should be placed in trust for the benefit of the Jennie E. Fowler Home for "honest, virtuous, sick and financially helpless mothers and their babes." At this turn of events, the other grandchildren of Edward Sumner began an almost endless litigation to break the will and divide the property among themselves. Eventually, a compromise was reached whereby the latter were to receive two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in lieu of all claims against the property but not all the litigants accepted this action, and the fight was resumed. When all the contestants were exhausted, there remained to the Home but a fourth of the original tract it was bequeathed. Ill luck dogged the Home for it was destroyed by fire shortly after it was opened and again fourteen years after it was reconstructed it had to close because of diminishing revenue from the landed endowment.

Despite the losses sustained through litigation and mortgage foreclosure, three grandchildren of Edward C. Sumner own 1,611 acres and the Home owns 1,358 acres in Benton County. Of the Illinois land, the heirs still hold sixty-eight hundred acres.

Jesse Sumner who inherited the Illinois land passed it on to his three sons. When one of these sons William Reynolds Sumner died in 1936, leaving no children, his two brothers,

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40 Benton County Deeds, IV, 81.
41 Fowler, Indiana, Benton Review, February 22, 1912.
42 Petition of Lee Dinwiddie, Trustee of the Jennie E. Caldwell Home, November 15, 1932, in 741 Probate Records, Benton County.
the only heirs, presented a statement to the court for inheritance-tax purposes that provides an interesting commentary on one type of estate management. The property consisting of 1,628 acres on the Illinois side and 547 acres on the Indiana side was divided into six tenant farms. Never since the land was first farmed in the sixties had anything but corn and oats been raised on it. No livestock was kept on the land, the corn and stalks were fed elsewhere, and no manure or fertilizer was applied. The owners had “always been opposed to the spending of any money for improving or conserving the soil, the logical consequence having been . . . that the soil has been robbed of most of its available fertility.”

Tests showed that the soil would require ten years for rehabilitation because it was acid and poor in available plant food. The tenant improvements were of the simplest and cheapest type, only one of the houses had a cellar, and all were the subject of constant complaint. The fences were in bad repair and required replacement, drainage was inadequate and called for the expenditure of thirty thousand dollars to prevent further erosion and drowning of crops, and finally, morning glories, bull nettles, and cockleburs infested the land. The brothers concluded their indictment of the farm management of their father and brother by saying that the farm had a reputation of being “worn-out land.”

Alexander Kent, of whom it was said that “he was . . . a rearing, tearing, compacted bundle of energy,” played a large part in the development of Newton and Jasper counties in Indiana. With his brother Phineas, he bought thirty thousand acres, much of which although classed as swamp land was suitable for grazing. Extensive feeding of livestock raised by Kent and of feeders imported from the plains marked the first use of the land. But no matter how sentimental the cattle barons were concerning their livestock, they had to adapt themselves to changing conditions, the result of rising land values. Kent invested in improving the land, constructing miles of fences, digging ditches in low areas, and erecting homes for workers. His cattle ranch became a bonanza farm with great fields in corn. Continued labor difficulties induced him to sell a part of his holdings to workers on long-term credit and to rent small tracts on a grain-

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43 Inventory of property, estate of W. R. Sumner, by Aaron T. and Edward C. Sumner. Iroquois County Probate Records.
share basis. It was said that “half the local population” was “on his pay roll as herdsmen or field hands.” In 1860, fifty-four settlers had either bought small tracts of him on which they were making payments or had borrowed of him to finance improvements, the amount of the debts ranging from fifty to four hundred and eighty dollars. In 1877, Kent seemed anxious to dispose of much of his property for he offered for sale twenty thousand acres. Much of this was only slightly improved, though it was fenced, but a five-thousand acre tract was advertised as being well-drained and in cultivation with twelve houses on it. Another tract of five thousand acres had two hundred and sixty acres in cultivation, three houses, and two orchards.

Perhaps the most extensive estate in the Kankakee Valley was that of Lemuel Milk and his partners. Their holdings in Kankakee and Iroquois counties, Illinois, and Newton County, Indiana, were estimated at sixty-five thousand acres. Milk experimented with sheep raising, having at one time a flock of ten thousand, but cattle, which were better adapted to the area, constituted the major part of his business. He bought young stock, instead of raising them, fed them, until they were three years old and then drove them to market. From fifteen hundred to twenty-five hundred head were kept on his farms in addition to fifteen hundred hogs and three hundred horses that were used for farming purposes. Ditching and draining were undertaken on a large scale. One field of two thousand acres was put in corn and in another year ten thousand bushels of flaxseed were harvested. The bonanza-farm period lasted for a short while, but it was not long before Milk was carving up a part of his estate into farms that ranged from eighty acres to a full section which were rented to tenants. At one time Milk had fifty-six tenant farms. Apparently, Milk learned early that first-rate housing attracted a superior class of tenants, for the improvements were stated to be “better than we usually find on rented farms.”

In 1886, thirty of Milk’s Illinois farms, ranging in

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46 Ibid., October 2, 1884.
47 Kankakee, Illinois, *Gazette*, quoted in Watseka, Illinois, *Iroquois County Times*, November 18, 1875; *Sectional Maps showing the Location*
size from eighty to six hundred and forty acres, were offered for sale at prices from thirty to fifty dollars an acre according to location and improvement. Several thousand acres of the Indiana land is still in the possession of the family.

Few residents of Warren County, Indiana, or Vermilion County, Illinois, could have been ignorant of the affairs of the Goodwine family whose large cattle operations, extensive estates, and numerous children kept them in the public eye. James B. and John W. Goodwine were among the early pioneers of these two counties. Both entered largely into the business of buying, fattening, and driving cattle to market, and both used their profits to buy and improve estates. James acquired 10,250 acres in Warren County on which he pastured from twelve hundred to fifteen hundred cattle. John purchased six thousand acres in Vermilion County, Illinois, where he maintained somewhat smaller herds. The most recent ownership maps of these counties show a number of thousand acres still in the hands of the family.

From the brewing and distilling business, James W. Gaff, of Aurora, Indiana, and Cincinnati, Ohio, accumulated a fortune, part of which was invested in a cattle ranch of eleven thousand acres in Newton County. As many as one thousand cattle were fattened on the ranch which was completely fenced. Homes for laborers and tenants were constructed, and a considerable amount of ditching was done. Much of the Gaff land was later taken over by William Raff and J. Lawler as part of their twenty-two thousand acre holding in Newton and Jasper counties.

of over 2,500,000 Acres, Selected Farming and Woodlands in the State of Illinois. 850,000 Acres get for Sale by the Illinois Central Railroad (Chicago, 1867), 66; Beckwith, History of Iroquois County, 370ff. Watseka, Illinois, Republican, January 6, 1886.

48 Watseka, Illinois, Republican, January 6, 1886.

49 Portrait and Biographical Album of Vermilion and Edgar Counties (Chicago, 1889), 207; Battey & Co., Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper, and Newton, Indiana (Chicago, 1885), 171. Farther south in Vermilion County, Indiana, and Vermilion County, Illinois, the Collett family acquired five thousand acres which, after a period of feeding livestock was divided into small farms. In 1879, two British visitors reported that John Collett had in the past as many as forty tenants on his land who rented farms for three dollars an acre. The cost to Collett was no more than twenty-five cents an acre, leaving him a satisfactory return. On other land, Collett paid tenants twelve and one-half cents for every bushel of corn they raised. Notebook of Clare Reed and Albert Pell, November 12, 1879, in Appendix, Agricultural Interests Commission, "Report of the Assistant Commissioners" in Parliamentary Papers, 1880, XVIII (London, 1880), 17-18.

50 Battey & Co., Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper and Newton, Indiana, 793.
No account of Hoosier cattle kings would do justice without at least mentioning Henry T. Sample (4,000 acres), Robert W. Sample (3,800 acres), Cephas Atkinson (12,000 acres), Joseph Heath (4,000 acres), Parnham Boswell (12,000 acres), Hugh Scott (4,500 acres), LeRoy Templeton (7,000 acres), Orlando Bush (4,000 acres), John Kious (4,000 acres), and Miller Kenton (5,000 acres). The prairie counties are dotted with little villages that were either named after or by the prairie landlords such as Atkinson, Boswell, Chase, Conrad, Earl Park, Fowler, Gifford, Kentland, Raub, Rensselaer, Reynolds, Templeton, and Wolcott.

The great day of the cattle kings was from the outbreak of the Civil War to the eighties, by which time most of the principal figures had passed beyond the great divide. Fowler Sumner, Earl, Milk, Kent, and the others were important men whose achievements rank them with titans in industry and commerce. They had a major share in improving and developing the prairie to its present state of productiveness. The wealth that came to them from the cattle industry, rents, and sales of their holdings permitted them to live in regal grandeur on their estates, in Lafayette or in one of the smaller towns of the region.

They built huge “mansions” with “Brussels carpet on the floors and decanters of port on the walnut sideboards.” The “two story brick mansion” of Edward Sumner has been described by Judge Elmore Barce:

There were great drives and porches at the front—a large hall at the entrance, and on the lower floor seven large rooms with frescoed ceilings fourteen feet in height. The upper story comprised eight large rooms. In all rooms, above and below, were fireplaces and grates. To the rear of the mansion were two large pantries, and quarters for the servants.

Another mansion, the third home built by Jacob Cassel, was “both mammoth and imposing. The stair casing and the panels are of oak and walnut. There are six large rooms above, five below, and two halls.” The former home of

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51 The Daniel Sigler farm of 2,604 acres in Jasper County was sold in 1888 to Hamilton Brown of Fort Dodge, Iowa. Rensselaer, Indiana, Republican quoted in Kentland, Indiana, Gazette, July 5, 1888.
53 Barce and Swan, History of Benton County, Indiana, III, 67.
54 Ibid., 102.
Abraham Mann, an extensive cattle feeder with a farm of four thousand acres, was described in 1879 as having "twenty spacious rooms, including dairy and laundry, and exclusive of the large halls, closets and garret. It was built at a cost of . . . $30,000. The adjoining grounds are laid out with taste and planted with flowers and evergreens. A greenhouse is attached to the premises."\textsuperscript{55} When recently 1,310 acres of the old Mann place together with the house was sold to A. G. Belt, owner of the Steak 'n Shake restaurants, the "palatial" three-story house was described as having thirteen rooms, five bathrooms, and a ballroom on the third floor.\textsuperscript{56}

The Fowler and Earl homes in Lafayette, built respectively in 1852 and 1859, are superb illustrations of the lavish splendor with which the cattle barons surrounded themselves.\textsuperscript{57} Fowler's English gothic type house was adapted from the plans of a "country villa" outlined and described by Andrew Jackson Downing, the distinguished architect and landscape gardener in his The Architecture of Country Houses; Including Designs for Cottages, Farm Houses and Villas.\textsuperscript{58} Red brick, now covered with stucco, was substituted for the recommended New Jersey sandstone. Downing had urged that the house "should have no common-place, contracted or mean site. It should stand on a commanding locality . . . overlooking a fine reach of picturesque but cultivated landscape." This was provided by placing it in the center of a lot comprising an entire city block and the "picturesque" was shortly furnished by the construction of the present Wabash Railroad which cut across a corner of the estate. The grace and charm of the structure was matched by the interior finish in oak and black walnut that is elaborately handcarved, the intricate scrollwork, the frescoes, the marble fireplaces, and the gold leaf in the ceiling, since removed. Extensive changes were later made by a grandson of Moses Fowler, and more recently the home became the headquarters of the Tippecanoe County

\textsuperscript{55} H. W. Beckwith, History of Vermilion County (Chicago, 1879), 676.\textsuperscript{56} Bloomington, Illinois, Pantagraph, October 18, 1945.\textsuperscript{57} These homes were not "lavish" in comparison with the turreted castles and baronial halls then being constructed by millionaires in New York and Newport, but for a town and area scarcely out of the frontier stage they were indeed splendid.\textsuperscript{58} The book was published in New York in 1850. Visits to the Fowler and Earl homes at the invitation of Miss Alameda McCollough and Mrs. A. C. Clouser were most helpful.
Historical Society. Enough remains, however, to suggest the taste of its builder and the wealth he expended in making the place one of the show spots of Lafayette.

Adams Earl built his house on a high knoll in the midst of a ten-acre plot, a part of which was kept for a deer park. No means were spared in making the home fit for the entertainment of the most aristocratic people. High ceilinged rooms with eight beautifully constructed marble fireplaces, some in alabaster white and others in black carrara marble, heavy draperies, carpets covering the floor from wall to wall, exotic vases, exquisite china from the best potteries of England, and massive walnut and mahogany furniture all combined tastefully to give distinction to the home.

With these mansions and the lavish decorations, oil paintings, European and oriental bric-a-brac, and furniture that filled them from main floor to garret, went a social life that was scarcely harmonious with frontier existence. High society, an aristocracy, had come to the prairies. Essentially a rural aristocracy at the outset, though some of its best-known members always dwelt in towns and cities, there was a tendency to move to neighboring urban centers either in the first or second generation. Rising corn-belt cities like Springfield, Decatur, Bloomington, Champaign, and Danville, Illinois, and Lafayette, Crawfordsville, Logansport, and Indianapolis, Indiana, attracted the sons of the cattle kings where they entered into banking, real estate, the law, and politics. The income from their estates, now divided into numerous and on the whole highly profitable farms assured them independence and a comfortable living. It also made possible donations to local universities and colleges and other philanthropic institutions.59

The heritage of the cattle kings is shown in the plat books and ownership maps of the prairie counties, which reveal large blocks of land still held by their families. But memories of the cattle kings, their buoyant optimism, their driving energy, their great herds of cattle, the speed with which they brought the prairie into cultivation, their rapid accumulation of wealth, their lavish mansions, and their conspicuous consumption are fast fading. Their share in con-

59 The donations of the Ellsworth, the Fowler, and the Earl families to Purdue University and Wabash College are illustrations.
verting the wild prairie of yesterday into the rich corn belt of today was as vital and in its way as romantic as that of the lonely pioneer in coonskin, or the cowboy with his six-shooter, but it has been much less appreciated.