

THE PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN

1880 1925

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of  
the University of Wisconsin in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy.

by

ARLAN CLAYTON HELGESON

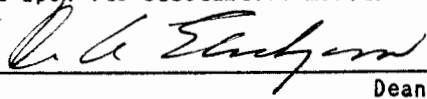
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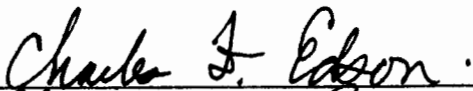
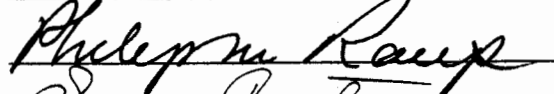
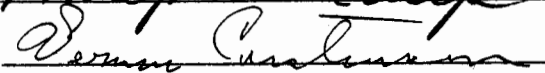
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Preface .....	i

PART ONE

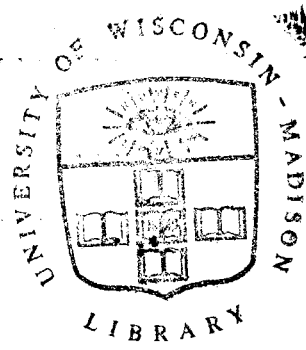
THE DISCOVERY OF POSSIBILITIES

Introduction .....	1
I. Private Promotion of Agricultural Settlement, 1860-1900 .....	5
II. Promotion of Cut-Over Lands by Newspapers and Voluntary Groups, 1880-1900 .....	36
III. Official Promotion of Agricultural Settlement in the Cutover, Before 1900 .....	71
IV. The Progress of Settlement to 1900 .....	113

PART TWO

THE CULTIVATION OF POSSIBILITIES

Introduction .....	117
V. Selling the Land, 1900-1925 .....	122
VI. The Colonizers .....	157
VII. Publicizing the Stump Lands After 1900: News- papers and Organizations .....	194
VIII. County and State Promotion of the Cutover, 1900-1925 .....	228
IX. The College of Agriculture and the Stump Lands .....	257
X. The Progress of Settlement: Conclusions .....	293
Appendices .....	308
Bibliography.....	311



## PREFACE

The settlement of cut-over lands for agricultural purposes is as old as American history. With the exception of natural or burned out clearings the pioneer farmer cleared his fields from the Atlantic coast to the prairies and plains of the West. In some regions, especially those bordering lakes and rivers, he could market the timber and its by-products which he took from his land. Sometimes he found only the stumps which the lumbermen left him. The pattern of clearing and planting was old and established. From the standpoint of the farmer land must be cleared to be put to use. In some areas this formula persisted to the embarrassment of later generations.

While American agriculture grew up on deforested lands, certain areas of the nation were exploited primarily for their valuable timber. Unlike the lands cleared for agricultural purposes these lands were only partially cleared. They were hurriedly "cut over" by lumbermen who left stumps, brush, and undesirable trees. Hence the term cut-over came into use to describe such areas. While the use of the term did not necessarily imply unfitness for agriculture, the word cut-over has become popularly identified with lands which have proved submarginal for farming. That these lands were often unsuited for farming one cannot deny. Indeed, the Wisconsin Cutover has become widely known as a "problem area."

Between 1880 and 1920 a number of land companies, public officials and voluntary groups sought to bring about the settlement of the stump lands of northern Wisconsin with farmers. To the men who promoted this settlement the Cutover was not unsuited for farming. They recognized it as a problem area only in that it was not settled. They devoted time, energy and huge amounts of money to attracting settlers to northern Wisconsin. These promotional efforts are the special subject of the chapters that follow.

Readers who are acquainted with earlier land promotion in American history, as well as with contemporary efforts to obtain settlers by land companies, railroads, and state immigration agencies, will undoubtedly recognize much that is familiar in the following pages. They will also see that the stump land promotion differed essentially from that of many regions in that the primary exploitation in northern Wisconsin had been for timber, not for farming. The agricultural possibilities of many parts of northern Wisconsin remained unproven throughout the entire period under consideration here. But to many already established communities in the Cutover the promotion of agricultural settlement seemed their only chance for survival. Hence the stump land promotion had about it an air of desperate optimism and universal participation probably found in few other regions.

For the most part the story of settlement and the

statistics presented in the following chapters are confined to twenty-four northern counties. The line of demarcation for the Cutover has been more or less arbitrarily designated as the southern boundaries of Oconto, Shawano, Marathon, Clark, Chippewa, Barron and Polk counties. Other counties might have been included in the study but for various reasons they have been omitted. Those counties, for instance, in which more than half of the lands were devoted to agriculture before 1880 have been omitted from the study except for occasional mention. The study is divided into two parts, dealing with promotional efforts before and after 1900.

Materials for this study have been of a very heterogeneous nature, including personal interviews, books and papers of several land and lumber companies, the papers, formal reports and publications of a number of state agencies, publications of many railroads, land companies, and promotional associations, the files of many northern Wisconsin and other newspapers, and a number of other sources. I am indebted to many people who assisted me in various ways: to the staff of the Eau Claire Public Library, where the Shaw Lumber Company papers were used; to the Minnesota Historical Society and the Laird Norton Company of Winona, for permission to use that company's papers in the manuscript collection of the Society and in the company vaults in Winona; to the same society and to General Timber Services, Incorporated, for

granting me the rights to use the records of the American Immigration Company. Lucile Kane, Curator of Manuscripts at the Minnesota Historical Society, gave me great assistance in my study of these records. I am also indebted to her for allowing me to read parts of her forthcoming volume on The Lumber Industry in the Lake States. My thanks are due to the staff of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, especially to Dr. Wilbur Glover, who allowed me to accompany him on a northern field trip in order to gather materials for this study and made several tape recordings which have been of great assistance to me. I am grateful also to Alice Smith, who permitted me to use her notes on the Cushing Papers. I am heavily indebted to my wife, who typed manuscript and corrected copy with admirable forbearance.

## PART ONE

### THE DISCOVERY OF POSSIBILITIES

The business growing out of the utilization of our forests would alone enrich our county...but with it will come also the swift development of our mineral and agricultural resources; and it will be seen that no portion of the State has been more richly endowed by nature than our own.

The Ashland Press  
March 27, 1875

## PART ONE

### The Discovery of Possibilities

#### Introduction

In the last decades of the nineteenth century a concentrated effort to promote agricultural settlement in northern Wisconsin began. While this was by no means a new movement, it had not gained much momentum earlier for various reasons. The heavy growth of timber covering northern Wisconsin and the cheap lands waiting for the plow on the prairies and plains of the West loomed large in retarding the agricultural development of the area.

The relation of the Wisconsin forests and the Western plains to the lack of settlement in northern Wisconsin was more complex than it might at first appear. In the first place, timber from the northern forests made possible the building of homes on the plains. In that sense this wooded area aided in diverting the flow of settlers away from Wisconsin. However, in some localities lumbering and agricultural settlement came simultaneously, and the taxation of timber lands made possible the roads and schools which the settler demanded. To this extent the forests encouraged settlement. On the other hand, some lumbermen fought settlement on the lands which they controlled, even while they were inviting eventual settlement by clearing the land.

One thing seems certain; few areas in northern

Wisconsin were cleared simply to make agricultural land, as much of the forest land in southern Wisconsin and eastern United States had been. Either the settler combined logging and farming, or he purchased stump lands already cleared by lumbermen. It was not merely a case of getting the timber out of the way; most of northern Wisconsin was cut and burned over before the agricultural settler came.

That the settler preferred breaking the prairies and plains to grubbing stumps is of course an obvious explanation for sparse settlement in northern Wisconsin. No doubt other motives existed for ignoring the stump lands. Perhaps a farm boy ready to make his own way in the world found northern Wisconsin somewhat dull in comparison with the romantic West. Whatever the causes, the foreign born were settling the northern counties in 1890, while the native sons of Wisconsin and other states were breaking the prairie lands of Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska.\* In all likelihood the relatively low standard of living of the immigrant settler had much to do with his migrating to northern Wisconsin. Often his native home had been in a forest region, and he attempted to match it as closely as he could in America.

\*In 1890 one-third of the population of twenty-nine northern counties was foreign born. Joseph Schafer, History of Agriculture in Wisconsin (Madison, 1922) 139.

Moreover, native Americans could probably master more readily the changes in farming techniques made necessary by the climate and soils of the semi-arid regions.

By 1890, however, certain changes rendered the stump lands of northern Wisconsin more desirable for settlement. Much of the good agricultural land of the prairies was now under tillage, although a considerable amount remained for the great number who were willing to cross the border into Canada. Moreover, bad years of drought and blizzard, boom and bust, had changed the attitude of many who had ventured out into the plains. As the area of available Western land diminished, population increased and immigration rose to new heights.

Many immigrants sought lands on which to settle. In the cities they crowded into foreign settlements which became the special provinces of land agents from areas like northern Wisconsin. In times of depression and labor unrest in the cities there were many who resented the presence of foreigners; thus the movement to persuade the immigrant to go to the land found support in cities like Milwaukee.

In addition to these developments the decline of lumbering in Wisconsin led to a search for a means of survival in many communities that had risen in the north. Lumbermen who held vast acreages of stump lands sought increasingly to promote them for settlement. If, instead,

they forfeited their acres by failing to pay taxes on them, a common practice among lumbermen who valued only the timber on their holdings, the lands eventually found their way into the hands of speculators and promoters of settlement.

The story of these promoters of settlement in northern Wisconsin is the special subject of the pages that follow. It has seemed convenient to discuss first the speculators and promoters themselves, giving examples of their work, and then the voluntary and state organizations founded to supplement the activities of the private landholders. The turn of the century provides the stopping point for this first portion of the story of the attempts to populate the Wisconsin Cutover.

# I

## PRIVATE PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT

1860-1900

By the very nature of their callings speculators, promoters and pioneer settlers alike are hopefully aware of the widest range of possibilities for the lands in which they invest money, talents and toil. This fact is no less significant in the history of northern Wisconsin than in that of the Piedmont or the Ohio Valley. Thus, while minerals or timber may have been of primary interest, the possibilities of agricultural development played a prominent part in some of the earliest speculation in upper Wisconsin lands. Although many lumbermen chose to confine themselves to the exploitation of the forests, their logging camps supported a skimpy agriculture and their denudation of the forest lands hastened the day when they or their successors would have to consider seriously the promotion of agricultural settlement. In some areas lumbering and agriculture were happily combined. The pattern of exploitation fitted no precise mold, as the following pages show.

This chapter is intended to illustrate the nineteenth century methods of promoting northern Wisconsin for agricultural settlement. Every village and hamlet in the Cut-over had someone engaged in selling land to settlers, and the individuals and organizations described on the following

pages are only examples whose contemporaries are too numerous to mention.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward speculators exhibited a sporadic interest in northern Wisconsin as a region for agricultural settlement. Areas favored with natural transportation routes were promoted early, among them the valley of the St. Croix River. As early as 1859 the Northwestern Land Agency of Prescott, Pierce County, attempted to lure settlers to this valley with the aid of a pamphlet written by Oliver Gibbs. Gibbs, a clerk in the state assembly, called the attention of southern Wisconsin farmers to the advantages of an area where, he said, settlers had cultivated crops for fifteen years without a failure. Farmers who contemplated moving west to Kansas or Nebraska should investigate instead the valley of the St. Croix, where potatoes and wheat, prodigious in their yield, found ample markets down the Mississippi in St. Louis and in the pineries where logging operations were under way. Moreover, settlers could expect facilities for eastern trade to equal those enjoyed by southern Wisconsin farmers, once railroad connections with the port of Superior were obtained.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver Gibbs, Jr. The St. Croix Valley (Madison, 1859) 1-3.

Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts was one investor whose interest in power sites, timber and lands in the St. Croix Valley dated from the mid-forties. Cushing and other stockholders in the St. Croix Manufacturing and Improvement Company, as they titled their organization formed in 1857, at first appeared to be somewhat indifferent to the wants of settlers. A representative of the company complained that its failure to invest \$500 in a good road practically isolated St. Croix Falls from a farm community nearby. He urged the company to build a road to Superior as a means of encouraging agricultural settlement and suggested that they dispose of some farm lands at low prices and on favorable terms so as to create interest in the region.<sup>2</sup>

After the Civil War Cushing engaged in a settlement scheme conceived with one of his land agents in the belief that they could settle the Cushing lands with European

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2 H. K. Bartlett to Caleb Cushing, October 4, August 9, 1857; May 2, 1858. Cushing Papers, Microfilm copy in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Reel 4. At this time the company held a strip approximately one-fourth of a mile deep, extending for two miles along the Wisconsin bank of the St. Croix River. Act of Incorporation and By Laws of the Saint Croix Manufacturing and Improvement Company.... (Washington, 1857), in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

immigrants.<sup>3</sup> Their attempts began in 1868 with the incorporation of the Great European-American Emigration Land Company in New York. Cushing became the president of this organization, while Henning A. Taube of a prominent Swedish family assumed the position of general superintendent.<sup>4</sup> Capitalized at a million dollars, the Emigration Land Company announced its intention to engage in business in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas and several other states.<sup>5</sup>

Cushing pledged many of his St. Croix holdings to the new Emigration Land Company and, with his brother William,

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3 Alice E. Smith, "Caleb Cushing's Investments in the St. Croix Valley," Wisconsin Magazine of History, 28:1 (September, 1944) 14. Since not all of the pertinent Cushing papers are available on microfilm in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Miss Smith graciously permitted the writer to use the notes prepared in her study of the original manuscripts in the Library of Congress. Except where designated as based on microfilm, the writer's citations of the Cushing Papers stem from these notes. It should also be clear that the writer's interpretation is shaped largely by the article cited above.

4 Taube's brother Arvid was the General Superintendent of Railroads in Sweden. Other officers in the Emigration Land Company were Isaac Tallmadge, Vice President; J. A. Bartlett, Treasurer; J. D. Reymert, Secretary; J. Jay Watson, Manager, Trustees of the company included the above officers and John E. Sundstrom of New Orleans. New York Daily Tribune, December 2, 1868. The Great European American Emigration Land Company.... (New York, 1868), Cushing Papers. Henning A. Taube, Upplysingar for Utvandrare til Amerika (Stockholm, 1869), 1, 2.

5 New York Daily Tribune, December 2, 1868.

contracted to purchase and hold for colonization by the company all the unsold state agricultural college lands in Polk County. In addition the Cushing advanced the necessary capital for the company to begin operations.<sup>6</sup> In 1869 "Count" Taube proceeded to Sweden where he issued a booklet detailing the plans of the Emigration Land Company. Settlers needed \$1000 to make an eighty acre farm in America, Taube said, although such a sum was sufficient for buying a larger farm through yearly payments.<sup>7</sup> For the trip from Stockholm to St. Croix Falls passengers could expect to pay \$241.35, with lower rates for children. Rates from other parts of Europe to the Wisconsin colony were also listed in the booklet.<sup>8</sup>

Upon the arrival of a colony of Swedes in the summer of 1869 it became evident that some misunderstanding

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6 Copy of Memorandum between C. and W. Cushing and the Great European American Emigration Land Company, August 21, 1869, Cushing Papers.

7 He itemized the expenses as follows: Eighty acres of land, \$200; a pair of oxen, \$150; two cows, \$80; a sow with litter, \$10; three sheep, \$7; chickens, \$10; 1 plow, \$24; breaking plow (he advised saving money through joint ownership with other settlers) \$40; a wagon, \$50; a harrow, \$10; tools such as axes and shovels, \$10; food and shelter for animals, \$50; food for a family of five, \$149; miscellaneous, \$210. Upplysingar for Utwandrare til Amerika, 25.

8 Ibid., 25 ff.

existed between Taube and the company. Settlers arriving in July were disturbed to find that no lands would be ready for sale until the fall of the year. Having made some commitments as to their support, Taube purchased goods for them on the company's credit. He also promised them employment and in the following spring a group of unpaid immigrants employed by the company took the company agent prisoner, releasing him only after he made arrangements to borrow the money to pay them. Taube persuaded Cushing to advance the funds necessary for making good his promises to the immigrants, but this climaxed a succession of difficulties which destroyed his standing with the company.

Company officials had worried about Taube's extravagant living habits in New York and Europe. Moreover, the rumors they had heard that he had made false promises to emigrants regarding provisions for their support and employment in America now seemed to be confirmed. Settlers at St. Croix Falls besieged Cushing with reports that Taube or his agents had sold them stock in the company with the assurance that it could be exchanged for land of their own choosing upon their arrival at St. Croix Falls. Once at the Falls they found that the company had no land, and the reports of a swindle spread far and wide. Cushing resigned his presidency, other officers severed their connections with the company, and together they published a

broadside in European papers divorcing themselves entirely from Taube and the European members of the company.<sup>9</sup>

So ended one of the first ambitious attempts to colonize a part of northern Wisconsin for agricultural purposes. Cushing still had a large amount of land on his hands. He endeavored to overcome the weight of suspicion and distrust which the European venture attached to the name of St. Croix Falls. He found this difficult to do. His agent reported that it was difficult to interest Scandinavians in the Cushing lands because of Taube's "swindles."<sup>10</sup> Cushing continued to be troubled by Taube's victims as late as 1872, when two Swedish immigrants forcibly took from his agent deeds to lands they claimed Taube had sold them. They recorded the deeds and sold them

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<sup>9</sup> Smith, "Caleb Cushing's Investments in the St. Croix Valley," 16, 17. Concerning the arrival of the Swedish settlers and the ensuing troubles, see: Isaac Freeland to Caleb Cushing, December 1, 1869; James Thompson to Caleb Cushing; June 8, 1870; J. D. Reymert to Isaac Freeland (copy), April 11, 1870; Cushing Papers. On the actions of Count Taube and the ensuing break-up of the company see: Henning A. Taube to Caleb Cushing, November 11, 1869; J. D. Reymert to Caleb Cushing, November 19, 22, 1869; Victor Bergren and Albert Larson to Caleb Cushing, January 13, 1870; Draft of Letter of Caleb Cushing to Trustees of Great European American Emigration Land Company Resigning the Office of President, March 24, 1870; J. D. Reymert to Caleb Cushing, March 24, 1870; S. Wilke to Caleb Cushing, April 2, 1870; Hjalmar Tilberg to Caleb Cushing, April 25, 1870; Cushing Papers.

<sup>10</sup> Christian Bors to Caleb Cushing, January 4, 1871, Cushing Papers, Microfilm, Reel 5. H. D. Barron to William Cushing, August 16, 1872, Ibid., Reel 2.

immediately to third parties.<sup>11</sup> Despite such troubles Cushing was able to dispose of nearly three thousand acres by 1872, although he retained over 40,000 acres purchased for colonization purposes.<sup>12</sup> These lands were offered at from three to seven dollars an acre in 1875.<sup>13</sup> During the previous year the colorful J. Stannard Baker, who assumed management of Cushing's lands, proceeded with great energy to put the Cushing interests in order. He initiated in this way an enterprise that would be carried in his own name to the middle of the next century, long after the last of the Cushing lands had been disposed of.<sup>14</sup>

A contemporary of the Great European American Emigration Land Company, the Wisconsin Emigrant Company of New York also undertook the promotion of agricultural settlement in upper Wisconsin. Formed to dispose of the lands of the West Wisconsin Railway Company, the Wisconsin Emigrant Company sought to attract settlers in a typical

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11 H. D. Barron to William Cushing, August 27, 1872, Ibid., Reel 2. The Emigration Land Company was also sued for breach of contract, H. D. Barron to J. H. Reymert, September 30, 1872, Ibid., Reel 2.

12 H. D. Barron to William Cushing, December 23, 1871, Cushing Papers.

13 Choice Farming Land in the St. Croix Valley, Polk County, Wisconsin, for Sale to Settlers, by Caleb Cushing (Madison, 1875) 10-12.

14 Smith, "Caleb Cushing's Investments in the St. Croix Valley," 18, 19. Baker's private land business is discussed in another part of this chapter.

immigration pamphlet.<sup>15</sup> Readers of the pamphlet learned from no less an authority than William H. Seward that at the western terminus of the line lay

...the central place, where the agriculture of the richest regions of North America must pour out its tribute to the whole world....I now believe that the ultimate, last seat of Government will be found somewhere within a circle or radius not very far from the spot on which I stand.<sup>16</sup>

If this description did not prove to be of sufficient interest to the prospective emigrant, he might succumb to the account of a remarkable climate, in summer like that of Venice, free of the consumptive threats of the Atlantic seaboard and the "malarial exhalations" of undrained soils in Indiana and Illinois.<sup>17</sup> The great gold and silver mining regions of the northwest would depend upon this region for their food supply. A word to the wise, sugar beets would earn profits of more than \$120 per acre for the future settlers of the region.<sup>18</sup>

The Wisconsin Emigrant Company urged that prospective settlers form themselves into companies for pur-

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15 One Million Acres of Wheat and Timber Land of the West Wisconsin Railway Company (New York, 1869).

16 Citation from an 1860 speech, Ibid., 7.

17 Ibid., 5, 6.

18 Ibid., 4, 9, 10.

chasing blocks of land, then send representatives to Wisconsin to choose the tracts, and divide them into farms to be distributed among stockholders and sold at auction to outsiders.<sup>19</sup>

In an 1874 pamphlet published for German consumption, the West Wisconsin Railway Company repeated much of the earlier pamphlet, calling attention also to the great shelter provided by timbered areas in contrast to the prairies where winter winds brought illness to many. The company offered small tracts to settlers at three to fifteen dollars per acre with a promise of long payment terms. In addition, holders of stock in the railway company could exchange it at par value for lands.<sup>20</sup>

The transactions of the Wisconsin Emigrant Company typified the part that railroads would play in promoting agricultural settlement in northern Wisconsin. Perhaps foremost in this field during the remainder of the century was the Wisconsin Central Railroad. Having begun a close connection with state immigration agencies at an early date,<sup>21</sup> that company copied Dr. Increase Lapham's early

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19 Ibid., 16.

20 West Wisconsin Railway Company, Landerein der West Wisconsin Eisenbahn in Wisconsin (New York, 1894) 34, 35, 39.

21 The granting of an official state position, without pay, to their agent, K. K. Kennan, will be discussed in a later chapter.

immigration pamphlet extensively for its first publications. They emphasized the cheap lands available for settlers and the advantages of building a home in a forest region.<sup>22</sup>

A leaflet of testimonials from settlers in the north central counties was combined with the earlier pamphlet in 1877.<sup>23</sup> Through these media the company announced in 1875 that some 400,000 acres of rich farming lands would soon be placed on the market, and offered a selected 50,000 acres to settlers at a special price of five dollars an acre. The testimonials supplied in answer to a questionnaire indicated a concensus among pioneers that north central Wisconsin was an ideal place in which to locate.<sup>24</sup>

Potential settlers were invited to the Wisconsin Central's Milwaukee office to see an exhibit of grains and vegetables grown in northern Wisconsin. The company also used the device of publishing an account of a successful settler. Thus they published widely such pamphlets as

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22 The Wisconsin Central Railroad and Its Lands (Milwaukee, 1875). Landet ved Wisconsin Central R. R. (n. p., n. d., about 1875).

23 Testimony Concerning The Wisconsin Central Railroad Lands (n. p., 1875). The combined publication was entitled The Wisconsin Central Railroad and Its Lands (Milwaukee, 1877).

24 Testimony...Wisconsin Central Railroad Lands, 1-3.

"What John Welch Has Done." In 1873 this pioneer, so the story ran, purchased eighty acres of timber land and began to clear it. Having cut the timber in the fall, he logged and burned off his tract in the spring, and then planted potatoes. The harvest netted him 756 bushels of potatoes from the two and one-half acres he had been able to prepare. This was sufficient, the company stated, to bring a profit of \$270 over the cost of land, labor and seed.<sup>25</sup>

In the eighties the Wisconsin Central pursued both American and European settlers diligently. They employed K. K. Kennan to spend much of his time in Europe procuring settlers for north central Wisconsin. A great mass of literature was produced for both native and foreign consumption, Kennan writing and distributing much of it. He also distributed, and the company no doubt inspired, the 1883 publication of a Pastor W. Koch, praising lands along the railroad and urging readers in Germany and Switzerland to join him in building a German Evangelical settlement in northern Wisconsin.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lands of the Wisconsin Central Railroad Company (1877), 29; The Wisconsin Central Railroad and Its Lands (1877), 32.

<sup>26</sup> See the several boxes of Wisconsin Railroad pamphlets in the Wisconsin State Historical Society Library. Two of Kennan's pamphlets were Der Staat Wisconsin. Seine Hilfsquellen und Vorzuge für Auswanderer (n.p., n.d., about 1844) and Staten Wisconsin. Dens Hjaelpkilder og Fordele For Udvandrerene (Milwaukee, 1884). See also W. Koch, Wo find ich eine Heimat in der Fremde (Black Creek, 1883).

Railroad companies offered special rates and reductions to land seekers. The Wisconsin Central subtracted the price of railroad fare from the cost of a tract of land when a land seeker purchased from the railroad. For this purpose special "Land Exploring Tickets" were issued by the company. In addition they subtracted fifty percent of the cost of moving household goods over the company's roads from the purchase of a tract of land.<sup>27</sup>

By 1890 directors of the Wisconsin Central Company reported that they had disposed of 250,000 acres of their 838,628 acre grant.<sup>28</sup> In succeeding years between four and six thousand acres of land were reported as sold yearly, until in 1893 and 1894 sales suddenly leaped to nearly 20,000 acres.<sup>29</sup> Receivers of the company attempted to continue what was undoubtedly the established policy of the company in selling the timber on the lands as quickly as possible so that settlement might begin.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5. Wisconsin Central Railroad Lands in Northern Wisconsin (Milwaukee, 1899) 63, 64. See also the advertisement of the "Omaha" line, offering half fares to land seekers, Cumberland New Wisconsin, November, 1896.

<sup>28</sup> Second Report of the Board of Directors, 1890, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Third Report...1891, 63; Fourth Report...1892, 23; Fifth Report...1893, 15; The company went into receivership in 1893 and reports of land sales were discontinued.

<sup>30</sup> Report of Receivers Covering Period from September 27th A. D., 1893, to June 30th, A. D. 1895.... (July 1, 1895) 4.

The Wisconsin Central Company not only had agents in big cities and in Europe but employed a number of local agents on a commission basis. These agents sold to the settler on the usual company terms of approximately five dollars an acre, fifty dollars down payment and the balance in three yearly payments at seven per cent interest. The company paid a ten per cent commission to the agent on such sales.<sup>31</sup>

Since the railroad interests benefited not only from the sale of their own lands but from location on any lands to and from which they might obtain "the haul," the Wisconsin Central and other lines sought to promote the settlement of other northern Wisconsin lands almost as eagerly as their own. Consequently, company officials acted as "go betweens" without commission where deals could be made between land holders and buyers. They sought to encourage particularly large scale agricultural activity (such as stock grazing) both in pamphlets and in corres-

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<sup>31</sup> George Sell to Laird Norton Company, February 15, 1892. Boxes marked Chippewa Lands, 1892, in the Laird Norton Company Papers, Manuscripts Division, Minnesota Historical Society. The Laird Norton Company papers and letterbooks for the years prior to 1900 are in the manuscript collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, at St. Paul. Those for the years after 1900 were used in the company vaults at Winona. No further reference will be made to the location of the papers in future citations.

pondence with land holders and potential buyers.<sup>32</sup> Many company agents asked to sell non-railroad lands on a commission basis, while some roads sought to purchase them for colonization purposes.<sup>33</sup>

So great was the interest among potential settlers in 1900 that the manager of the Wisconsin Central's Chicago office announced that the company had arranged to give free stereoptican lectures in Chicago, displaying over two hundred views of farms in Taylor, Price and Ashland counties.<sup>34</sup> Sales of the road's lands in the ensuing year seemed to justify such advertising. Between January and December, 1900, 33,000 acres of land were sold at an average price of \$5.25 an acre. By that time some 450 families had been located along the road.<sup>35</sup> Noting the

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32 See the letters of Valentine H. May, Assistant Tax Commissioner of the Wisconsin Central Railroad to Samuel L. Prentiss, July 24, 29; August 28; September 5, 9; Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1899. See also Tax Commissioner W. H. Killen to Laird Norton Company, September 16, 1899, Ibid., Chippewa Lands, 1899. See the pamphlet Northern Wisconsin Lands Along the Line of the Wisconsin Central Railway (n.p., n.d., about 1898).

33 John S. Arnold to Laird Norton Company, February 25, 1895; Theodore Dunn to Laird Norton Company, September 9, 1895; C. H. Pratt to F. S. Bell, March 19, 1895; Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1895. C. H. Pratt to F. S. Bell, February 26, 1896, Ibid., Chippewa Lands, 1896.

34 J. D. Rowland, Circular Letter, January 29, 1900, in boxes marked Immigration, Wisconsin State Executive Office Papers, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Hereafter cited as Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

35 The total was 1,500 people, seventy-five per cent of them Germans. Report of the Secretary...Board of Immigration...1900, 10.

large influx of settlers to northern Wisconsin during that year, the Milwaukee Sentinel gave credit mainly to the Wisconsin Central. The road's land department, it claimed, was employing some three hundred assistants in the work of advertising northern Wisconsin and placing settlers. In the northern press similar comments praised the colonization work of the railroads. The Oshkosh Times predicted that the Northwestern Railroad alone would bring 20,000 settlers to the northern part of Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula in 1901.<sup>36</sup> It is not surprising that state agencies for promoting immigration faded into the background and seemed of questionable worth against so shining an example of the workings of private enterprise in the field of agricultural settlement.

If speculators and land holders like Caleb Cushing and the land grant railroads came early to a belief in the agricultural possibilities of the Cutover, no such unity of conviction appeared among the individual lumbermen who possessed the greater portion of northern Wisconsin lands. Nevertheless, a number of factors turned the attention of lumbermen toward agricultural settlement. For instance, the diminution of the timber supply itself forced upon them the decision to remove to other fields of operation

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<sup>36</sup> Milwaukee Sentinel, April 9, 1901; Marinette Eagle, April 29, 1899; Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, April 26, 1901; Oshkosh Times, April 13, 1901.

or to turn to new methods for exploiting their holdings in Wisconsin. Equally important, of course, were the changing conditions which made probable a flow of settlers to the areas formerly by-passed in the westward surge of population. By 1890 much of the choice agricultural land of the West had been settled. The remaining free acres offered less competition to the stump lands of northern Wisconsin. Moreover, the nation's rapid growth in population made the eventual settlement of the Cutover seem inevitable. Hence the retention of stump lands appeared more judicious than it had previously.

Among the possibilities open to those who chose to retain their holdings after the cutting of the pine timber, the selling of cut over lands and the development of hardwood manufacturing industries proved a happy combination. The non-floating hardwoods demanded new techniques of logging and manufacture in which the seasonal use of local laborers and the growth of small sawmill towns played a prominent role. Thus colonization of landed laborers became a feature of the hardwood areas. Summer farming and winter logging proceeding hand in hand.

Still other factors served to advance the cause of agriculture in the Cutover. Where lands had been cut over their owners could adopt one of several courses: allow them to lie idle, let them be taken over by counties in

lieu of taxes, sell them to speculators, or attempt to induce settlement on their own initiative. Each year long lists of tax delinquent lands in the local newspapers testified to the common practice by which many lumbermen forfeited cut over lands through failure to pay assessments. However, lumbermen who planned to continue working in a given area might elect to lighten their tax burden by increasing the number of taxable land holders in that area. In most cases agricultural settlement appeared sooner or later as one solution to the problems of the cut over tracts.

The attitudes of lumbermen varied greatly as to the most advantageous disposal of denuded lands. Some were unwilling to sell, being inclined to hold their lands for future rising prices, except in those counties where taxes seemed too high.<sup>37</sup> Even when they felt convinced that lands should be sold, a certain reluctance to enter the land business was evident. "...We are not in the land business," was a typical reply to an insistent correspondent.<sup>38</sup> Some lumbermen frankly desired to prevent

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37 Fred S. Bell to G. W. Bishop, November 16, 1895, Laird Norton Papers, Press Letter Book, 1895.

38 F. S. Bell to James L. Gates, April 6, 1898, Ibid., Press Letter Book, 1898. See also Laird Norton Company to Charles Ellenson, April 29, 1896, Ibid., Press Letter Book, 1896.

settlement. One editor claimed to have been told that

So long as we have standing pine of any considerable quantities in a county, we want the settlers to keep out, for as soon as the farmer appears he wants school houses, roads, and other improvements, for which we, as large holders of land in his neighborhood must pay in increased taxation.<sup>39</sup>

Lumbermen were not alone in their reluctance to become promoters of land settlement. Land agents, accustomed to dealing in timber lands with an entirely different class of buyers, confided their misgivings about venturing into a new field. Hence the secretary of one land company admitted that his organization did not know whether to sell all its lands in one block or to attempt to promote the manufacture of hardwoods and then try to settle the lands.<sup>40</sup> Another land agent confessed that selling the land to settlers

...seems all there is left for us to do as all the valuable timber has been cut from the lands and if they are good for anything now it will only be for agriculture and hay lands.<sup>41</sup>

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39 Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:1(April, 1896) 9.

40 Edward Carey [Secretary of the Flambeau Land Company] to Laird Norton Company, March 15, 1899, Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1899.

41 Theodore Dunn to Laird Norton Company, August 18, 1896, Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1896. See also the interesting progression of letterheads in the letters of Frederick C. Bogk to Laird Norton Company, July 15, 1896; July 12, 1898; October 26, 1899; Ibid., Chippewa Lands, 1896, 1898, 1899. Bogk dealt formerly in timberlands, now quoted Dean William A. Henry on his letterhead: "Central and northern Wisconsin is to become the great cheese section of Wisconsin, if not the United States."

Other lumbermen and land agents pursued a bolder policy. In the 1870's Knapp and Stout of Menominee commenced to sell their lands to settlers, gradually increasing this activity year by year. From 1890 to 1895 the company claimed to have sold over 48,000 acres of land, and in 1896 settlers from Minnesota, the Dakotas, and the Middle West purchased from them another 8,000 acres, according to the company's statement.<sup>42</sup> Similarly in the 1890's the Beaver Dam Lumber Company advertised farming lands for sale, and the Browns of Rhinelander donated land for a church and encouraged the settlement of Polish families on their acres.<sup>43</sup>

Numbers of lumbermen combined logging operations with the promotion of settlement. Among these was Squire A. Taylor, who founded Langlade County in 1879. Taylor, engaged in lumbering and logging, attempted also to boom "New County," as he named it, for agricultural settlement. According to his description the county contained 200,000 acres of "the best farm lands," available to settlers at from two dollars and fifty cents to three dollars an acre. Only ten per cent of the total cost of a tract need be paid in cash, Taylor stated. His proposals included features

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42 Cumberland New Wisconsin, May 1896; January, 1897.

43 Cumberland New Wisconsin, January, 1897; Marinette Eagle, November 2, 1895; Superior Evening Telegram, July 12, 1894.

more common to colonization companies of a later period. Settlers must agree to build a house on the land, and clear, fence, and till an additional eighth part of their tract each year for three years. Following this the balance of the purchase money was to become due in three annual installments at six per cent interest, thus giving the settler a total of six years in which to pay for his farm.<sup>44</sup>

In 1884 two Neillsville lawyers combined their interests in lumbering and real estate with a unique attempt to lure English settlers to the Cutover. A large farm owned by C. A. Youmans of the firm of Ring and Youmans was to be converted into a practical school where as many as fifty "young and middle-aged English gentlemen" could learn the techniques of American farming from an experienced agriculturist. Following the completion of a year's course at Neillsville, the English students would be placed on farms of their own if they so desired, their management to be supervised by a competent company agent. For this enterprise the two lawyers organized what they called the Wisconsin Land, Emigration and Colonization Company, and apparently maintained one of their clerks in London for

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<sup>44</sup> Squire A. Taylor, State of Wisconsin, County of New (New Taylor , 1879?), in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. The pamphlet is reprinted in its entirety, and some biographical data is found, in Robert M. Dessureau, History of Langlade County Wisconsin (Antigo, 1922) 262, 12.

several months as a company agent. Prospective students could obtain their transportation from London or Liverpool to Neillsville, board and lodging, schooling and "ordinary medical care, " plus "Forty Acres of Rich Farming Land," timber or prairie as desired, for the sum of five hundred pounds. For three hundred pounds the same training could be obtained without the land. The company also offered to find individual farms where young men could work for experience if they so desired. At the Youmans farm students might participate in daily labors according to their individual inclination, the prospectus stated, although they would be urged to do so to a "reasonable extent" as a valuable part of their training.<sup>45</sup>

The colonization attempts common to a number of saw-mill communities in northern Wisconsin illustrate a typical approach of the land-lumber interests to the problem of agricultural settlement. Among these the Rietbrock Land and Lumber Company succeeded in building a thriving agricultural community around Athens in Marathon County, at the same time as they conducted a successful lumbering

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<sup>45</sup> The Wisconsin Land, Emigration and Colonization Company (Madison, 1884). Apparently the venture had no success worthy of mention in local newspapers or biographies. Youman's trip to England with his clerk is recorded in the Neillsville True Republican, January 17, 1884. Biographical sketches of Youmans are found in Biographical History of Clark and Jackson Counties Wisconsin (Chicago, 1896) 278, and in Franklin Curtis-Wedge, (compiler), History of Clark County Wisconsin (Chicago, 1918) 498 ff.

enterprise. The company's founder was apparently dedicated from the first to the agricultural phases of his enterprise. A Milwaukee lawyer, Frederick Reitbrock perceived opportunities to colonize the unemployed laborers so numerous in that city during the 1870's. He investigated numerous tracts in northern Wisconsin before finding one where both soil and timber suited his purposes. By 1880 he had located his mill site and begun the process of bringing in settlers, mainly from Milwaukee, but in some cases directly from Germany. He located them in small houses on company lands. From an early date a company farm occupied much of Reitbrock's attention with the result that settlers witnessed advanced farming methods and farmed their own tracts in a somewhat paternal atmosphere. Reitbrock devoted himself increasingly in his later years to the encouragement of better farming practices among his own settlers as well as the advancement of agriculture in his portion of the state.

Such activity led to the establishment in the early 1900's of one of the first forms of agricultural extension work in the nation and of a plan by which company pure bred stock was made available for breeding purposes to settlers at no cost. Meanwhile the company's lumbering enterprise provided seasonal work for settlers, lending to the community a development which, while not without its less

altruistic aspects, was perhaps as happy a combination of private lumbering industry and land settlement as occurred in the Cutover.<sup>46</sup>

Similar to the colonization activity at Athens was that of Heronymous Zech, begun in 1895 at Crivitz, in Marinette County. Zech combined his exploitation of forest lands with the colonization of Polish settlers from Milwaukee and Chicago. He built stores, warehouses, schools, homes and roads for the settlers, more than one hundred of whom he employed in his lumbering enterprise. Here too, a large company farm was cleared and operated as a model for the community. During the fall of 1896 as many as twenty-five to thirty Polish settlers visited the tract each week, according to the Marinette Eagle, choosing their lands and returning to their work in the cities until moving time arrived. By December three thousand acres had been sold.<sup>47</sup>

In three years time Zech was credited with the sale of 20,000 acres in Marinette County. Apparently he followed a practice pursued also by Reitbrock in accepting urban real estate for his deforested tracts, for, according to

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46 Arlan C. Helgeson, Athens, Wisconsin, A Study of the Economic Development of a Northern Village, Master's Thesis, 1948, on microcard, Wisconsin State Historical Society. D. O. Thompson and Wilbur H. Glover, "A Pioneer Adventure in Agricultural Extension," Agricultural History, Vol. 22, No. 2 (April, 1948); 124-128.

47 Marinette Eagle, November 28, December 5, 1896.

the Eagle, he had acquired \$100,000 worth of real estate in Chicago and Milwaukee.<sup>48</sup> This estimate came at the close of Zech's colonizing career and the beginning of a new and interesting attempt on the part of a Chicago Polish group to conduct its own settlement venture. The Polish Industrial Association, comprised of 150 families, purchased 10,000 acres of land, including Zech's sawmill, shingle mill and general store at Crivitz, for \$104,000. By January, 1900 fifty shareholders were on the scene, working in the lumber yards and in the woods. While most shareholders came from Chicago, the project also lured investors from far away Wyoming, Minnesota and Pennsylvania. The company, with offices in Chicago and Milwaukee, claimed to be one of the largest colonization companies in the United States.<sup>49</sup> It endured but briefly, however; indebted for more than \$84,000 to Zech, the company was bankrupt within a little over one year, and its properties reverted to the original owner.<sup>50</sup>

Such colonizing enterprises as those conducted by Reitbrock, Zech, and others stimulated interest among land

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48 Ibid., December 16, 1899.

49 Ibid., November 25, December 9, 16, 1899; January 13, May 12, 1900.

50. Ibid., April 30, 1901.

agents not concerned with lumbering. Thus Theodore Rudzinski, Milwaukee politician and railroad land agent, helped to organize the Polish colony at Crivitz, and then himself purchased 10,000 acres of Marinette County land, announcing his intention of bringing Polish settlers from Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, and if necessary, from Poland itself. Only moderately successful in his sales in 1900, he complained of too many "new beginners in my neighborhood trying hard to locate people in their own way...."<sup>51</sup>

Indeed it did seem as if everybody and his neighbor was buying or selling eighty acre lots in northern Wisconsin at the turn of the century. Secretary Taylor, of the State Board of Immigration, remarked that Zech's colonization activities had created a flurry of selling in Barron County on the other side of the state, where 15,000 acres were sold to actual settlers.<sup>52</sup> A colony of glassblowers from Indiana was announced; colonies of Chicago motormen and Bohemians from Nebraska were anticipated.<sup>53</sup> A Sawyer County company offered lands at one dollar to two dollars and fifty cents an acre, with seven years in which to pay. A Burnett County speculator championed a scheme to drain a

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., February 17, 1897. Theodore Rudzinski to George W. Taylor, December 7, 1900, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

<sup>52</sup> Marinette Eagle, December 23, 1899.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., December 23, 1899; April 2, June 14, 1901.

large swamp area for settlement at a cost of from fifteen to twenty thousand dollars. He would pay for this cost, he claimed, with the first crop of flax planted on the newly tilled land.<sup>54</sup>

Lumbermen were besieged with the requests of agents who wished to sell their lands for them. A postmaster, a storekeeper, a county judge, might be found among the host of land sellers. Judge H. S. Comstock of Cumberland pledged himself to sell two thousand acres a year if he was given exclusive rights to lands of the Laird Norton Lumber Company. A promoter of some experience, he had spent \$1200 for advertising in 1896 and promised to spend a like amount in 1897. No doubt he referred mainly to the editing of his short lived promotional monthly, the New Wisconsin, soon to die from want of support. Comstock requested any price over two dollars and fifty cents an acre as his commission. When they demurred at so large a commission, he offered to divide half and half with the owners anything over three dollars.<sup>55</sup>

Comstock's was only one of an ever increasing number of offers which poured in to the Laird Norton Company from

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<sup>54</sup> Flambeau Land Company, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. Lands in Sawyer County...Seven Years to Pay...And No Interest on Prompt Payments (Chippewa Falls, 1898), Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1898. Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, May 12, 1899.

<sup>55</sup> H. S. Comstock to the Laird Norton Company, January 26, March 4, 1897, Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1897.

the early nineties onward.<sup>56</sup> Among the more impressive offers was one for 150,000 acres by the North American Land Company in 1895. This organization consisted of American and German officials of North German Lloyds and a Sheboygan land dealer who proposed to form a company to bring German immigrants to the Cutover. One-fourth of the stock of the concern was to be held by the steamship company, while the remainder was to be held by the owners of the land chosen for colonization. Shareholders were to divide profits in this proportion, great savings being effected by the "pooling of facilities" for the settlement work.<sup>57</sup>

Land agents and promoters who had long sung the praises of the agricultural lands of northern Wisconsin could perhaps feel that they were now reaping their just harvest. James "Hustler" Agen of Superior typifies the more voluble group among the promoters. Vermont born, he located in Iowa following the Civil War, expanding from a drayage and coal business to lumber and grain. By 1887 he was selling real estate in Superior. There he became associated with the local county agricultural society, took

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<sup>56</sup> See the many letters from various land selling agencies in the Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1893-1900.

<sup>57</sup> Such a company was said to have been suggested by Governor Rusk. Dropped at his death, the plan was now revived at the instigation of the State Board of Immigration. J. O. Thayer to Laird Norton Company, November 19, 1895, Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1895.

an active part in immigration work, including travelling as an agent for the State Board of Immigration, organized the first Northern Wisconsin Fair at Chippewa Falls, entered politics and championed legislation for promoting the agricultural settlement of northern Wisconsin. Considering the promotional nature of all these activities, it was not difficult to understand his sobriquet nor to give credence to his claim that he had sold six million dollars worth of real estate in a decade at Superior.<sup>58</sup>

J. Stannard Baker, who had taken over the agency of the Cushing lands in 1874, was of quite another school. No less firm in his faith in the land than the more aggressive members of his profession, Baker had begun his personal investments soon after coming to St. Croix Falls. He became the owner of thousands of acres of land, mainly through the purchase of tax deeds. By 1898 he claimed to have invested \$78,000 in Burnett County lands alone. The early nineties found him "land poor," perhaps largely because his holdings had outgrown a business carried on for the most part through personal contact, and his transactions lacked the flamboyant methods of men like Agen and James L. Gates. Baker yielded to a son who saw the need for advertising and their business was showing profits again by the end of the

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<sup>58</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, March 18, 25; July 15, 29; August 26; December 2, 1898; February 3, 1899.

decade. If the failure of the Bakers to follow the conventional colonization schemes of the period seemed somewhat conservative, the reputation of the firm was to grow to the point in the coming century where it handled a million dollars worth of business annually.<sup>59</sup>

James L. Gates was easily the most exciting figure to come to the fore in the nineties, and the personification of big business as it applied to the agricultural settlement of the Cutover. In the following decades he earned the title "Stump Land Gates" by becoming the owner of over half a million acres of cut over land in northern Wisconsin.<sup>60</sup>

Testimony as to the effect of the new interest in the promotion of northern Wisconsin lands was not lacking at the turn of the century. A La Crosse company dealing in lands in Jackson and Clark counties reported the sale of 24,000 acres in 1900, more than double the sales of the previous year.<sup>61</sup> That Company's experience seemed representative of all northern Wisconsin, if one could rely upon

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<sup>59</sup> Tape recorded interview, Wilbur Glover with Harry D. Baker, January 17, 1950, manuscripts collection, Wisconsin State Historical Society. Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, May 27, 1898.

<sup>60</sup> Since his activities reach their peak in the 1900's, Gates will be treated in a later chapter as more representative of a later period.

<sup>61</sup> Report of the Secretary...Board of Immigration... 1900, 9.

the reports sent to the Secretary of State in 1900. In twenty-four counties total sales had risen from slightly over one million acres in 1899 to nearly double that amount a year later.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the sellers of the land had cause for good cheer. Even if voluntary associations for promoting the Cutover proved ephemeral and the agencies of the state appeared indifferent or came and went with the political tides, the outlook for the agricultural settlement of the Cutover seemed bright and sure in the minds of the countless salesmen devoted to their cause.

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62 Ibid., 11.

## II

### PROMOTION OF CUT-OVER LANDS BY NEWSPAPERS AND VOLUNTARY GROUPS

1880-1900

The various interests which strove to settle the Wisconsin Cutover with farmers possessed ample means of persuasion. A friendly press gave ever larger space to the booming of land settlement, while a number of individuals and organizations lent persuasive argument to the cause. In addition there arose in the 1890's a number of promotional associations, inspired and manned by the now large numbers of people who expressed interest in one way or another in the settlement of northern Wisconsin.

The degree to which personal interest was reflected in the press and in the promotional associations need not be an object of long consideration. Obviously every northern editor who attempted to create a land boom had a personal stake in the survival and expansion of his community. Many enthusiastic editors were hired by lumbering and landed interests. It would not be incorrect to point out, however, that the newspaper promotion of northern Wisconsin lands for agriculture was also prompted by such intangible factors as local pride, and personal convictions and experiences concerning agriculture. While much the same thing could be said of many members of associations formed to encourage settlement, the direct economic interest behind the

formation and management of these organizations was quite obvious, as the following pages will reveal.

Although the decline of Wisconsin's lumber industry and the coincidental decrease in the amount of desirable land available in the western United States<sup>1</sup> accelerated the movement toward agricultural settlement of the Cutover, those interested in the northern part of the state had long professed a belief that it would follow a pattern of development similar to older cut over regions. As early as 1852 Albert Ellis had evinced an optimistic faith in the agricultural future of the lumbered-out regions.<sup>2</sup> Noting an official designation of northern Wisconsin as a swamp, Ellis informed the members of the Wisconsin Agricultural Society that

Time and the progress of the "Yankee Nation" will doubtless drain this Wisconsin swamp as it did that of Michigan.<sup>3</sup>

Settlements now dotted areas formerly labelled as swamp land on War Department maps. Wisconsin would follow the pattern

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1 It is important to remember that desirable lands were still available in Canada. See Paul F. Sharp, "When Our West Moved North," American Historical Review, 55:2 (January, 1950), 286-300. These lands proved to be great competitors of the cut-over lands of northern Wisconsin, as will be shown later.

2 See Albert G. Ellis, "Northern Wisconsin--Its Capacities and Its Wants," Wisconsin Agricultural Society, Transactions, 1852, 326-336.

3 Ibid., 327.

set in the pineland regions of New York, once thought unfit for farming.

Whoever recollects western New York as it was forty years ago, may have a good idea of Northern Wisconsin as it now is; and whoever sees Wisconsin forty years hence, may behold its prototype in Western New York at this moment.<sup>4</sup>

The comparison with New York continued to be a favorite among partisans of the Cutover. However, "forty years hence" Ellis's predictions still remained unfulfilled. Undaunted, a founder of the Northern Wisconsin Immigration and Improvement Association optimistically repeated the prophecy almost word for word. His father had sold cut-over land in New York for one dollar an acre, thinking it worthless for farming. Now dairy farms covered the region. By comparison the soil and climate of northern Wisconsin were superior. Surely the growth of dairying in the Wisconsin Cutover would imitate and surpass the development in New York.<sup>5</sup>

Little sentiment for the preservation of the forests of northern Wisconsin existed as the century waned. As one advocate of clearing put it, the destruction of the great forests might arouse a sense of guilt, but

...the practical side of man comes to the rescue when he sees clearly that...Whatever may be said in favor

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4 Ibid., 328.

5 Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, 1:1 (April, 1896), 2.

of forests, the fact still remains that over immense areas in middle and northern Wisconsin our only road to prosperity lies in the destruction and removal of these primitive forests.

If the transition to agriculture seemed destructive of the natural wealth and fertility of the region, as it had in New England, one must find what comfort one could in the realization that

...agriculture has so far in the world's history been a wasteful process, and the fertility of the earth has diminished in all districts confined to their own resources for fertilizers. Scientists are now agreed that our whole solar system is in a transition state toward death and darkness, and that the appearance of man on our planet, and his full career, will form but a brief chapter when the whole history of the universe shall be written.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, poor agricultural land would not raise good timber, which disposed of a suggestion that some land might be better suited to timber than to cultivation.<sup>7</sup>

However, the average person interested in northern Wisconsin was probably not given to framing his views in reference to the dynamics of the universe. The sentiments of Assemblyman James Hill must have been more to his taste; he assured pioneer farmers of Barron County that agriculture stood first among all the pursuits of mankind and that

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<sup>6</sup> J. W. Wood, "Clearing Off Timber Land," Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Transactions, XVIII (1879-1880), 136-138.

<sup>7</sup> Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Transactions, XIX (1880-1881), 181-183.

In all my travels, all things considered, I have never seen any new country that, in my judgment, equalled the north and northwestern parts of Wisconsin for a man, with limited means, to settle in and make a home.<sup>8</sup>

Undoubtedly local pride was aroused and fears were allayed by Hill's assertion that settlers of the Cutover should hesitate long before attempting to move to the plains areas of the West.<sup>9</sup>

The competition for prairie lands often provided the stimulus for an anxious faith in the future of the Wisconsin Cutover. Citizens of older sections of the state took comfort in the thought of their sons removing to nearby locations rather than to some remote western state. A Ripon newspaper greeted eagerly the printing of a new handbook on northern Wisconsin, hoping that young men would find in it the guidance which would keep them in their own state.<sup>10</sup> To a booster of northern Wisconsin the editor of the Whitewater Register wrote:

You are in the right path in showing up the events of northern Wisconsin to people seeking homes. If you had had The Register, you will [sic] not have to be told that for many years I have insisted that the northern part of our state offers far better opportunities for better homes and permanent growing and reliable farming enterprises than the West or South. I was born in the state, in the dense woods

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8 Ibid., XXI (1882-1883), 404, 416, 417.

9 Ibid., 416.

10 Ripon Commonwealth, March 27, 1896.

of Jefferson County, and the land my father paid \$1.25 an acre for is now worth \$100 per acre, and the good German who bought it of him, paying in part by day's work, died ten years ago worth \$75,000. I believe the same experience can be duplicated in Burnett County. I don't see how it can possibly be in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas or the South.<sup>11</sup>

And so a militant pride in the future of the home state as against competing agricultural areas supplemented the belief that old and to a certain extent inevitable patterns of development would repeat themselves in northern Wisconsin. Although few would have gone so far as to agree with a speaker at a Burnett County immigrant convention that

The Northwest...will in the near future contain within its limits the grandest race on earth. I believe this northern climate is conducive to the best development of man.<sup>12</sup>

many held that in agriculture the

...true and substantial basis of this section of the state is coming to be observed.<sup>13</sup>

Among the agencies most effective in the widespread circulation of these ideas were the newspapers of the northern section of the state. Especially in the closing decades of the century they manifested a growing belief in the agricultural future of the denuded timberlands. Often

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11 Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:1 (April, 1896, 10.

12 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, December 9, 1890.

13 James O'Neill, "The Future of Northern Wisconsin," Wisconsin State Historical Society, Proceedings, 1898, 202-210.

promotional publications resulted from a direct interest in the sale of lands to settlers. In 1883 real estate agents in Antigo published for a short time the Woodland Homes, given to exuberant descriptions of the opportunities in this region as compared with the windy, barren, one crop plains, where even fuel was scarce.<sup>14</sup>

A direct interest in the sale of cut-over lands inspired also the official publications of such groups as the North Wisconsin Immigrant and Improvement Association, founded at Eau Claire in 1896. This short-lived organization published for a time the New North Wisconsin. Lack of funds forced the discontinuance of the paper. Similarly doomed was the New Wisconsin, published at Cumberland as an official organ of the Barron County Immigration Association. Papers such as these received poor support from local business men and land owners, who found it difficult to see immediate returns in advertising. Contributions of promotional material were hard to obtain, subscribers could not be found, and open hostility toward the promotion of settlement was sometimes encountered.<sup>15</sup> The regular dailies and weeklies of the north, whose editors felt prompted to serve the cause of agriculture

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14 Woodland Homes I:1 (November, 1883).

15 Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:3(August, 1896), 1. The problems encountered by editors of these publications are discussed in fuller detail in another part of this chapter.

by motives as varied as the communities they served, proved longer lived and more successful in advancing the cause of agriculture in the Cutover.

The idea that farms would replace the logging camps in the north woods appeared sporadically in the news columns of the northern locals long before the timber supply neared exhaustion. The organization of a new northern county, for instance, provided opportunities for asserting that the familiar progress from forest to field would continue here.<sup>16</sup>

Experienced pioneers cited prodigious yields of potatoes, grains, and grasses as evidence of prosperity despite long winters and the hardships of clearing.<sup>17</sup> Occasional articles noted the progress of some remote agricultural settlement, and even those newspapers maintaining an almost complete silence on agricultural subjects were forced now and then to take cognizance of what seemed a remarkable development of farming in their midst.<sup>18</sup>

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16 "The new county of Lincoln... [has] large tracts of excellent farming lands, better than which, cannot be found any where... The time will come... when these will be eagerly sought for and improved. The grim old forest will bow to the commands of industry and civilization..." Wausau Central Wisconsin, October 28, 1874.

17 Ashland Press, January 31, 1874.

18 Ibid., August 1, 1874. Wausau Central Wisconsin, September 22, 1875. "Marathon County is not a large pinery as a great many suppose, but an immense agricultural district. All that is needed is energy, industry and courage; if a man has these three principals, he can soon become a farmer here and live happy [sic]." Ibid., June 26, 1886.

Even in some communities where lumbering had not yet developed to any great degree it seemed inevitable that the transformation to cultivated fields would come in due time.<sup>19</sup> News of a disaster caused by hordes of grasshoppers in the Great Plains inspired the Superior Times to wager that hundreds of families would forsake the stricken areas for northern Wisconsin if they were informed of the opportunities there. Newspapers of the state, the Times declared, ought to broadcast the fact that here was a country superior to that conquered by the pioneers of Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio.<sup>20</sup>

The depression aroused a special interest in agricultural settlement. In 1877 an Ashland editor, lamenting the severity of the depression in the area, laid it to the lack of farms.

If the soil of Ashland County was under cultivation---if instead of a forest of timber there were broad farms reaching out over the face of the country---if instead of wolves and wild game there were droves of fat cattle and sheep---then we might wonder indeed, that prosperity was tardy in reaching our part of the State. To us it is a very simple operation to solve---[sic] these hard times. We must develop the country....Our people can no longer depend upon railroad building or public works for a living. They must till the soil, cut and sell the pines, and endeavor to make the resources of the country yield them their support.<sup>21</sup>

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19 Ashland Press, March 27, 1875.

20 Superior Times, January 20, 1877.

21 Ashland Press, November 3, 1877.

The Superior Times was more critical of those who failed to cultivate the soil during the hard times of the seventies. A little naively, its editorials asserted that those who did not possess lands had no excuse for not raising crops when

...all the land they can plant can be had for simply the clearing. The non-resident property owners are very glad to give the use of their lots to anyone who will clear and fence them.

Moreover, it was time that local people turned to making their livings from the soil rather than relying upon taxes extracted from non-resident land owners.<sup>22</sup> With a wisdom born more of hindsight than of long conviction the Times lectured,

If the people here had gone into farming twenty years ago instead of laying back on the oars and waiting for somebody to buy their corner lots or build them a railroad, our county would be to-day one of the richest in the state, and not the very poorest as it is now rated.<sup>23</sup>

But hard times precipitated more than the rantings of the press. One agriculturist remarked that scarcity of work and low wages were giving rise to new interest in clearing and cultivating land. Annual forest fires stimulated this movement, he held, by burning over certain areas until only "a little picking" was required to ready them for the plow. In addition cities along the South Shore presented hungry

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22 Superior Times, April 21, 1877.

23 Ibid., September 29, 1878.

markets for farm produce. Many scoffers would now be forced to admit that northern Wisconsin had great possibilities as a stock and grain raising country.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the seventies and eighties then, occasions for prophetic oratory, loud lament, or enthusiastic observance gave rise to portrayals of upper Wisconsin as the land of the future for the American farmer. Yet it was not until lumber supplies began to run out that editors turned their attention more fully to luring the farmer. It is noteworthy that in 1895 the Marinette Eagle mentioned the formation among local lumbermen of a syndicate to purchase southern pine and, from that date, referred more and more to the importance of agricultural settlements in the area.<sup>25</sup>

Within several months the editor foresaw that in less than a decade hundreds of acres which then grew nothing but brush and berries would be converted into "one of the finest and richest farming districts in the state." Lumbering would give way to the sale of farm lands as the principal source of revenue in the region. To this end an immigration committee had already been appointed and an organization was forming to buy stump lands and sell them to farmers. The editor confided to his readers that a forthcoming volume

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24 Ibid., October 12, 1878; May 20, 1882.

25 Marinette Eagle, March 2, 1895. "Foreign" holdings by lumbermen of this section had grown to approximately four billion feet of timber six years later. Half of this amount was held in Louisiana pine, the other half in California redwood. Ibid., April 5, 1901.

describing the lands of northern Wisconsin, undoubtedly that by William A. Henry of the University College of Agriculture, would state that no better farming lands could be found in the state than those in Marinette County.<sup>26</sup>

Land selling had not yet taken on the high pressure tactics which later proved to be so remunerative to the northern press. The only advertising to be found in the weekly Eagle was typical of its kind, a simple statement that a lumber company had thousands of acres of good farming lands available at low prices.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the Eagle hailed any event which promised to advance agriculture in the county. Especially sweet to editorial ears was the news that fifty families were to return from Minnesota to begin farming in Marinette County. These farmers, gloated the Eagle, had been lured westward by the promise of fertile soil but had been unable to maintain themselves on Minnesota land. In comparison

...there are no finer lands in the West than Marinette county and no place where a living can be more easily secured, and in a few years all our present wild land will be under cultivation. The signs of the

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26 Ibid., September 28, 1895.

27 Ibid., November 2, 1895. Advertising of the land grant railroads was an exception. The Wisconsin Valley Railroad exhorted people of southern Wisconsin: "Don't Freeze to death on Western Prairies, when you can make you a home near by, where the soil is equal to the very best, and covered with splendid Hardwood Timber..." Wausau Central Wisconsin, June 5, 1886.

times read it and developments are constantly proving it.<sup>28</sup>

Opportunities to advertise the produce grown in Marinette County lands were rarely missed. When a local farmer brought in some large ears of corn raised in the vicinity, they were touted as proof that corn could be grown with profit in the county, although this was not commonly accepted.<sup>29</sup> Attempts to develop a celery farm near the city aroused expectations that "others will engage in it and make our city a celery center for northern Wisconsin."<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most militant among the new advocates of the northland was the editor of the Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County. The Journal was the second weekly in this otherwise unimposing county seat. It was founded by Ed L. Peet, who was apparently induced to come to Grantsburg in the hope that he could do something to draw settlers to the area.<sup>31</sup> Peet made clear at once that he intended to publicize the advantages of settling in Burnett County, slanting his paper at potential home seekers. With proper advertising he hoped to double the population of the county. He revealed his motives editorially when he stated that

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28 Marinette Eagle, November 9, 1895.

29 Ibid., December 7, 1895.

30 Ibid., December 7, 1895. Other ventures received equally sanguine notice, Ibid., February 27, 1897.

31 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, August 4, 1899.

We...see no reason now why we should try to conceal the fact that we hope to make money out of the people who are looking for new homes. We expect to get some of their money and also expect to give them their money's worth and more in return.<sup>32</sup>

Peet's earlier experiences had prepared him for his mission in Burnett County. He had pioneered on the prairies, knew the techniques of land booming from first hand experience in the Dakotas and in Nebraska, and had worked as an advertising agent for a city newspaper.<sup>33</sup> In addition he brought to his paper a flair for championing causes likely to attract public attention. These advantages gained for him not only the eye of the far off home-seeker but a sustaining subscription list in his local community as well. Readers were urged to pass the paper on to potential settlers and to provide copy for the paper.<sup>34</sup> Articles on the "resources" of Burnett County would be provided, but

...we wish to impress upon the minds of those who want to see this county grow and be boomed that they must provide a place for the boom literature to be circulated and the funds to circulate it with.<sup>35</sup>

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32 Ibid., August 7, 30, 1895.

33 Ibid., August 7, December 20, 1895. Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:2(June, 1896), 5.

34 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, August 30, 1895; May 27, 1898.

35 Ibid., September 27, 1895.

Peet's methods of advertising lands were to become standard throughout upper Wisconsin. Maps and accompanying articles portrayed the vacant lands of Burnett County in alluring language. Articles and speeches by experts who praised the section were reprinted in the Journal, inquiries were printed and answered. Local travel notes and news bits enthusiastically described the progress of settlers, while hopeful columns related the possibilities for local industries and their possible demands for agricultural produce. The weekly eagerly recorded land investments and supported drainage schemes. In short, no news of promotional interest escaped the Journal's columns.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to printing material calculated to draw the home seeker's eyes toward Burnett County, Peet engaged in a number of activities and controversies which brought attention to his corner of the state. In 1895 he attacked the new state immigration board for cultivating foreign prospects to the exclusion of Americans who were more desirable settlers for the Cutover.<sup>37</sup> However, in later years he loudly championed the board when it was under attack from other quarters. At all times he could be heard

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<sup>36</sup> For the peak of development in such reporting see the issues for August 11, 14, 25, 28; July 28; November 3, 1899; also April 12, 1901.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., November 15, 1895.

proclaiming the ill treatment of his portion of the state by the Wisconsin legislature. As the promoter of a northern state fair, as secretary of a local immigration board, and as a travelling immigration agent, he gained statewide recognition for his activities. At one time he was advanced as the northland's favorite for the position of Secretary of the Board of Immigration.<sup>38</sup>

The development of promotional interest in the Cut-over as illustrated in the columns of Ed L. Peet's lively weekly was paralleled in many northern Wisconsin publications. Before Peet had begun his venture the Superior Evening Telegram voiced demands for a local immigration commission to buy lands and sell them to settlers. After receiving letters inquiring about lands, the editor became convinced that a group should be formed to respond to such letters and encourage further interest among the thousands of people leading "precarious existences" in the cities.<sup>39</sup>

The large forests remaining in northern Wisconsin could best be protected from fire by settlements, urged the Telegram. Fire breaks would be provided by the settlers'

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<sup>38</sup> Milwaukee Sentinel, March 6, 1902; Milwaukee Journal, March 15, 1901; see the quotations from the Stanley Republican, Rice Lake Leader, and other northern papers in the Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, May 10, 1901. Activities and controversies engaged in by Peet will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

<sup>39</sup> Superior Evening Telegram, June 30, July 12, August 23, 1894.

clearing at no cost to the lumber companies, whose interest it was to prevent forest fires.<sup>40</sup>

Spreading like the forest fires with which the Tele-gram was so concerned, the desire to promote land settle-ment struck community after community throughout the Cut-over as its timber supply diminished. The Washburn Times, although lumbering still boomed in its particular locale, framed the question that all northern Wisconsin must en-counter sooner or later:

Certain it is that in a few years northern Wisconsin will cease to be a lumbering region, and then what?

The pine was not growing as fast as it was cut. Nor would it be enough, the Times foresaw, merely to seek replacements for the lumber manufacturing industries; the agricultural resources of the north must be the basis for economic survival. "Doubting Thomases" were already in the minority. Truly the soil of the Cutover needed only to be cultivated to blossom into the garden spot of the state. Settlers were "the crying need of the hour."<sup>41</sup>

To communities such as these the influx of immigrants became ever more important. A rumor of an intending settle-ment by some national group was enough to bring demands in the local newspapers that officials do something to bring a

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40 Ibid., July 28, 1894.

41 Washburn Times, March 28, 1900.

colony of Finns, Swedes, Germans or Danes to their county.<sup>42</sup>

The fervor which stirred the northern press had its counterpart in southern Wisconsin. Mention has already been made of the interest of southern state editors in the emigration of native sons to nearby settlements. Even more to the point perhaps was the mercantile interest aroused in cities like Milwaukee. The Evening Wisconsin pointed out that

Every settler in northern Wisconsin enlarges that market which the merchants of our Northern Wisconsin cities supply with goods. So the jobber, manufacturer and retailer have a material as well as benevolent interest in the people of the broad tracts this side of Lake Superior that yearn to lend themselves to the support of industrious settlers.<sup>43</sup>

Special editions of the Milwaukee Journal reflected this interest in the unsettled part of the state. Colored banner-heads proclaimed

MILWAUKEE NEEDS NORTHERN WISCONSIN...AND THEY NEED MILWAUKEE....MILWAUKEE'S FUTURE LIES TO THE NORTH.<sup>44</sup>

The Journal asserted that the people of northern Wisconsin would recognize that neither Chicago, St. Paul nor Minneapolis had claims upon them superior to those of Milwaukee. The city's merchants looked to this area for expansion of

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<sup>42</sup> See the typical demand for a colony of Finnish settlers for Bayfield County in the Bayfield County Press, January 20, February 3, 1900.

<sup>43</sup> As quoted in the Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:2 (June, 1896), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Milwaukee Journal, March 9, 12; April 16, 1900.

markets and, in turn, they could supply the capital needed to develop that great region.<sup>45</sup>

Notice of the mounting importance of agriculture in the Wisconsin Cutover was not confined to the local newspapers. Publications representing special interests turned their attention to that section in proportion to the advertising procured from northern land sellers. Thus, the manager of a leading agricultural magazine called the attention of Wisconsin land dealers to his publication's optimistic editorials on the cut-over regions. It was better, he pointed out, to have one's advertising in such a magazine than next to a "calamity howler's pessimistic cry, that a farmer cannot make a living in the region...."<sup>46</sup>

By 1900 many publications in both northern and southern Wisconsin, as well as those in various points outside the state, had adopted a favorable view of the agricultural possibilities of the Wisconsin Cutover. The degree of influence exercised by these publications is difficult to ascertain, especially since other promotional agencies were also attempting to forward the agricultural settlement of northern Wisconsin.

From the mid-nineties these other agencies became

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., March 12, 1900.

<sup>46</sup> P. V. Collins to Marinette Improvement Company, April 26, 1900. Boxes marked Immigration in the Wisconsin State Executive Office Papers, in the manuscripts collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Hereafter referred to as Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

increasingly numerous. The precursors of the movement took the form of immigration conventions, familiar to more settled sections of the nation. Thus, in November, 1895, at the behest of St. Paul business men, delegates from some eight northwestern states and Canada met in that city to sing the praises of their respective districts and formulate a program calculated to lure immigrants to their neglected territories. From press accounts of the great gathering one is led to assume that the atmosphere of the convention hall was at times more suited to such liars' clubs as were, in a later day, to assemble annually in Burlington, Wisconsin.<sup>47</sup> As Judge Ole Larson of the Wisconsin State Board of Immigration remarked, other states (he did not refer to Wisconsin) seemed to be represented mostly by great land owners, town site owners, and "owners of large cities on paper, or their attorneys."<sup>48</sup>

As for Wisconsin, one reporter noticed

...over in the corner by themselves...perhaps the most unique delegation in the hall. It consisted of the Rev. Mr. Monten, a Lutheran minister; James H. Agen, a real estate dealer; Fred Beglinger, a county official, and Halford Erickson, a politician, all of Superior, Wis., and all survivors of the days when the greatest boom of late years, or any other years for the matter of that, was going on at the head of the lakes."<sup>49</sup>

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47 St. Paul Daily Pioneer Press, November 19-22, 1895.

48 Quoted in Morgan's Farm Advocate (part of the Cumberland [Wisconsin] Advocate), February 20, 1896.

49 St. Paul Daily Pioneer Press, November 21, 1895.

Even if they were not all town site owners, members of this "unique" delegation and less conspicuous representatives of the Badger state could at times add their bit to the general glow of optimism which prevailed in the convention halls. James H. Agen, a founder of the Douglas County Agricultural Society and of the Northern Wisconsin Fair, Superior's "hustling" real estate agent and himself a promoter of gatherings of the sort he now addressed, discussed the phenomenal potatoes raised in his home county. Never long silent about his own region, Ed L. Peet, of Burnett County, gave the convention delegates an enthusiastic description of a local starch factory, an outlet for the potatoes so often hailed as evidence of the great productiveness of Cutover soil.<sup>50</sup>

While Wisconsin delegates may have disdained to carry home with them alluring reports of the "Iron Industries of the Northwest," or "Fruit Culture West of the Rockies," the mass display of promotional energies at St. Paul seems to have precipitated similar activities in Wisconsin.<sup>51</sup> The volatile Peet was no sooner back in his editorial chair

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., November 20, 1895.

<sup>51</sup> 1895 is chosen as the beginning point of this section because voluntary association for the promotion of agricultural settlement becomes increasingly prominent after that date. Earlier precedents will be cited for some of the organizations discussed below.

than Burnett County readers were informed that he was to be chairman of an immigration convention to be held in their county seat. Peet stated that this was the first county convention of this type in the entire northwest.<sup>52</sup>

In February, 1896, the Barron County Immigration Association was organized under the leadership of F. F. Morgan, who had for some time published an agricultural supplement to his weekly Cumberland Advocate. This group, composed mainly of business men, entered into an agreement with their county judge, H. S. Comstock, also a real estate dealer, to publish for one year's time the New Wisconsin. Five thousand copies of this publication were issued monthly and sent to a list of subscribers obtained in part from local settlers who were asked to send in the names of relatives and friends in their former homes.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, November 29, 1895. The success of the convention was negligible; see the report in the rival Grantsburg Burnett County Sentinel, December 26, 1895. Peet's claim to distinction might have been contested by James H. Agen, who had led in the organization of a Douglas County Immigration Association in 1894. However, the meeting leading to the formation of this organization had more specific agenda, being for the purpose of raising a sum of money to aid in settling a colony of Pennsylvanians. Superior Evening Telegram, August 22, 23, 1894. For another kind of voluntary immigration activity in Superior see the Petition From Residents of Superior, Wis., September 6, 1882, requesting the appointment of a state agent of foreign immigration for the port. Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

<sup>53</sup> Cumberland New Wisconsin, March, 1896; March, 1897. Morgan's Farm (Cumberland) Advocate, February 13, 1896. Cumberland Advocate, February 20, 1896.

At the end of the year Comstock announced that his paper had been a financial failure, and that while he felt that the cause was a worthy one, he was through with philanthropy. His Barron County supporters apparently did not offer to better, or even renew, the agreement under which the paper was published. Comstock then offered his paper as an advertising medium for the whole of northern Wisconsin, but his journalistic endeavors on behalf of agricultural settlement were seemingly unappreciated. Consequently, the New Wisconsin was heard from no more.<sup>54</sup>

Associations for the promotion of agricultural settlement were not confined within county borders. Perhaps the first notable inter-county organization for this purpose was the Northern Wisconsin Immigration and Improvement Association, founded at Eau Claire in February, 1896. Intended at first for Chippewa Valley delegations only, the convention drew representatives from fifteen counties. The delegates resolved to advertise their sections and promote the immigration of "desirable characters" to northern Wisconsin. In addition the organization was to attract new manufacturing enterprises to their cities and to obtain

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<sup>54</sup> Cumberland New Wisconsin, March 1897. Comstock, editor, lawyer and county judge, was also a land agent for the Knapp and Stout Lumber Company of Menomonie; Ibid., January, 1897.

good roads.<sup>55</sup> The association went on record against the Morse Immigration Bill, then before Congress, because of its provisions for taxing immigrants.<sup>56</sup>

Founded like the Barron County Immigration Association by land holders and business men who hoped to benefit by the attraction of immigrants to their area, the Northern Wisconsin Immigration and Improvement Association also adopted an official organ, the New North Wisconsin.<sup>57</sup> Launched in April, 1896, this prospective monthly was doomed to die for want of material and patronage. The first issue of the publication apologetically announced that several member counties had failed to provide material for the paper.<sup>58</sup> By June the editor indicated his dissatisfaction at the poor financial support his paper received. Not only was he expected to furnish all material for the publication, he complained, but he was forced to carry on with little or no financial backing. Lack of material forced him to publish only bi-monthly, even then repeating articles previously

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55 Eau Claire Morning Telegram, February 20, 27-29, 1896. Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:1(April, 1896), 2, 3.

56 Ibid., February 29, 1896.

57 Published by the secretary of the Association, J. H. Petherbridge. H. C. Putnam, president of the Association and George H. Thompson, treasurer, were both Eau Claire financiers, the one in real estate, loans, and banking, the other in a building and loan association.

58 Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:1 (April, 1896), 3.

printed. This led him to reflect that perhaps northern Wisconsin businessmen were in a condition of self-hypnosis:

They have for so many years concentrated their gaze on the pine lumber industry, [that] they can see money in no other line of business or development.<sup>59</sup>

What, asked the editor, had Eau Claire or Chippewa Falls, the biggest cities in the valley, ever done to let outside capital know of their possibilities!

...Eau Claire's method of advertising herself to the outside world in recent years seems to have been mainly along the line of press reports of sensational criminal cases.<sup>60</sup>

By August, 1896, the New North Wisconsin was ready to collapse. The Augusta Eagle sounded its death knell with the sympathetic comment that business men seemed unable to see direct returns for their advertising in papers like these, although they might lead to the settlement of the country and thus benefit all concerned.<sup>61</sup> Apparently the loss of its voice indicated a general failure of energy in the association, for after the demise of the New North Wisconsin the Northern Wisconsin Immigration and Improvement Association was no longer heard from.

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59 Ibid., I:2 (June, 1896), 1-3.

60 Ibid., 2.

61 Augusta [Wisconsin] Eagle, quoted in the Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:3 (August, 1896) 1.

Many groups not directly concerned in the sale of stump lands were interested in the agricultural settlement of the Cutover. Probably the German Catholic State Immigration Bureau, established at the 1896 biennial convocation of the Wisconsin Union of German Catholic Benevolent Societies, was the furthest removed from promotional motives. Meeting in Racine, this group followed the suggestion of the colorful Bishop Messmer of Green Bay by establishing an agency for directing German Catholic immigrants to the sparsely settled lands of northern Wisconsin and keeping them, as the founding resolution stated, "out of the hands of land sharks."<sup>62</sup>

The agency reported in 1898 that it had worked mainly in Milwaukee, aiding new immigrants until they could be permanently located. In addition, however, an immigrant handbook had been prepared but awaited funds for publication. This was eventually published, but no further mention of the committee or its work occurred in news reports of succeeding conventions of the Benevolent Societies.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Racine Times, May 25, 27, 1896. Deutschen Katholischen Staats Einwanderungs Bureau, Wisconsin: Ein Neues Heim für Deutsche Katholischen (Milwaukee, n.d.) 1 ff. It is interesting to note the name of H. Zech, an important Marinette County land dealer among the "vertrauensmänner" to which immigrants are advised to write, p. 100ff. As is pointed out later in this study in reference to a German Lutheran "colonization company," religious affiliation could be conveniently exploited if land sellers so chose.

<sup>63</sup> Appleton Evening Crescent, May 31, 1898. Appleton Volkesfreunde, June 2, 1898. Milwaukee Journal, May 31, 1898. Fond du Lac Daily Reporter, June 5, 1900. The handbook referred to is cited above.

The Northern Wisconsin State Fair, begun at Chippewa Falls in 1897, played a vital part in promoting the agricultural settlement of northern Wisconsin.<sup>64</sup> The primary motive of the founders of this annual agricultural event, among them Peet and Agen, was to provide a show place for the farm produce of the northland. Here it would not

...become lost among the things gathered from the gardens of the old, settled parts of the state,

as it did when it was exhibited at the State Fair in Milwaukee.<sup>65</sup> James H. Agen, then a member of the state legislature, was largely instrumental in the passage of an appropriation bill for the fair in 1897.<sup>66</sup> An attempt to have this appropriation increased in 1899 failed, and added to the grievances laid by Peet at the door of a legislature dominated by the older sections of the state.<sup>67</sup> In 1901,

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<sup>64</sup> An earlier Northern Wisconsin Fair had been held annually at Oshkosh, a function of the Northern Wisconsin Agricultural and Mechanical Association, whose headquarters were in that city. See the Oshkosh Northwestern, November 3, 1870, for an account of the first fair.

<sup>65</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, July 15, 1898. See the number of petitions filed in its behalf by legislators of northern Wisconsin. Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1897, 210-211.

<sup>66</sup> Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1897, 126. Wisconsin Session Laws, 1897, Chapter 212. By this act the fair association was given official status as including twenty-nine northern counties and the Chippewa County Agricultural Society was ordered to give up its ground and rights to the new organization.

<sup>67</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, May 19, 1899. Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1899, 229, 736.

however, the appropriation was raised from \$2,500 to \$3,250, and the annual fair became an enduring feature of agricultural advancement in upper Wisconsin.<sup>68</sup>

Another state subsidized organization which hoped for the advancement of agricultural settlement in northern Wisconsin was the Wisconsin State Horticultural Society. Impressed by the failure of fruit orchards in the Cutover, members of that society resolved to establish a trial orchard in northern Wisconsin for the purpose of finding suitable varieties for that section. For this purpose the society received a legislative grant in 1895 and succeeding years.<sup>69</sup> The orchard was established near Wausau, in Marathon County, where committee members reported successful experiments with many varieties. However, in 1900 a member of the society admitted that in general, northern Wisconsin

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<sup>68</sup> Wisconsin Session Laws, 1901, Chapter 356. Other attempts to promote agricultural advancement by means of fairs might be cited. See for instance the Official Premium List of the Third Annual Exhibition of the Northern Wisconsin Poultry and Bet Stock Association...1898 (West Superior, n.d.). The appropriations of various county boards to local agricultural societies for the purpose of maintaining exhibits at regional fairs will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>69</sup> George J. Kellog, "Fruit Observations In Northern Wisconsin," Wisconsin State Horticultural Society, Annual Report, 1895, 312-313, 315. Ibid., 1896, 61. Wisconsin Session Laws, 1895, Chapter 148; 1897, Chapter 239.

has always been under a ban horticulturally, and even now most horticulturists very gravely doubt any material success in that line.<sup>70</sup>

And so another society was at least partially unsuccessful in its efforts to find a means of advancing agriculture in the Cutover.

As has been pointed out in previous pages, editors of northern Wisconsin newspapers became more and more conscious of the importance of agriculture to their section as the century drew to a close. No doubt the importance of obtaining agricultural settlers influenced those who founded a new Northern Wisconsin Press Association in 1900.<sup>71</sup> The initial meeting of newspaper men at Chippewa Falls seemed to have been characterized mainly by conviviality and the discussion of technical matters related to their trade. This led Peet to chide his fellow editors for ignoring the

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<sup>70</sup> T. E. Loope, "What Horticulture Can Do For Northern Wisconsin," Wisconsin State Horticultural Society, Annual Report, 1900, 224-226. Ibid., 1898, 3ff. Wisconsin Horticulturist, III:10 (December, 1898), 25-27.

<sup>71</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, January 12, 26; March 23; 1900. In 1871 a similarly titled organization was formed in Oshkosh among editors from central and eastern Wisconsin. They included among their objectives the obtaining of legislation favorable to their section, development of public improvements and advertising with the view of obtaining settlers for their region. Oshkosh Northwestern, October 12, 1871. It is interesting to note the parallel roles of Oshkosh and Chippewa Falls in this respect as well as in the northern Wisconsin fairs. A quarter of a century earlier Oshkosh served an area somewhat less characterized by cut-over problems.

paramount interests of their sections.<sup>72</sup> Meetings of the organization continued to be dominated by trade talk, however, and the Northern Wisconsin Press Association did not materially concern itself with the promotion of settlement in the Cutover.

Among the associations more effective in drawing settlers to their communities were the advancement associations and business men's organizations in various cities and villages throughout the northern part of the state. One of these, the Grantsburg Business Men's Association, undertook to attract attention to the Burnett County seat by the use of advertising on business stationery and by communicating with potential settlers as well as industrialists who might be persuaded to move to their village.<sup>73</sup>

At the turn of the century a great many such organizations were formed up and down the Wisconsin River Valley under the aegis of a larger body, the Wisconsin Valley

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<sup>72</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, March 23, 1900. Peet was defeated in an attempt to get the association to go on record against the transfer of certain federal lands, repossessed railroad grants, to the state of Wisconsin. His object was to prevent the sale of homestead lands to private speculators by the state land commissioners. His fellow editors felt that such a subject was not within the province of their organization. Chippewa Falls Weekly Herald, March 16, 1900.

<sup>73</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, November 3, 1899; January 5, 1900. The association also ran large advertisements in the Journal.

Advancement Association.<sup>74</sup> The organization at Tomahawk received many inquiries about farm lands and claimed to have been instrumental in bringing many farm settlers to its community.<sup>75</sup>

The association under whose wing these smaller advancement associations operated was perhaps the most pretentious of all the contemporary groups formed to promote agriculture and industry in northern Wisconsin. Incorporated in January, 1900, the Wisconsin Valley Advancement Association was headed by prominent northern lumbermen and included representatives from six counties as well as prominent cities in the Wisconsin River Valley. The association employed L. A. Rose, a Wausau newspaperman, as its secretary, Rose was to devote his entire time to publicity work.<sup>76</sup> An intensive advertising campaign was begun with apparently satisfying results.<sup>77</sup> But members

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<sup>74</sup> At Eagle River, Rhinelander, Minocqua, Tomahawk, Merrill, Wausau, and Stevens Point. Tomahawk [Tomahawk, Wisconsin] March 3, 1900.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., April 14, 1900. One of the most novel publicity stunts of the period was the Trailing Arbutus Day held in this village in May, 1900. School children gathered flowers which were shipped to Milwaukee and distributed free there in little bouquets tagged "Come and See Us." Ibid., April 7, 28; May 12; 1900.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., January 20, April 28, 1900.

<sup>77</sup> L. A. Rose, Secretary of the Association, claimed a file of 500 inquiries in March, 1900, mostly from people interested in farm lands. The land agent of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad cited the association's work as the cause of increased interest in northern Wisconsin lands; Tomahawk, March 3, 1900. Later the association employed an extra secretary to keep up with correspondence. Ibid., March 17, 1900.

failed to agree on a program to draw immigrants to the area. In February, 1900, an Appleton immigration agent proposed that the association provide him with a list of lands which he might sell on a commission basis in the Scandinavian countries. Other agents proposed similar plans, one of them claiming to have a colony of three hundred families ready to bring to the valley. However, lumbermen were reluctant to pay a commission of ten cents an acre to promoters and to raise the necessary funds for sending them overseas. No agreement was reached, and one of the agents retired in disgust.<sup>78</sup>

Whatever the cause of their failure to agree on any program for attracting settlers, the Wisconsin Valley Advancement Association now turned to other devices to advertise their area. A fish and game preserve held their attention for a time, as did surveys of water power and resources in their valley.<sup>79</sup> In addition they persuaded the State Press Association to tour the valley during the summer

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<sup>78</sup> Tomahawk, February 17, 24; March 3, 10, 17, 1900. Ernst W. Monthan to George W. Taylor, March 21, 1900. Executive Office Papers, Immigration. George W. Taylor, secretary of the State Board of Immigration, remarked that the agent from Appleton, George C. Sherman, was of questionable ability and that the head of the association, lumberman W. E. Bradley, "was too sharp for the rest of the fellows...." Letter to Monthan, March 26, 1900, Executive Office Papers, Immigration Letter Books.

<sup>79</sup> Tomahawk, May 19, 1900.

of 1900, as a means of gaining favorable publicity.<sup>80</sup> The resignation of Lester Rose, secretary of the organization, left it with little promotional talent, however, and by December, 1900, the association was in trouble. The members resolved to seek funds from county boards in the valley as a means of securing another secretary and financing further advancement work. At least four county boards responded with appropriations of \$250 each, but apparently attempts to arouse interest by moving the meetings of the association from Tomahawk to various cities in the valley were of little avail, as were appeals to non-resident land owners to help in the association's work.<sup>81</sup> As interest declined the association met less and less frequently. Although the organization had convened every month originally, the directors now resolved to meet only quarterly. In the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., February 17, July 7, September 15, 1900. The association offered a prize of \$100 to the pressman writing the best description of the Valley, Ibid., July 7, 1900. The Trailing Arbutus Day mentioned above was suggested by the Association's secretary. From the turn of the century much space is devoted to resort talk in the Tomahawk. This suggests an additional factor in the decline of the fervor for agricultural settlers.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., December 22, 1900. The membership of the Association was approximately 300 but not all members paid their dues. Counties making appropriations were Oneida, Vilas, Lincoln and Marathon. Tomahawk, January 19, 1901; Official Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of Marathon County...1900-'01, 29; Proceedings of the [Lincoln County] Board of Supervisors...July 16, 1900... February 1, 1901, 32.

spring of 1901 the association concentrated its waning energies on ordering and distributing a map of the Wisconsin River Valley.<sup>82</sup> Grandiose schemes for progress had come upon the same troubles in the valley of the Wisconsin as in the Chippewa Valley, and in Burnett and Barron counties. At this point the Wisconsin Valley Advancement Association faded quietly from the scene.

Hence at the turn of the century it was clear that any attempt at organization for promoting the settlement of the Cutover was premature. Promotional groups faced indifference, poor financial support, and an enthusiasm too soon grown cold. Men of great expectations like Peet might suggest another such organization for the northwestern counties,<sup>83</sup> but for a time at least inter-county promotion was dead. The organizations most likely to succeed were those less directly promotional in character and supported by state grants. The Northern Wisconsin State Fair could claim to be the only institution still functioning which had been founded with an eye to encouraging an interest in farming northern Wisconsin lands. Conceivably, it was the fair's vague relationship to actual promotional work that

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82 The Tomahawk, May 25, 1901.

83 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, September 29, 1899.

permitted this organization to continue in the public favor. For, as in the case of voluntary associations for promoting settlement, the use of public funds for encouraging the agricultural settlement of northern Wisconsin was considered by many to be of questionable value. This becomes manifestly clear when one turns to the history of the various state and county agencies devoted to that work before the sudden discontinuance of the State Board of Immigration in 1901.

### III

#### OFFICIAL PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT IN THE CUTOVER BEFORE 1900

Since they exerted powerful economic pressures upon local and state governments, the promoters of land usually found sympathetic ears when they requested government aid. Both state and local governments appropriated varying sums of money for the purpose of attracting settlers to northern Wisconsin. Usually these funds were handled by an official body, such as the several State Boards of Immigration discussed below. Similar bodies worked to advertise their communities as agricultural meccas. These were only the more obvious ways in which official help was enlisted in the task of populating the Cutover. A host of officials from governors to college professors lent their talents to the cause. In the following chapter the work of the state immigration agencies and their local counterparts will be discussed. Other branches of officialdom involved in encouraging agricultural settlement in northern Wisconsin will receive consideration also.

The state of Wisconsin did not undertake an intensive campaign to settle its northern Cutover until it established a new Board of Immigration explicitly dedicated to that task in 1895. Nevertheless, the earliest publications of the state's immigration agencies displayed much the same confidence felt by many individuals that the inevitable

process of clearing and planting would eventually take place in northern Wisconsin. In 1853 a publication of the state's Commissioner of Immigration in New York pointed out that in general the same characteristics held true for the northern pineries as for the southern portions of the state; the lands were fertile, the home markets for agricultural produce were great.<sup>1</sup> The interest of the state at large in maintaining such a point of view could hardly be doubted. In the same year a legislative committee noted

...large quantities of school land yet unsold, in the sale and occupancy of which the State has a deep and double interest, as well as in the sale of the vast tracts of Congress lands now in market within our limits. Could all such lands as those above referred to, together with land held on speculation within this State, once pass into the hands of actual settlers, the benefits to be derived by Wisconsin from such a condition of things are hardly susceptible of calculation.<sup>2</sup>

While in 1853 some of the lands referred to by the legislative committee were in all likelihood in southern Wisconsin, this was not to be the case for long. In 1869 a list of state lands open to sale was confined wholly to

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<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin State Emigration Agency, Wisconsin (New York, 1853), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Committee on State Affairs on Matters Relating to the Emigrant Agency (Madison, 1853), 4.

northern counties.<sup>3</sup> The matter of northern settlement was not urgently pressed until the end of the century. The first immigration pamphlets concerned themselves with the agricultural merits of northern Wisconsin only in passing. Yet an early state publication called attention to the fact that the northwestern part of the state and Chicago were on the same isotherm in the spring months, concluding,

This is a remarkable fact, and when generally known cannot fail to correct the erroneous impression which now prevail as to the agricultural capacity of the climate of north-western Wisconsin.<sup>4</sup>

The state's first notable immigration pamphlet, that compiled by Dr. Increase Lapham from his earlier Geographical and Topographical Description of Wisconsin (1884), took note of the protection afforded to northern plant life by early and heavy snowfalls and cited the advantages of settling in timbered country where building materials were readily at hand and the lumber business provided a nearby

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<sup>3</sup> State Lands Comprising the School, University and Agricultural College Lands, Subject to Sale in the State of Wisconsin. Published By Order of the Board of Immigration (Madison, 1869).

<sup>4</sup> Wisconsin: Its Natural Resources and Industrial Progress. Being a Portion of the Transactions of the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, For the Year 1860. Published by Order of the Legislature (Madison, 1862), 28.

market for farm produce.<sup>5</sup>

While pamphlets in English took less note of northern Wisconsin, those for foreigners were more explicit in calling attention to the advantages of timbered areas for settlers. One pamphlet in the German language, which ran into twelve editions, predicted that railroads would open the northern part of the state to streams of settlers who would come from far and wide when they learned of the excellent agricultural opportunities there.<sup>6</sup> Pamphlets for

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<sup>5</sup> Statistics Exhibiting the History, Climate and Productions of the State of Wisconsin. Published by Order of the Legislature (Madison, 1867) 9, 11. The influence of this early immigration pamphlet is discernable in nearly all publications of the state immigration agencies throughout the seventies and eighties. A more complete examination of these agencies and their publications than can be included here can be found in Theodore C. Blegen, "The Competition of Northwestern States for Immigrants," Wisconsin Magazine of History, III (September, 1919) 4, 5, 27, 28. To this should be added Merle E. Curti and Kendall A. Birr, "The Immigrant and the American Image in Europe," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVII:2 (September, 1950) 203-230. The latter is especially important for a comparison of literature issued by Wisconsin and neighboring states for the purpose of attracting agricultural settlers.

<sup>6</sup> Wisconsin, Ein Bericht uber Bevolkerung, Boden, Klima, Handel und die industriellen Verhaltnisse (3rd ed., Milwaukee, 1870), 47. As Curti and Birr point out, earlier editions of this pamphlet bore an appealing picture contrasting a fine farm home and barn with a crude log cabin from which the owner had been able to progress in only ten years. "The Immigrant and the American Image in Europe," 215. They cite the 1868 edition of the above pamphlet. For a Scandinavian pamphlet, also an adaptation from that by Lapham, see Beskrivelse Over Staten Wisconsin, Dens Klimat, Jordbund, Agerdyrkning samt Natur-og Kunstproducter... (La Crosse, 1870).

American readers soon adopted a similarly optimistic tone. Thus an 1869 edition of the Lapham publication added twenty-five pages of statistics on counties and reports from government land offices, providing opportunities for many enthusiastic predictions concerning farming in northern Wisconsin. Burnett County was described as being settled mostly by Norwegians who, by their great industry, would make it "one of the best agricultural counties in the state."<sup>7</sup> Immigration officials came to look upon the lumber industry of the north as the great hope for the farmer-settler. Employing huge numbers of men, horses and oxen to get out the timber, the lumber industry would furnish agricultural markets in the north for a half century to come.<sup>8</sup> In addition to markets supplied by lumbering, the advance of the railroads into northern Wisconsin would facilitate settlement. In 1873 the Commissioner of Immigration stated:

No one agency tends so much toward the rapid building up of the state as the building of railroads. The northern portion of this state has been sadly neglected heretofore in this respect, but the last two or three years has witnessed great changes. The completion of the Wisconsin Central Railroad...will open large tracts to settlement which have been heretofore almost unknown, or have been so far removed

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<sup>7</sup> Statistics Exhibiting the History, Climate and Productions of the State of Wisconsin (Madison, 1869), 31.

<sup>8</sup> First Annual Report of the Wisconsin Commissioner of Immigration (Madison, 1872), 25.

from any facilities for transportation that for all practical purposes they have been useless.

Railroads in the northeastern part of the state would open up a rich agricultural country to settlement also, he stated.

It has long been a well known fact that there are in Shawano and Oconto counties many hundred thousands of acres of good farming lands that will now be very speedily taken up by actual settlers.<sup>9</sup>

Similar reports were urged on the commissioner concerning northwestern Wisconsin, especially in Chippewa county, where an agent for protecting state lands reported that the Northwestern Railroad was about to place 60,000 acres of land on the market at two dollars and fifty cents an acre. He also had learned that the county was preparing to sell its lands on credit, with a small down payment, to actual settlers.<sup>10</sup>

Officials voiced such opinions as these in the publications of the new State Board of Immigration established in 1879, with an appropriation of \$2,500.<sup>11</sup> Its first publication predicted, among other things, the great future of the Chippewa Valley, where the timber supply would permit an annual output of 200,000,000 feet of lumber for the next

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<sup>9</sup> Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration...1872, 11, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1872, 30. Optimistic predictions continue in the Third Annual Report...1873.

<sup>11</sup> Wisconsin Senate Journal, 1879, 107. Wisconsin Session Laws, 1879, Chapter 176.

fifty years.<sup>12</sup> The board employed unprecedented amounts of pamphlet materials in addition to foreign newspaper advertising to call attention to farming possibilities in northern counties.<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising to find the board placing great faith in the railroads as openers of the new territory in the north, since two of its three commissioners were railroad land agents.<sup>14</sup> Nor is it surprising to find close cooperation between the railroads and the board in attempts to lure settlers to Wisconsin. This cooperation was especially outstanding in the case of K. K. Kennan, immigration agent for the Wisconsin Central Railway, who became a special agent for the state of Wisconsin at the request of Charles Colby, president of the road.<sup>15</sup> Such an arrangement as this was not without great

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<sup>12</sup> Wisconsin State Board of Immigration, Wisconsin, What It Offers to the Immigrant (Milwaukee, 1879), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 32-51. Curti and Birr, "The Immigrant and the American Image in Europe," 206.

<sup>14</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Immigration of the State of Wisconsin For the Year Ending December 31st, 1880, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Colby felt that the state position would give Kennan "extra weight" in Europe. Kennan's salary was paid entirely by the company. Charles L. Colby to J. A. Becher, May 31, 1880; Colby to Governor William Smith, June 5, 1880; Wisconsin State Executive Office Papers, boxes marked Immigration, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Hereafter cited as Executive Office Papers, Immigration. Annual Report of the Board of Immigration...1880, 6; Annual Report...1881, 12; Annual Report...1882, 10-11. The act of 1879 was modified to permit the appointment of such agents as Kennan, Wisconsin Session Laws, 1881, Chapter 223.

significance, especially in the north central part of the state. Kennan influenced many Germans to come to this section. In 1881 he personally brought 150 immigrants from the Bavarian Alps. They settled not only on Wisconsin Central Railroad lands but on privately held land as well.<sup>16</sup>

Besides intensifying its European advertising the Board of Immigration also tried to turn the westward flow of native Wisconsinites toward the north.

While the efforts of this Board have been chiefly directed to making known the resources and advantages of Wisconsin to residents of Eastern States, and of Europe, there is no doubt that by publication and distribution of these pamphlets within the State, a great deal has been done to enlighten our own citizens, many of whom were not aware that a large portion of the central and northern part of Wisconsin contains excellent farming land, thereby, to a certain extent, stemming the tide of emigration from this State into more western territory, which had at one time assumed considerable proportions.<sup>17</sup>

Out-of-state readers of the board's pamphlets were urged not to spend time in the southern part of the state if they had little money, but to go immediately to that section of

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<sup>16</sup> Kate E. Levi, "Geographical Origin of German Immigration to Wisconsin," Wisconsin State Historical Society, Collections, XIV(1898), 360-382.

<sup>17</sup> Annual Report...1880, 5.

the state where more public land was available.<sup>18</sup> Apparently the members of the board found native Americans largely indifferent to cut-over lands. In 1882, disturbed at a population ratio of less than four people per square mile in the newer sections of the state, the board regretfully observed the "prevailing inclination of our own people" to move to the prairies of the west where it was easier to raise a crop. The Board concluded that settlers for northern Wisconsin would have to be obtained in Europe.<sup>19</sup>

If the State Board of Immigration was unsuccessful in persuading native Americans to farm the Cutover, it was even less successful in maintaining the confidence of many citizens of Wisconsin. This was true for a number of reasons. Because of a predominance of Milwaukeeans on the board, it was not fully representative of the wishes of northern Wisconsin promoters.<sup>20</sup> James A. Becher, a Milwaukee

<sup>18</sup> Soil, Climate, Population, Commerce and Industries of Wisconsin (9th ed., Milwaukee, 1885), 30. This perhaps reflected a feeling that many immigrants never got further than Milwaukee, a criticism flung at the Board by the Milwaukee Sentinel, May 31, 1886.

<sup>19</sup> Annual Report....1882, 13, 14.

<sup>20</sup> The originating bill was that of Senator Hyde of Milwaukee. Wisconsin Senate Journal, 1879, 107. Milwaukee capital was interested in the settlement of northern Wisconsin, however, and doubtless had much to do with the introduction of bills for immigration agencies. The investments of Milwaukeeans in northern Wisconsin are well known. For a typical lumbering, farm settlement enterprise by a Milwaukeean see the writer's Athens, Wisconsin: A Study Of The Economic Development of a Northern Village, Master's Thesis, on Micro-card in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

real estate dealer was secretary of the board. The other two commissioners were J. M. Smith and R. Ostergren, land agents for the Wisconsin Valley and Wisconsin Central Railroads respectively. The first publication of the board in 1879 was a fifty-four page pamphlet of which more than five pages were devoted to the city of Milwaukee, while northern counties received what seemed to some promoters of settlement an unenthusiastic treatment.<sup>21</sup> S. A. Taylor, deeply involved in an agricultural promotion scheme in the recently formed New, later Taylor, County, wrote the governor that the "official report" of the Board of Immigration, probably the pamphlet referred to above, was a "disparagement to the state and a stigma on the institution." This, apparently, because of its mild statement concerning New and Shawano counties.<sup>22</sup>

The resentment toward the State Board of Immigration for its neglect of northern Wisconsin was also indicated by a petitioner who asked for an immigration agency at Superior and a larger appropriation from the legislature, because

Said amount would benefit this northern section in proportion; enable the Board to have qualified agents appointed, at least here, were [where?] the country

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<sup>21</sup> Wisconsin State Board of Immigration, Wisconsin, What It Offers To The Immigrant (Milwaukee, 1879) 24-29.

<sup>22</sup> S. A. Taylor to Governor William C. Smith, November 14, 1879, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

needs settlers established,...<sup>23</sup>

As it was organized, the Board of Immigration was incapable of bringing settlers to the state lands, one critic stated. Immigrants who came to Milwaukee received little information about state owned lands, because the three immigration commissioners were either railroad land agents or speculators on their own account. Whereas state lands now went to speculators and lumber dealers, if the Board were located at Madison as a branch of the state land office, state lands might be sold to actual settlers.<sup>24</sup>

Failure to get immigrants out to the land also created anti-immigrant sentiment in Milwaukee, where it was felt that labor disturbances were in part caused by the heavy influx of foreigners. The Milwaukee Sentinel found the city divided on the issue of immigration. One German merchant complained that immigrants were flooding the city, and that they did not go out to settle on the land. The clerk of the state board was criticized because he spent much of his time finding employment for immigrants in Milwaukee.<sup>25</sup>

The Board of Immigration defended itself as having

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23 B. A. Froiseth to His Excellency the Governor of Wisconsin, September 9, 1882, Executive Office Papers, Immigration. The petition concerned is cited above, p. 57.

24 Milwaukee Sentinel, May 31, 1886.

25 Ibid., May 31, 1886.

virtually transformed northern Wisconsin from a dense forest to an area dotted with immigrant's farms in a period of six years. It contended that a greatly increased trade must accrue to Milwaukee from such activity.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless anti-immigration sentiment prevailed, and in 1887 a legislature which memorialized Congress to prevent the admission of alien undesirables also abolished the State Board of Immigration.<sup>27</sup>

Thus in 1887 state promotion of agricultural settlement in northern Wisconsin halted abruptly. But this condition would not endure. The problem posed by the vast and ever mounting acreage of wasteland induced the renewal of state efforts when a new board was established in 1895. Moreover, the new board was frankly created for the purpose of populating the northern counties.<sup>28</sup>

State politics reflected the expanding importance of the northern portion of Wisconsin by the turn of the century.

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26 Biennial Report...1886, 17.

27 Petitions and memorials against the admission of paupers, lepers and other undesirable immigrants were introduced by Senator Kidd of Grant County. Wisconsin Senate Journal, 1887, 181, 206. The repealer bill was that of another southern Wisconsin legislator, Samuel S. Miller, of Rock County. Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1887, 61; Wisconsin Session Laws, 1887, I: Chapter 21.

28 Report of the State Board of Immigration(Madison, December 20, 1898) 1.

It was during the governorship of a lumberman, William Upham, that a new immigration board was born. In 1895 an Ashland County lumberman introduced into the legislature the bill for creating a new Board of Immigration. It was virtually a copy of its predecessor of 1879.<sup>29</sup> Upon its passage by both houses the bill went to Upham, who was personally interested in the bill, and had made a study of immigration work in other states.<sup>30</sup> He appointed northern Wisconsin men to the new board, the southernmost member being from Portage County. Polk and Ashland counties were represented and the most important member, Secretary George W. Bishop, was from Rhinelander in Oneida County. Soon after the board's organization, Upham and Bishop visited eastern cities for the purpose of advertising northern Wisconsin and gaining the interest of European immigration agencies.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1895, 169; Wisconsin Session Laws, 1895, Chapter 235. The legislature voted down a bill to establish an agricultural experiment station in northern Wisconsin, Assembly Journal, 1895, 379, 544.

<sup>30</sup> Upham's interest in immigration is shown in replies to his queries concerning immigration agencies from governors of several states. See the files for February, 1895, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

<sup>31</sup> Report to the Secretary of State, typewritten, undated, 1897, in the Executive Office Papers, Immigration. Upham's successor, Edward Scofield, was also a lumberman. He was cited by one prominent land promoter as "satisfied that we can make farms out of the whole principle part of northern Wisconsin and...doing everything he can to help us land fellows." James L. Gates to George W. Taylor, April 2, 1900, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

The 1895 legislature also provided funds for a book to be prepared by the Dean of the College of Agriculture. This was Northern Wisconsin; A Handbook for the Homeseeker, unquestionably the most important and effective book of its kind ever published in Wisconsin.<sup>32</sup> Professor Henry, first dean of the College of Agriculture, was a well known figure in northern Wisconsin. As early as the mid-eighties he had urged northern settlers to go into dairying when the demand of lumber camps for hay and garden produce began to diminish. His investigations into the agricultural possibilities of northern Wisconsin were well known before the advent of his handbook.<sup>33</sup>

Henry's immediate interest in the publication of a settler's guide arose, according to his own story, from a visit to drought stricken western Nebraska in 1894, where he became convinced that settlements in a wooded area adapted to diversified agriculture were more practical than those on the plains.<sup>34</sup> It was probably not difficult for "that effective University lobbyist, Professor Henry," as Curti and

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<sup>32</sup> Wisconsin Senate Journal, 1895, 173. Wisconsin Session Laws, 1895, Chapter 311.

<sup>33</sup> See his letter to the Wisconsin Agriculturist, XII:25(June 23, 1898), 2. Superior Evening Telegram, June 30, 1894.

<sup>34</sup> See his letter printed in the Tomahawk Wisconsin Tomahawk, April 21, 1900.

Carstensen so aptly have characterized him,<sup>35</sup> to obtain from the legislature a bill authorizing him to prepare a bulletin describing the agricultural resources of the northern part of the state. The legislature specified a practical publication for homeseekers, dealing with the advantages to be found in settling in the newer parts of the state, such as agreeable climate, good soil, variety of crops to be grown, and the location and prices of land.<sup>36</sup>

Dean Henry lost little time in preparing his handbook. In the summer and fall of 1895 Henry and his associates visited every county in northern Wisconsin for material for the handbook. They sought the first hand experiences of settlers, perhaps with less objectivity than Henry insisted on in his experiments at the Agricultural College, but with the understandable faith and zeal of men who were convinced that northern Wisconsin was the land of opportunity for those willing to clear farms on cut-over

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<sup>35</sup> Merle E. Curti and Vernon Carstensen, The University of Wisconsin, A History (Madison, 1948), I: 319. Henry's great popularity with legislators and farmers of the state is evidenced by his obtaining from the legislature the first appropriation for research of any kind at the University of Wisconsin. Maintaining the dress and effecting the vernacular of the dirt farmer, he was at the same time a scholarly investigator and an astute administrator. Ibid., II: 376 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Wisconsin Senate Journal, 1895, 173. Wisconsin Session Laws, 1895, Chapter 311. The amount of appropriated was \$2000.

lands.<sup>37</sup>

The resulting publication was indeed A Handbook for the Homeseeker.<sup>38</sup> From it the prospective settler could learn about the physiography, climate, soil, available lands and their prices, types of crops suitable to the region with special chapters on swine, sheep, potatoes and fruit, and Henry's great hope for the Cutover, dairying. In addition testimonial letters revealed the personal experiences of settlers, usually people with little means who had made a success of farming cut-over lands.<sup>39</sup> Nor was the inducement of a banker's testimonial as to the safety of agricultural investments in the area omitted.<sup>40</sup>

Probably as appealing as any statistical array of

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37 Henry wrote to Ed L. Peet: "Now I would like to get the experience of one or two men who have come to Burnett County with a little money, or none whatever, and have settled down there and made something of a success of clearing their land and establishing a farm." His letter is printed in the Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, December 13, 1895.

38 Published at Madison, 1896. Hereafter cited as the Handbook.

39 See note 37 above in reference to Henry's efforts to get this type of testimonial.

40 Halle Steensland, President of the Savings Loan and Trust Company, of Madison, testified that he had placed farm loans in several northern counties for a period of twenty years with hardly more than two foreclosures for every 100 loans. Handbook, 158.

facts and figures, or the reports of personal experiences of settlers, was the heart to heart, man to man approach of Professor Henry. Throughout the Handbook, and especially in his "talk with the Homeseeker,"<sup>41</sup> this quality was evident. Henry's sincerity was worthy of the mission he saw for his book:

If this Hand Book shall be an instrument in removing the great ignorance and even prejudice which prevails in the southern half of our own state concerning the agricultural possibilities of northern Wisconsin, and if it shall convey to our people and those of other states and countries a true knowledge of this region, much good will have been accomplished.<sup>42</sup>

It was plain to him that misleading evidence had deluded southern Wisconsin farmers into thinking cut-over land was worthless.<sup>43</sup> This was far from the real case. To the sons of farmers in the older, crowded sections of the state, to those farmers who sought larger farms with only a limited amount of capital to invest, to farm laborers, tenants and city dwellers tired of a "hand to mouth" existence, northern Wisconsin was a land of opportunity.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, there were great advantages for the people of southern Wisconsin in remaining within the borders of their state:

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41 Handbook, 162-180.

42 Handbook, 6.

43 Handbook, 16.

44 Handbook, 20.

Wisconsin is today the best state in the union for Wisconsin people to settle in, for these are familiar with the climatic conditions, social features and the laws and customs of our commonwealth, they have learned self-government as practiced here and can shift to their new holdings without serious break or inconvenience. First of all, then, Wisconsin's raw and untamed but fertile lands at the north are for our own people to possess and occupy.<sup>45</sup>

To this end special attempts were made to convince the "great army of doubters in southern Wisconsin who do not believe that a corn crop can be grown north of about the middle of the state."<sup>46</sup>

The Cutover beckoned to all people who wanted a farm. Here lay a region where clearing a farm was a "laborious task" to be sure, but the settler of limited means would find the materials easily obtainable for a comfortable home, plenty of fuel, and an abundant supply of good water. Once settled, northern Wisconsin would be a country of small, neighborly farms as opposed to the lonely, isolated farms of the western plains. The settler without capital could find employment in the lumber camps, while his own farm would undoubtedly be rich with unharvested timber resources.<sup>47</sup>

The Cutover appeared unique to Henry in that its cities and villages were

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45 Handbook, 20.

46 See the pictures of mature corn fields in the Handbook, 69, 79.

47 Handbook, 162 ff.

...twenty years in advance of the rural districts about them. Were the country developed in proportion of [sic] the cities and villages this region would today contain at least fifty thousand more inhabitants than it does. Were this so, farming lands would be much higher priced than they are at present.

The lesson was obvious; the markets were there and the investment was a sure one, for land values would rise as settlement proceeded.<sup>48</sup> Given such a faith, one could rest assured that

...northern Wisconsin will not revert to a wilderness with the passing of the lumber industry, but will be occupied by a thrifty class of farmers whose well directed, intelligent efforts bring substantial, satisfactory returns from fields, flocks, and herds.<sup>49</sup>

Dean Henry's handbook received a circulation fulfilling the author's highest hopes. By 1897, 50,000 copies of the book had been distributed, mainly in response to personal inquiries received by the State Board of Immigration.<sup>50</sup> The Board reported in 1898 that the Handbook was "in great demand from railroad companies, real estate dealers, land corporations and individual home seekers."<sup>51</sup> Published by the state and written by agricultural experts from a reput-

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48 Handbook, 18.

49 Handbook, 6.

50 State Board of Immigration, Report to the Secretary of State, 1897, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

51 Report of the State Board of Immigration(Madison, December 20, 1898), 1, 2.

able school, the book was accepted as authoritative. One Illinois land promoter wrote the Secretary of the Board that it "takes better" than railroad publications for prospective settlers.<sup>52</sup> A Milwaukee dealer used the handbook in conjunction with his own circular and letters from the governor.<sup>53</sup> So popular was the Handbook that within five years after its publication copies were selling at one dollar apiece.<sup>54</sup>

But the effectiveness of Henry's book could not be measured alone by its circulation. Newspapers throughout the state gave it wide notice and quoted again and again from its contents. Thus additional circulation was afforded "What Professor Henry says of Northern Wisconsin," as one paper headed its articles from the Handbook.<sup>55</sup> Apparently the half-tone cuts used in the Handbook were loaned to whoever asked for them and thus found their way into numerous promotional publications.<sup>56</sup> The information collected for

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<sup>52</sup> Frederick O. Grill to George W. Taylor, December 7, 1900, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

<sup>53</sup> Theodore Rudzinski to George W. Taylor, December 7, 1900, Ibid., Immigration.

<sup>54</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, April 12, 1901.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., September 15, 1899; February 23, 1900.

<sup>56</sup> W. A. Henry to George W. Taylor, March 20, 1900, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

the Handbook was also made available for private use. The land commissioner of the "Omaha" line, for example, had some of Henry's material published in pamphlet form for free distribution.<sup>57</sup>

The popular Dean himself was as available to promoters of the Cutover as his Handbook for the Homeseeker. A constant stream of articles and letters flowed from Henry's office to the northern press. He took special interest in the organization of groups to promote settlement. He appeared in person at the founding of the North Wisconsin Improvement and Immigration Association, and lent his support to their organ, the New North Wisconsin.<sup>58</sup> His letters on northern Wisconsin graced the pages of many a Wisconsin paper.<sup>59</sup> Sometimes he was overenthusiastic. In spite of the predominant sand and swamp of Burnett County, Dean Henry, in commenting on that area, declared,

I have no hesitation in predicting that it will become one of the most prosperous regions in all Wisconsin and that in a short time all the lands will be

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57 The Wisconsin Farmer, XX:49(December 5, 1901) 593.

58 Eau Claire New North Wisconsin, I:1(April, 1896), 3;2(June, 1896), 4.

59 Cumberland New Wisconsin, April, 1896. Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, June 17, 24, August 5, 1898; March 31, 1899. Milwaukee Journal, April 16, 1900. Tomahawk, April 21, 1900.

taken up and most of them cleared into good farms.<sup>60</sup>

While Dean Henry was bringing the College of Agriculture into line behind the movement to settle the Cutover, the new State Board of Immigration produced characteristic pamphlets and booklets. Between 1895 and 1897, 60,000 pamphlets in English, German, and Norwegian were printed and illustrated with scenes from Henry's book.<sup>61</sup> As their titles indicated, these pamphlets were aimed mainly at prospective settlers for the Cutover.<sup>62</sup> Between June, 1899, and December, 1900, the Board distributed 250,000 pieces of literature.<sup>63</sup>

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60 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, June 24, 1898. He pointed out, however, that some of the "lighter soils" were not to be settled. It would be unfair to Henry to say that he advocated unlimited settlement in northern Wisconsin. See for instance, his warning in the Milwaukee Journal, April 16, 1900, concerning both unreliable land promoters and undesirable lands. But the prevailing tone of Henry's writings was optimistic to the point of indiscretion.

61 Report to the Secretary of State(1897), Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

62 Wisconsin: Its Opportunities and Inducements to Home Seekers(Madison, 1895). Wisconsin; Bevolkerung, Bodenschaffenheit, Klima und industrielle Verhaltnisse in Nordlichen Theile des Staates Wisconsin...(Milwaukee, 1895). Wisconsin. Befolkning, Fordbundsbestaffenhed, Klimat og industrielle Forhold in Staten Wisconsin Nordlige Del (Madison, 1896).

63 Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Immigration...1900, 1.

The new board employed the advertising methods of its predecessor. Advertisements and articles were placed in newspapers throughout the United States and in Europe. Ministers were solicited for names of friends of their parishioners who were prospective settlers, and special efforts were put forth to interest Dunkards in coming to northern Wisconsin.<sup>64</sup> South African Boers also presented a possibility to the Secretary of the Board, who offered his services to the Secretary of State in providing homes for these unhappy British subjects lately at war with the mother country.<sup>65</sup>

Beginning with the eastern trip of Governor Upham and Secretary Bishop of the Board of Immigration in 1895, several representatives of the Board made tours for the purpose of getting settlers for northern Wisconsin. In 1901 Secretary Taylor reported that he had travelled from Pittsburgh to Omaha, and that temporary assistants had visited Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio.<sup>66</sup> One of these assistants

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64 Report to the Secretary of State, 1897, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

65 George W. Taylor to John D. Hay, December 5, 1900, Executive Office Papers, Immigration Letter Books. Taylor suggested to a Milwaukee Road official that he promote a 50,000 acre tract in Forest County for a colony of Boers, in that way insuring "the haul" for his company. Taylor to W. E. Powell, December 20, 1900, Ibid., Immigration Letter Books.

66 Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Immigration...1900, 1. Upham and Bishop persuaded several colonization and immigration companies to investigate northern Wisconsin as a possible ground for operation. Report to the Secretary of State, 1897, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

was the energetic editor of the Journal of Burnett County, Ed L. Peet, who apparently undertook a tour of the East for promotional purposes largely on his own initiative. His request for financial aid for the trip was met with the nominal contribution of fifty dollars by the Board. This might explain Peet's preference for freight trains as a means of transportation on at least a part of his eastern trip.<sup>67</sup> Peet toured for a total of four weeks in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. At each stopping point he had small handbills distributed several days in advance of his arrival and announced his visits in local newspapers as well. Acting in his capacity as secretary of his local board of immigration, he distributed a special folder on Burnett County, adding to this a folder on state lands. These were placed in farm wagons wherever he had the opportunity. He gathered for his mailing list the names and addresses of tenant farmers and others who seemed likely to be attracted to northern Wisconsin.<sup>68</sup>

Peet's trip apparently convinced him that the East was not the place to look for settlers for northern Wisconsin.

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<sup>67</sup> George W. Taylor to Ed L. Peet, September 7, 20, 1899, Ibid., Immigration Letter Books. Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, October 27, 1899. Peet received no funds from the Burnett County Board of Immigration, of which he was secretary. Another such agent was James H. Agen of Superior, a prominent land dealer, Ibid., March 25, 1898.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., October 27, 1899.

Shortly after his return he wrote in favor of concentrating on areas where more contrast could be offered to the prospective settler; timber and water would be effective talking points in the arid regions of the West.<sup>69</sup>

The correspondence of the Secretary of the Board of Immigration and of the satellite boards in the counties was also an important means of attracting settlers to northern Wisconsin. In 1897 the Board had received over 9000 letters, mostly from people in southern Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa and Minnesota. No doubt their proximity to Wisconsin was a controlling factor in the responsiveness of farmers in these states. Again, the greatest number of personal investigations of land following correspondence with the Board came from much the same area.<sup>70</sup>

While letters from friends and relatives proved effective in Europe, the Board found that its advertising did not produce favorable results unless it was followed up by land agents, presumably acting in conjunction with the Board.<sup>71</sup> This was especially true since the Board had no

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., December 22, 1899. Secretary Taylor had earlier expressed a similar opinion to Peet concerning New England, although he had been optimistic about other areas in the East. Taylor to Ed L. Peet, September 7, 1897, Executive Office Papers, Immigration Letter Books.

<sup>70</sup> Report to the Secretary of State, 1897, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 1897.

funds with which to assist in colonizing activities or to defray the expenses of land seekers sent out by groups wishing to colonize.<sup>72</sup> This situation was, of course, perfectly in accord with the theory under which such an agency operated. The State Board of Immigration was held to be mainly an advertising agency, and colonization activity would no doubt have been considered by many an unwarranted invasion of the field of private enterprise.<sup>73</sup> Given such an interpretation of the Board's responsibilities it was perfectly in order to channel its huge correspondence to those private interests whose function it was to deal with the settler for land. Lists of prospects were frequently sent to railroad land agents, as well as to other land agencies, as a normal course of action. The Board considered itself a go-between for the settler and the land seller.<sup>74</sup>

The secretary of the Board of Immigration was in a

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<sup>72</sup> Report of the State Board of Immigration (December 20, 1898), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Report to the Secretary of State, 1897, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

<sup>74</sup> See the typical list sent to a railroad official in George W. Taylor to W. H. Killen, August 19, 1899, Executive Office Papers, Immigration Letter Books. The Board also assigned to itself a protective role in relation to the settler. For a discussion of the accepted functions of the Board see Wisconsin, Its Opportunities and Inducements to Home Seekers, 11.

favorable position to steer more likely prospects whichever way his fancy might dictate. In Secretary Taylor's case it appeared that this was often in his own direction. A land promoter and the head of an "Improvement" company in his own Marinette County, Taylor maintained a rather vague boundary between his own business and that of the Board of Immigration. His official replies to information seekers often contained such offers as:

...I have some land of my own that I believe I could fix you up easily on. Understand that I am not a land shark, but I have some wild land that I have a great deal of confidence in, and I am willing that a man should go on and improve it and make a farm, on his own terms. After he gets it in shape, then if he wants to buy it we could talk business.<sup>75</sup>

To an Ohio representative of several families interested in homestead lands in the western part of Wisconsin, he wrote,

I myself think, although you must be your own judge, that you will be more money ahead in five years time by locating on a good piece of land in the eastern part of the state that you will have to pay \$6 to \$8.00 an acre for...than you will to go further west in the state and locate on a piece of Government land...I can locate your families, and locate them all on some of this land [which "I have...on my desk now"] that is for sale where you will do well; I could not promise as much on the government land...<sup>75</sup>

Again, to an Illinois land dealer who had written of the possibilities for obtaining settlers among the dissatisfied

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<sup>75</sup> George W. Taylor to E. E. Alden, July 10, 1899, Executive Office Papers, Immigration Letter Books.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor to R. L. Clements, December 21, 1900, Ibid., Immigration Letter Books.

renters there, he explained,

Understand that...we will have our own private deal, and if you land these gentlemen you are to get a commission on every acre sold. I think that by figuring together this way, you knowing your people down there, that we ought to be able to do quite a stroke of business.<sup>77</sup>

There was perhaps, then, reasonable substance to the charge that Taylor was "feathering his own nest" on the Board of Immigration, one of the factors which led to the sudden discontinuance of the Board by Governor La Follette in 1901.<sup>78</sup>

While the Board of Immigration fulfilled its function as go-between for prospective settlers and private interests, its members sought also to encourage the work of similar boards appointed in each county under the authority of the 1895 act. By 1897 some thirty-nine counties had such boards operating to some degree. The majority of their members were chosen by the State Board following recommendation by their respective county boards of supervisors.<sup>79</sup> The exploitation of personal contacts by local immigration agencies seemed especially important to members of the State

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<sup>77</sup> Taylor to Frederick O. Grill, December 8, 1900, Ibid., Immigration Letter Books.

<sup>78</sup> Hudson Observer, quoted in the Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, April 19, 1901.

<sup>79</sup> Report to the Secretary of State, 1897, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

Board because of their conviction that foreign-born farmers were more successful in the Cutover.<sup>80</sup>

The first advocate of more intense concentration on foreign settlers by local agencies who gained any great official notice was George M. Hotschick, Chief Clerk in the office of the Secretary of State. Hotschick won the favor of Governor Scofield with a plan proposed to the State Board of Immigration in 1899. The Board, Hotschick said, should seek settlers who would devote all their time to farming. Native Americans were undesirable for this purpose, since their sons drifted away to the cities in pursuit of easier employment and a higher standard of living.

Hotschick urged that the methods necessary for luring European peasants to the Cutover were especially adapted to the abilities of local immigration agencies. The land, the farms and the people of each county must be described in appropriate foreign language pamphlets, with the view of impressing foreigners who might recognize the names of relatives and friends who had emigrated from their own communities. In addition county boards of immigration should circulate lists wherein farmers might provide the names of relatives and friends in the "old country," in this way preparing a mailing list of desirable prospects. To these he

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<sup>80</sup> George W. Taylor to John R. Commons, December 31, 1900, Ibid., Immigration Letter Books. Commons was at this time preparing a report for the United States Industrial Commission on the subject of immigration.

would send supplements of local newspapers or pamphlets containing the descriptive materials of the county. Circulated from hand to hand in Europe, such advertising matter could reach as many as two million people, Hotschick believed. The cost to each county he estimated at \$250.<sup>81</sup> Travelling through several northern counties to advance his plan, Hotschick enjoyed favorable hearings with several officials who promised to work for appropriations for the scheme.<sup>82</sup>

Appropriations by county boards for the purpose of encouraging agricultural settlement were familiar devices before Hotschick's plan was evolved, although pamphlets were not usually printed in other than the English language. When William A. Henry addressed the first convention of the North Wisconsin Improvement and Immigration Association at Eau Claire in 1896, he was able to cite seven counties whose appropriations for immigration publications totaled \$1500.<sup>83</sup> Typical of such proceedings was the resolution of the Chippewa County Board of Supervisors to authorize the printing of 10,000 copies of a "Hand-book of Chippewa

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81 Antigo Republican, October 5, 1899.

82 George M. Hotschick, Report to State Board of Immigration, October 28, 1899, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

83 He listed Polk, \$300; St. Croix, \$50; Wood, \$300; Oneida, \$300; Taylor, \$200; Washburn, \$50; Bayfield, \$300. Eau Claire Morning Telegram, February 29, 1896.

County's farming resources..." with a map and pictures. They appropriated the sum of \$650 for the project.<sup>84</sup> In 1897 the State Board of Immigration reported that thirteen county boards had appropriated from \$100 to \$900 each for the purpose of attracting immigrants. Nine of these had issued books describing the advantages of their lands, while some counties had employed agents to obtain settlers.<sup>85</sup> These activities continued, varying in each county. Thus in 1899 the Barron County Supervisors appropriated up to \$100 for issuing pocket maps of the county as an aid to land seekers and the Ashland County Board appropriated \$250 for its immigration board.<sup>86</sup> Taylor noted in his report for 1900, however, that many county board members doubted the legality of appropriations for aiding immigration, and recommended that a law be passed legalizing such activity by county boards.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, Chippewa County ...1895-1896, 100, 102.

<sup>85</sup> Report to the Secretary of State, 1897, Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

<sup>86</sup> Proceedings of the County Board of Supervisors of Barron County, Wis....November, 1899, 12.

<sup>87</sup> Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Immigration...1900, 11. Undaunted by the lack of appropriations, Ed L. Peet, secretary of the Burnett County Board of Immigration assumed the initiative both in printing a circular and in making a promotional trip through the East. His was not an isolated case, see below p. 102.

The activities of county boards were not confined to appropriations for immigration pamphlets and similar materials. The annual state fair and numerous other county fairs provided fine showplaces for attracting settlers to northern counties. Such an opportunity to display the agricultural produce of the northland was not ignored by the Douglas County Agricultural Society, which managed to obtain funds from the county board of supervisors for that purpose.<sup>88</sup> In 1901 samples of agricultural produce were shipped to Milwaukee for the state fair, then to the Walworth County fair. Members of the "State Fair Committee" tended the exhibits and talked with interested onlookers, distributing 5,000 copies of a pamphlet on the county and its agricultural resources. The results gratified the committee; they reported that

...almost every real estate man in Superior has been kept very busy showing these lands to farmers from Wisconsin, Iowa, and other states who have come here largely as a result of our work. Many sales have already been made to these visitors, who are almost daily arriving with their families to make permanent citizens of this county.<sup>89</sup>

It is not surprising to find members of this Agricultural Society claiming that they added \$1,000 from their own purses to meet expenses for which county appropriations were insufficient.<sup>90</sup> The Society seems to have been a center

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<sup>88</sup> Douglas County Board of Supervisors, Proceedings, 1900, 14, 15, 20; 1901, 25. The appropriations were for \$300, then \$500.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 43, 48.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 48.

of promotional activity for such well known Douglas County land dealers as David Dobie, William H. Webb and James H. Agen, whose personal interest in the results of the exhibits no doubt more than justified their contributions.<sup>91</sup>

County governments also sought to encourage settlement by conveying directly to actual settlers the cut-over acres which they had acquired in lieu of delinquent taxes. While such lands were more often sold to speculators, the desire to encourage agricultural settlement was manifested as early as 1872 when it was rumored that Chippewa County would adopt a plan to sell its land on credit to actual settlers.<sup>92</sup> By the end of the century such plans were in operation in at least two counties. In 1898 Ashland County Supervisors adopted what might be called a little homestead law when they directed the county clerk to sell county lands to actual settlers, 160 acres to each, in return for an agreement to occupy the land, clear fifteen acres within five years, and add \$200 worth of improvements to the land. After a down payment of fifty cents per acre and meeting the above

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 48. Webb was secretary of the society, Dobie a member of the county board of supervisors; both served on the Fair Committee. Ibid., 1900, 15; 1901, 25. Agen, a former president of the society, had held a similar post in Mitchell County, Iowa. All suggest the advantages for land dealers in associating with such organizations.

<sup>92</sup> Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration...For the Fiscal Year 1872, 30.

terms, the settler would become the owner of the land.<sup>93</sup>

Supervisors of Price County also resolved to sell their better agricultural lands to actual settlers, the somewhat more lenient provisions in this county being that a three man land committee could sell up to 160 acres to actual settlers at five dollars "a description," providing that fifty dollars in improvements be placed on each description.<sup>94</sup>

Hence county agencies sought various ways to enhance the work of the State Board of Immigration in promoting the agricultural settlement of the Wisconsin Cutover. The latter body met a premature death in the winter of 1901, however, when Governor La Follette ended the existence of the Board before its legislated time was up. Since this action was controversial it served to point up a growing dissatisfaction in some northern counties concerning the land and immigration policy pursued by the state government.

La Follette's decision to abolish the Board came

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93 Timber cut in clearing the land belonged to the settler but he was not allowed to cut timber other than on the land he was readying for cultivation before the terms of his agreement were fulfilled. The county clerk was also authorized to sell lands outright at a price of five dollars per acre. Phillips Bee, November 23, 1898.

94 The term "description" is sometimes used for forty acres. For details of the provisions see the Phillips Bee, Supplement, September 6, 1899.

early in February, 1901.<sup>95</sup> It was met with a barrage of newspaper comment, much of it hostile. The Hudson True Republican declared that the southern part of the state had become "too exacting" concerning the desires of people in northern Wisconsin. Real estate interests had been satisfied with the work of the Board, the Republican said.<sup>96</sup> The Milwaukee Journal declared that the benefits of the Board's work had not been confined to northern Wisconsin but had been shared by Milwaukee business as well.<sup>97</sup> Friends of the Board were granted space to air their views in the Journal. Railroad land agents agreed with K. K. Kennan that the abolition of the Board was unwise, although they did feel that Secretary Taylor lacked enthusiasm and was careless of expenses.<sup>98</sup> Correspondents from Marathon and Lincoln counties took similar views, while the Journal cited the Deerfield News, a Dane County organ, as holding the regrettable opinion that the Board benefitted only lumber barons with lands to sell.<sup>99</sup>

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95 The law of 1895 had been continued with little change by acts passed in 1897 and 1899. See Wisconsin Session Laws, 1897, Chapter 327; 1899, Chapter 279.

96 Hudson True Republican, February 7, 1901.

97 Milwaukee Journal, February 11, 1901.

98 Ibid., February 11, 12, 1901.

99 Ibid., February 15, 18, 23, 1901.

The Milwaukee Sentinel found that opinion varied greatly among its northern exchanges concerning the Immigration Board issue. It noted that the Merrill Advocate favored retention of the Board while the Wausau Pilot spoke for its abolition.<sup>100</sup> The argument soared to new heights with the introduction of a bill in the state legislature to re-establish the Board of Immigration.<sup>101</sup> The Journal called for a state immigration commission through which advancement associations and other agencies could coordinate their work to attract immigrants to the stump lands.<sup>102</sup> The Hudson Observer charged that Secretary Taylor had used his office to advance his own interests.<sup>103</sup> When La Follette was reported to have stated to the legislature that the advertising of state cut-over lands could be done more effectively and properly by private enterprise, Ed L. Peet expressed total disagreement. Private enterprise had brought few settlers to Burnett County in comparison with the State Board of Immigration, he said, citing railroads as an example of private enterprise in land settlement. Moreover, private interests

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100 Milwaukee Sentinel, February 21, 1901.

101 Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1901, 330.

102 Milwaukee Journal, April 9, 1901.

103 Hudson Observer, quoted in the Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, April 10, 1901.

acted selfishly and could not, as the Governor contended, perform the same services as a disinterested public body.<sup>104</sup>

Peet circulated a petition later introduced into the State Assembly by Ole Erickson, a Burnett County politician, in support of his bill to create a new board of immigration.<sup>105</sup>

Assemblyman Erickson attempted to persuade fellow legislators that this was not a sectional measure, that enrichment of the north would enable it to share more burdens proportionately with the southern part of the state. Only since the creation of the Board in 1895 had any great influx of people to northern Wisconsin occurred.<sup>106</sup> However, the opponents defeated the bill in the Assembly by a comfortable majority.<sup>107</sup>

The defeat of Erickson's bill caused some bitterness in the north. Ed L. Peet summarized the resentment of that part of the state in his charge that politicians of the more developed areas feared an increase in population in the unsettled parts of the state "so far out of their reach." He also charged that hunters from the cities disliked settlements in their favorite shooting grounds, thus, returning to

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104 Ibid., April 26, 1901.

105 Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1901, 997.

106 His speech is reprinted in the Journal of Burnett County, May 3, 1901.

107 The vote in the Assembly was 42 against, 31 for, Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1901, 1135.

a long standing complaint of the settlers that state hunting laws discriminated against them by requiring licenses from people who needed game to eke out their first years on the land. Lumbermen also were against the agricultural settlement of the Cutover, Peet lamented, mindful of the oft-repeated charges that lumbermen disliked taxation for schools and roads demanded by settled communities. Still another reason for the defeat of the bill lay in the fear among certain elements that an immigration agency would hasten the homesteading of the remaining federal lands in Wisconsin, thus destroying hopes for their becoming state school lands.<sup>108</sup>

Peet had gained wide recognition for his special interest in the opportunity to homestead federal lands in Wisconsin. In 1900 Senator Spooner had introduced a bill in the United States Senate to grant to the State of Wisconsin a large part of the government lands remaining in that state in lieu of certain swamp lands which had been granted to but never turned over to the state.<sup>109</sup> As federal lands these were subject to homestead entry. As state lands they would not be so and promoters of settlement in those counties having federal lands were greatly disturbed by the prospect

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<sup>108</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, May 10, 1901.

<sup>109</sup> Senate Journal, 1st Session, 56th Congress, 1899-1900, 28, 102, 154.

that these lands would no longer be subject to free entry. As one-fourth of the lands affected lay in Burnett County alone, Peet took more than a proportional share of the leadership in the battle against the Spooner bill.<sup>110</sup>

Burnett County's one great lure for settlers, Peet held, was her free homesteads. If such lands were given to the state land commissioners for disposal, cheap land in northern Wisconsin would become a thing of the past.

It was the homestead law which developed the west and it is to a large extent the homestead law which is now developing northern Wisconsin.<sup>111</sup>

Other northern editors joined Peet in the campaign against the Spooner bill. When the bill passed the Senate the Chippewa Falls Herald called for its defeat in the House, lest ruinous effects be wrought on immigration to the Cutover. The future of the state lay in agriculture, and the homestead laws were the greatest inducement toward agricultural settlement.<sup>112</sup>

If the Milwaukee Sentinel had found the northern press divided on the issue of an immigration board, the Wausau Daily Record testified as to its unity against the Spooner

110 Two-thirds of all remaining federal lands in Wisconsin were in Peet's section of the state, namely: Bayfield, Douglas, Sawyer, Washburn and Burnett counties. Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, March 30, 1900.

111 Ibid., March 30, April 13, April 20, 1900.

112 Chippewa Herald, March 30, 1900.

bill. Of course opposition did exist in cities like Superior, the Record admitted, where friends of the normal schools hoped to augment the school lands of the state with the lands now held for homesteads. The Record held that

One actual settler, industrious and energetic, is worth more to this section than a quarter section of timber land, however valuable that timber may be, and when this portion of the state is finally settled it will be worth more to the state than the money accruing to the state from the sale of lands granted by the national government.<sup>113</sup>

Peet returned to the attack with charges that the proposed law would stop immigration and put former homestead lands into the hands of non-resident speculators. State owned lands had always been sold to speculators, he contended,

...If the state gets the land, not one acre in forty will have a settler upon it within the next twenty years.<sup>114</sup>

His militant battle against the Spooner bill won Peet the credit for its defeat when it failed to pass the House of Representatives.<sup>115</sup>

And so the advocates of agriculture in the Cutover

<sup>113</sup> Wausau Daily Record, May 8, 1900. The Tenth Congressional Convention at Hudson also passed a resolution against the Spooner bill. Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, April 27, 1900.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., May 4, 1900.

<sup>115</sup> Congressional Record 33: Part 3, 56th Congress, 1st Session, 1899-1900, 2636. The bill was referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Nation and failed to come up for a vote. On Peet's reputation see the quotations from several northern newspapers in the Journal of Burnett County, March 29, 1901.

could claim at least one victory against forces which seemed hostile to the advance of farming in northern Wisconsin. But reasons for anxiety still existed, Ed L. Peet warned. The death of the Board of Immigration, the sale of state lands to speculators rather than to actual settlers, and the increasing interest of state legislators in forestry constituted threats to their plans.<sup>116</sup> In addition some promoters in the swamp land areas claimed that money from the sale of state swamp lands should be used for draining land suitable for agriculture. They objected to the use of these funds for aiding normal schools.<sup>117</sup> Laws which required the "frontier settler to have a license to kill his food" seemed evidence enough that hopes for agriculture in northern Wisconsin were greatly at the mercy of an indifferent legislature.<sup>118</sup>

However, there was also reason for good cheer. At the turn of the century private promoters of the land were look-

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116 See the attack on the policy of the state land commissioners in the Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, November 15, December 13, 1901. The conflict between advocates of forestry and farming in the Cutover will be treated in a later chapter.

117 Ibid., November 15, 1901.

118 Ibid., November 15, 1901. See the article on Peet as a champion of northern interests in the Milwaukee Journal, March 6, 1902. It must be remembered, however, that Peet represented an area which was to a greater degree sub-marginal than some other areas in the Cutover and that his views on state immigration agencies, homestead lands, etc., were necessarily colored by that fact.

ing forward to the greatest flow of settlers they had yet experienced. If government agencies for advertising the Cutover had broken down for the most part, the railroads and land dealers were redoubling their efforts to bring farmers to northern Wisconsin stump lands. There was indeed reason to believe that, although government agencies and appropriations were undeniably of great aid, private sellers of the land would successfully carry the burden of settling the Cutover.

#### IV

### THE PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT UP TO 1900

It is impossible to evaluate in any objective manner the work of those who promoted the settlement of northern Wisconsin. No statistics are available to tie the movements of individual settlers with one or another form of promotion. The following pages are merely an attempt to measure the progress of settlement to 1900; to measure, as it were, how much there remained for the promoters to do if northern Wisconsin was to be transformed into a land of farmers.

In the eighties and nineties a large portion of Wisconsin's new farms were made in the cut-over counties. From 1880 to 1890 three-fourths of the 12,000 new farms were located in the northern counties. In the next decade these counties gained approximately 11,000 of some 23,000 new farms in the state.<sup>1</sup>

As might be expected, the gains in farm acreages closely paralleled those in the number of farms. Thus from 1880 to 1890, when the state's total land in farms increased by about 1,400,000 acres, more than 800,000 acres were added in northern Wisconsin. In the following decade an additional three million acres was converted into farm lands, a third of

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<sup>1</sup> Figures were totalled for twenty-four northern counties from the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth United States Census Reports.

which were in the north. These were impressive gains compared to the past. But when viewed in relation to the total land area involved, the land in farms remained strikingly low in acreage.<sup>2</sup>

The southern fringe of cut-over counties made the most impressive gains in agricultural settlement. In Shawano, Marathon, Clark, Chippewa, Barron and Polk counties the land in farms rose, on an average, from eighteen to forty-four per cent between 1880 and 1900. In contrast, an average of only ten per cent of the land of the other cut-over counties was in farms by 1900. The relatively simple state of agricultural development in the entire region is shown by the fact that less than three per cent of the land was classed as improved, even in the more advanced agricultural counties.<sup>3</sup>

Census figures on population revealed that in twenty years the flow of settlers to northern Wisconsin had not been very large. In the twenty-four counties the population rose from slightly over 120,000 in 1880, to about 400,000 in 1900. An increase of approximately 283,000 inhabitants in all these counties dwindled in importance when compared to a gain of more than half that amount in the city of Milwaukee alone, during the same period. Further, much of

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2 See the maps in Appendix A.

3 See the map and table in Appendix B.

the northern population lived in cities or lumbering camps, so that the rise in farming population had been even less than it might at first seem.

In 1890 two areas in the Cutover retained the population characteristics of frontier districts; Oneida, Forest and Langlade counties, and an area corresponding roughly to Burnett, Washburn, Sawyer, Price and the future Rusk counties, contained less than two people per square mile. In most of the counties of northern Wisconsin the density of population was not over six people per square mile in 1890.<sup>4</sup> By 1900 the islands containing less than two people per square mile had disappeared from the density of population maps. Most of northern Wisconsin now had an average of from six to eighteen people per square mile. However a narrow crescent extending from Sawyer county through Ashland, Vilas, Forest, and into Marinette county still contained less than six persons per square mile. In twenty years most of northern Wisconsin had therefore increased in population by from one to five people for every square mile, and the southern cut-over counties had gained five to ten people per square mile. Forest and Langlade counties lagged behind in this respect, their population having been augmented by less than one inhabitant in every square mile from 1890 to 1900.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Eleventh Census, Population, Part I, xxviii ff.

5 Twelfth Census, I: Population, Part I, Plates 5, 8.

Much remained, therefore, to challenge the promoters of agricultural settlement in northern Wisconsin in the twentieth century. If they credited themselves with a noteworthy rise in the southernmost cut-over counties, there remained millions of acres where population was extremely sparse and the amount of land in farms insignificant. It still remained to be seen whether northern Wisconsin would become a land of farmers.

## PART II

### THE CULTIVATION OF POSSIBILITIES

Over the fences, the barns, the walls and the sign boards of the southern part of the state the aggressive advertiser has placed the signs of his specialty, but over the hills, through the valleys and on the waters of the north nature has written the word "Possibilities."

The Tomahawk  
December 29, 1900

PART II  
THE CULTIVATION OF POSSIBILITIES

INTRODUCTION

Among the majority of land agents and promoters in the new century there was little discernable change from the techniques employed by those of 1890 or 1870. The typical land holder remained as before, a lumberman with stump lands to sell, or a speculator selling for the profit to be gained. These men advertised their lands to a varying degree, made their sales according to fairly conservative standards, allowed a "reasonable" time for payment, and left the rest to the settler.

Yet the promoters of agricultural lands in northern Wisconsin were subject to various pressures after 1900 which caused the more enlightened among them seriously to consider the problems connected with farming in the Cutover. The lack of long term credit in the northern counties, the obvious dirth of ethics among some of the promoters of stump lands, the great difficulties in clearing stump lands for farming, the number of deserted patches of clearing in the brushy waste land, were only a few of the impressive challenges to the more inventive and responsible promoters of the "new north." In addition the new century brought a different light to bear on the American farmer, some rays of which were reflected in the waste lands of northern Wisconsin.

If he had been looked upon in the 1890's as too easily swayed by crackpot theories of one sort or another, more people were now willing to consider the farmer in a friendlier light. Thus President Roosevelt's Country Life Commission reflected the new concern with rural standards of living, while in the next decades, state and federal legislation sought to improve the status of the farmer in one way or another.

Fully as important in its effects upon the promoters of the Wisconsin Cutover was the popular theory that free agricultural lands were no longer available in the West. The inescapable conclusion that the future of American agriculture now lay in more intensified tillage of older sections, or in the reclamation, through irrigation, drainage or clearing of areas formerly held unfit for farming, placed the Cutovers in a more favorable light to many a hopeful promoter. It perhaps made little difference to the average citizen that Frederick Jackson Turner had seen great significance in the end of free lands in the great West, or that later historians would dispute endlessly over the validity of his suggestions. He voiced what the people of his day had come to regard as commonplace; his contemporaries were equally impressed with the decline of free lands in the West. Especially the land holders in the Cutovers saw in this decline their golden opportunity. If Canadian lands

still beckoned Americans westward, they were to be attacked as unfit for agriculture. The reclamation projects of the West were also watched with a jealous eye.

Still another factor challenged those who wished to settle northern Wisconsin with farmers. The trek of both native and foreign born to the cities became a source of worry to many who studied the problems of unemployment and crowded living in the cities. Why did not the immigrant farmer and the American farm boy find their way instead to the remaining frontier areas? Specifically, why did they not become pioneers in areas such as northern Wisconsin?

Thus promoters of the stump lands were faced with both problems and a great opportunity in the period after 1900. If the difficulties which made potential settlers indifferent toward northern Wisconsin could be solved, if, for instance, honest dealing, long term credit, and special services to the settler could make the north attractive enough, would it not replace the West in the eyes of the city and country worker, the dissatisfied renters of Illinois, the sons of farmers who now sought a substitute for the free lands of the West? To make this dream possible a new class of promoters came to the fore in the period between 1910 and 1920. These were the "colonizers," who offered the settler a wide array of services and advantages in order to insure his success as a pioneer. These men be-

lieved, and said so often, that the old pioneering spirit of the American people was either gone or was inadequate for conquering the stump lands of northern Wisconsin. The twentieth century pioneer needed special aids and special incentives. Some even suggested that the problem was too large for private enterprise to handle. Most sought the assistance of both voluntary and public agencies with the old framework of free enterprise. Thus, as the following chapters will show, local and state officials sought to protect and encourage the settler and to increase his chances for successful farming, the College of Agriculture attacked the problems of production and land clearing in the stump lands, and voluntary associations sought in one way or another to further the settlement of northern Wisconsin by creating the necessary conditions for a thriving agriculture.

It would not be correct to maintain that only the "colonizers" were aware of the needs for new types of promotion. As indicated in the opening paragraphs the majority of the land sellers in northern Wisconsin probably retained the methods of the land agents of an earlier day. But none of them could afford to ignore for long the devices which seemed likely to lure settlers. For this reason a separate chapter will be devoted to the more "progressive" of the land sellers of the period. Another chapter will be devoted to several examples of the older type of promotion

and some generalizations on the methods of ordinary land companies. This is especially convenient since the colonizing experiments fall in a later period, chronologically. As in the previous part, successive chapters will deal with semi-public or voluntary promotional work, and with local and state efforts, among them those of the College of Agriculture. A final chapter will measure statistically the success of the promoters. Again, as in Part I, the intention is not to touch upon all promotional activities but to re-create something of the atmosphere in which so many different organizations strove to settle the stump lands with farmers.

## SELLING THE LAND, 1900-1925

## i. A General Survey

Before 1910 two large scale attempts were under way to promote the agricultural settlement of northern Wisconsin. James L. Gates made the first of these when he acquired the largest holdings of stump lands that had yet been held by a single individual in Wisconsin, or perhaps anywhere. After Gates failed the Weyerhaeusers and a number of their affiliated lumber companies seized the initiative and founded the American Immigration Company to dispose of their cut-over lands. Many smaller companies differed little from these large concerns, except in size.

In a sense, however, the more significant developments among the sellers of the land came in the following decade, for Gates and the American Immigration Company, as well as the great majority of their contemporaries, used methods which might have been used by any of their nineteenth century predecessors. In fact, there were noticeable similarities between the early efforts of the American Immigration Company and those of Caleb Cushing's Great European American Land and Emigration Company. As has already been indicated, the so called "colonization" companies made more efforts than their predecessors to adjust to the difficulties of promoting settlement in the stump lands.

They also arrived late on the scene. Hence these companies will be treated separately in a following chapter while the present one will deal with the activities of the ordinary types of land operators and the two gigantic concerns mentioned above.

Around 1900 a wave of enthusiasm struck the sellers of northern Wisconsin lands. Settlers were coming to the Cutover in greater numbers than ever before and experienced land dealers expected to double their previous annual sales.<sup>1</sup> Speculators purchased huge acreages of land in some areas, hoping to capitalize on the expected rush of settlers. Thus William and Ephraim Marriner of Milwaukee organized a Northern Colonization Company and purchased several thousand acres of land in Marinette County, announcing their intention to bring in settlers. In the same county a La Crosse investor purchased over 20,000 acres for similar purposes, one Cephas Buttles of Milwaukee bought 15,000 acres, and several Chicago concerns made similar investments.<sup>2</sup>

The optimism among salesmen renewed their faith in the agricultural future of the stump lands. Theodore Dunn,

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. Killen to George W. Taylor, September 3, 1900, Wisconsin State Executive Office Papers, boxes marked Immigration, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society; hereafter referred to as Executive Office Papers, Immigration. Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Immigration...1900, 4, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Marinette Weekly Eagle, July 14, 1900; November 26, 29, 1901; March 7, April 1, 1902.

who had lamented earlier that with the timber gone there was nothing left to do but to sell northern lands for farming, now flaunted a letter-head which pictured him displaying a long stalk of corn to a group of Iowa farmers.<sup>3</sup> Land selling now appealed to an even wider variety of people than in the 1890's. The Laird Norton Lumber Company, of Winona, was besieged with requests from druggists, postmasters, insurance salesmen, school superintendents, and even the warden of the Wisconsin State Prison, at Waupun, all seeking agencies for Laird Norton Company stump lands.<sup>4</sup>

But agents who worked on a commission basis did not find sales as profitable as they probably expected. One dealer who tried to operate his business by mail complained that it had taken him two months to sell one piece of land in this fashion.

I found it difficult to sell through correspondence on account of the peculiar impression generally prevailing as to this part of the state. Parties desiring to purchase are very solicitous as to expenses which we always find an opportunity for shaving.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Theodore Dunn to Laird Norton Company, January 23, 1902, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1902. The Laird Norton Papers for the years after 1900 are in the vaults of the Laird Norton Company, Winona, Minnesota. The abbreviated citation will be used on the following pages.

4 Ibid., see the correspondence files on Cut Pine Lands, 1900-1904.

5 Frank E. Watson to Laird Norton Company, November 7, 1899, Ibid., Cut Pine Lands, 1900.

Moreover, some land holders insisted upon reserving mineral rights. Possibly the proximity to the northern iron ranges had much to do with the general interest in minerals. On the other hand, talk of minerals and the reservation of mineral rights was an old ruse among land promoters who hoped to lure speculators. Whatever the purpose behind them, these reservations made the work of land agents extremely difficult. They reported that it was almost impossible to sell to farmers lands which had any reservations attached. Some held that the happiest solution to the problem was to reserve one-half of the mineral rights as a means of encouraging the purchaser to locate mineral deposits.<sup>6</sup> But the difficulties encountered in trying to sell stump lands convinced a few lumbermen that no reservations should be made whatsoever, especially where mineral finds seemed extremely unlikely.<sup>7</sup>

Letters from several agents to lumber companies indicated that high land prices were also deterrants to the expected land boom that never materialized. By 1904, the Laird Norton Company found that its lands were not moving

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<sup>6</sup> D. P. Arpin to Laird Norton Company, August 9, 1901. See also S. W. Anderson to Laird Norton Company, December 17, 1901; G. O. Van Dusen to Laird Norton Company, May 3, 1902; Oric O. Whited to Laird Norton Company, April 28, 1903; Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1901-1903.

<sup>7</sup> J. T. Barber to Fred S. Bell, August 3, 1906, Ibid., American Immigration Company, 1907.

even when offered at lower prices than in other years. This was the case also with the Shaw Lumber Company at Eau Claire. An agent stated that this company's lands were priced too high to compete with other lands around them. One of his partners had been "starved out," he reported, and had taken work in a lumber camp. He also intimated that the failure of the Shaw Company to pay commissions of one dollar an acre, as did promoters like James L. Gates, was a factor in the failure to sell their lands.<sup>8</sup> Another manager of the Shaw Company interests stated that agents were "whining like pups" because of the hard times. Land prices had been pushed up too rapidly in areas where no roads or bridges had been built. In three years one township had received only a single settler.<sup>9</sup>

Some lumber companies were also reluctant to make other adjustments necessary for a rapid sale of cut-over lands. Most landholders were slow in accepting the need for advertising. Four land and lumber companies in a total of ten reported in 1913 that they did nothing whatsoever to attract settlers.<sup>10</sup> A few lumber companies began to adver-

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<sup>8</sup> B. M. King to Eugene Shaw, June 22, September 11, 1903, Shaw Lumber Company Papers, Eau Claire Public Library.

<sup>9</sup> T. F. Armstrong to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, June 24, 1904, Shaw Lumber Company Papers.

<sup>10</sup> In 1913 the newly created State Board of Public Affairs attempted to gather data on the methods and operations of land companies. A few of the questionnaires upon which the above statement is based are filed in the State Legislative Reference Library, in the State Capitol, in a box marked Land Settlement, Promotion.

tise their lands in the 1890's but the newspapers of the early 1900's were nearly barren of land advertisements. Some lumbermen reacted coldly to proposals that they engage in newspaper advertising. Thus Eugene Shaw wrote to James L. Gates in regard to a suggestion that several companies raise \$9000 for an intensive newspaper advertising campaign:

We would not care to engage in the enterprise referred to. We haven't to our knowledge, sold an acre of land on account of the advertising we did last year and I decided, some time since, to not fool away any money in that direction.<sup>11</sup>

But such a point of view was not representative of the majority of land holders at so late a date. Only four years later a number of Wisconsin companies holding cut-over lands were willing to contribute one cent an acre annually to create an advertising fund.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, many firms became convinced that something extra would have to be offered to a prospective settler before he could be lured to Wisconsin stump lands. In 1906, a precursor of the later colonization companies, the George Knoblauch Farm

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<sup>11</sup> Eugene Shaw to James L. Gates, June 20, 1905, Shaw Lumber Company Papers. For examples of early land advertisements by lumber companies see the Cumberland Morgan's Farm Advocate, February 27, 1896, and The Tomahawk, May 18, 1901.

<sup>12</sup> See the later chapter on voluntary promotional associations, in which the Wisconsin Advancement Association is discussed.

Land Company of Ladysmith and Chicago, offered a log house with every eighty acres of land purchased.<sup>13</sup> Many Wisconsin companies participated in advancement schemes of one sort or another as a means of enticing the settler and insuring his success.

The large demonstration farms commonly used to promote interest in northern lands as well as to illustrate good farming practices to settlers, were continued on a grander scale after 1900. In 1900 the Northwestern Lumber Company organized the Northern Wisconsin Live Stock Company, at Stanley, as a large scale experiment in stock raising on stump lands. W. L. Carlyle, professor of animal husbandry at the state University, became the president of the company. University graduates were expected to find the experiment attractive and it was hoped that the project would become the center of a "notable colony of scientific, practical, educated and up to date farmers."<sup>14</sup>

Lumbermen were not the only promoters interested in the encouragement of large farming enterprises in the Cut-over. In 1905, James L. Gates was able to persuade the Darlington brothers, Chicago livestock merchants, to start a 5000 acre cattle and sheep ranch in Rusk county. As many

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13 Ladysmith Rusk County Journal, December 29, 1906.

14 Stanley Republican (supplement), December 27, 1902.

as 600 cattle and 12,000 sheep were kept on this tract at one time. The Darlington's operated the ranch until 1922, when they decided that the operation was not a profitable one.<sup>15</sup>

The Stark potato farm, begun in 1912 in Oneida County, was a successful venture by a Chicago potato buyer. Operated for profit rather than for its promotional value, the venture nevertheless provided opportunities for advertising the agricultural productiveness of the north. The Rhineland News made much of the fact that the clearing and planting of 380 acres in the first year brought profits enough to pay for all the costs involved. By 1914 the grower had cleared 800 acres and huge stump pullers were at work to clear the rest of the 18,000 acre tract.<sup>16</sup>

The great variety of organizations engaged in selling land made difficult any attempt to describe the typical land company of, say 1910. Perhaps all that could be said of them in general was that they differed from the later colonization companies in the degree of "service" which they offered to the settler. Otherwise they ranged in type from the Evangelical Lutheran Colonization Company to the

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<sup>15</sup> For Gates' part in the deal see pp. below. James Sturlaggson, "Size of Land Holdings in Wisconsin," Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics, 3 (August, 1927) 311.

<sup>16</sup> Rhineland News, May 22, 1914.

American Immigration Company.

In 1900 Hans P. Petersen started the Evangelical Lutheran Colonization Company. He had operated for several years at Cumberland, in Barron County, as an agent for several lumber companies. From this he had moved to his own land agency, a partnership, and finally, to the \$100,000 corporation which was to be active for twenty years. Beginning with only 1200 acres and an agency for several lumber companies, Petersen chose the name of his company to attract German Lutheran settlers, since he felt that they were most likely to succeed under pioneering conditions. By 1908 he had sold all the company's lands in western Wisconsin and moved his base of operations to Merrill, in the central part of the state. Two years later he dropped the original title of the company and it became the Cloverland Colonization Company.

Petersen sold mainly to middle-western German Americans, advertising in the English and German language newspapers of Milwaukee, Chicago, and in other Illinois and Iowa newspapers. In addition he published his own monthly, a "Practical Advisor" for the settlers. Through this medium and also through local agents the company strove to persuade settlers to engage in dairying. They believed this to be the only profitable form of agriculture in the Cutover.

At most, six persons were employed by the Cloverland Colonization Company. Petersen was the only travelling representative. Settlers were required to pay down one-fourth of the purchase price and were allowed an indefinite period of time to complete their payments, according to Petersen's later statements. The settler received a mortgage when half the payments on his land contract were completed. The mortgages were not sold to financiers but were retained by the company until cancelled. Petersen discouraged buyers who had no experience in farming. He recommended that a settler have at least six cows and enough cash remaining after his first payment to support his family for the first year.

Petersen attempted at one time to supply his settlers with ready made houses, no doubt taking a cue from other colonization companies. But he was unable to make a success of the experiment. Similarly, he failed in an attempt to clear and develop a demonstration farm, mainly because of the depression of the twenties. In fact, the latter period of stress virtually put an end to the land sales of the company, though it continued a kind of passive existence after that date. In the spring of 1920 Petersen sold \$45,000 worth of lands, mainly to mid-western farmers who made first payments and planned to settle in the fall, after holding auctions on their rented farms. These

auctions yielded so little, however, that the farmers were unable to complete their move to northern Wisconsin. Settlers now began to desert their farms in fairly large numbers, for the first time in the history of the company. Thus depression brought to a halt the work of the Cloverland Colonization Company.<sup>17</sup>

The Skidmore Land Company, of Marinette, was another of the companies attempting to promote the settlement of the Cutover in the period between 1900 and 1925. Listed for the first time in a Marinette city directory in 1903, the Skidmore Land Company was apparently at that time a small organization with a single building serving as both home and office for three members of the company.<sup>18</sup> By 1914, however, Ralph Skidmore had become a person of some influence in his community, not only as the son-in-law of Isaac Stephenson, wealthy lumberman, politician, and at one time probably the largest land holder in the county, but also through his position as secretary of the Farmer's Savings and Trust Company, the State Land Mortgage Association, and the Skidmore Land Company.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hans P. Petersen, still the president of the Cloverland Colonization Company, described his experiences to the writer in an interview at Merrill, Wisconsin, December 1, 1950.

<sup>18</sup> Polk's Marinette Directory, 1903.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1914.

Landology, A Text Book on the Land Situation, published by the Skidmore Company in 1912, typified the high pressure tactics of this land company. Declaring that water was the key to land's productiveness, Landology pointed to northern Wisconsin's heavy growth of timber as indicating that water abounded in her soils and that they must thus be among the best for agriculture. Wisconsin was one of the few states having such lands available for settlement. The reader was urged to stay away from the plains:

...for the average man with the average means to take his family and try to make a home on the wind swept prairies of the semi-arid region of drought, blizzards, hot winds and frosts is a different proposition. The cries for help are constantly coming from the Dakotas and other locations where the hot winds in the early part of 1911 killed all of the grain and the frost in August killed all of the corn and left the farmer without a single thing. Even then he has to buy his fuel to keep warm, where the winters average one-third colder than in Marinette County, Wis.<sup>20</sup>

By way of contrast to this dismal picture of farming in the West, Landology told what a settler could accomplish in Marinette County:

The farmer can come to Marinette County and buy land at a cheap price, hire it cleared, and make him a fine home in a short time, where his family has all the advantages they are accustomed to in the way of churches, schools, towns, R.F.D., rural telephones, and where he can raise all the crops he has been accustomed to and several others that cannot be raised

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<sup>20</sup> Lloyd M. Skinner, Landology, A Text Book on the Land Situation (Marinette, 1912) 9.

successfully in Illinois, Indiana, or Iowa, and which are more profitable than any crop raised in those states. He can raise all the hardier fruits and berries and compete with any country anywhere and never worry about water or irrigation ditches or hot winds or blizzards or frosts or markets or robber railroads.<sup>21</sup>

Such was the paradise painted for the prospective settler who chanced to receive a copy of the Skidmore Land Company's promotional booklet. Embellished with pictures of fine crops, luring tales of fish and game, Landology was one of the most pressing invitations to northern Wisconsin ever published.

The Skidmore Land Company apparently did not follow suit in offering the many services and advantages given to settlers by some contemporary colonization companies. In 1920, a year in which the company sold 30,000 acres of land, Marion C. Calkins who surveyed the work of a number of land companies in northern Wisconsin referred to the Skidmore Company as "ostensible money makers." This company, she said, gave only short term credit, did not provide stock or put up buildings for the settler. It merely cleared away brush to make lands accessible. While foreign born settlers were not barred from making purchases, the company preferred to deal with farmers from the corn belt who had accumulated savings of at least \$1500. The company urged its settlers to cooperate with the state University in land clearing

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 13.

projects. This, Miss Calkins declared, was the extent of its work with the settler.<sup>22</sup>

With some exceptions the railroads continued in the role they had begun so early as leaders in promoting agricultural settlement in the stump lands. Some roads changed their policies. Thus, the Chicago and Northwestern Company announced a reforestation policy for its remaining 200,000 acres. In 1912 a company official of that firm stated that no efforts would be made by the company to bring in settlers, since its lands were not suited for agriculture. The company sold its timbered lands outright, however, thus placing the burden of dealing with stump lands in the hands of the new owner. The Milwaukee road, too, was an exception to the usual role of the railroads in the stump lands, since nearly all of its lands had been disposed of by 1911.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, the Wisconsin Central Railroad continued its campaign to bring settlers northward, as did the "Soo" and "Omaha" lines. The first of these directed a strong appeal to the working men in the cities in such pamphlets as Do You Want Work And A Home Of Your Own? (n.p., n.d.) and Wisconsin And Its Opportunities (n.p., about 1905).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Marion C. Calkins, "Colonization Projects in Wisconsin," Survey, 45(January 1, 1921), 480-485.

<sup>23</sup> J. F. Cleveland to B. G. Packer, November 29, 1911; to William M. Duffus, March 4, 1912; John P. Hume to William M. Duffus, November 10, 1911; State Legislative Reference Library, Land Settlement, Promotion.

<sup>24</sup> Copies in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

The latter publication offered lands at from five dollars to seven dollars and fifty cents an acre, with the provision that settlers, like homesteaders, must build a "substantial" dwelling house and clear two acres out of every forty within two years of purchase. Financial terms for the buyer were not lenient; he must pay one-fourth down at the time of purchase and the balance in three or four years at six per cent interest.<sup>25</sup> The Minneapolis St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie, or "Soo" Railroad, advertised over 400,000 acres in the usual manner, spending as much as \$10,000 yearly for that purpose. Much the same was true of other lines.<sup>26</sup>

A significant change in the promotional activities of nearly all railroads was the adoption of extension type educational work to encourage successful farming along their lines. Thus the Chicago and Northwestern Road, although it had no agricultural lands for sale, maintained a "general dairy agent" to encourage the development of dairying along the road.<sup>27</sup> "Grassland specials," "livestock specials,"

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25 Wisconsin And Its Opportunities, 47.

26 William H. Killen to B. G. Packer, December 20, 1911; G. W. Bell to B. G. Packer, November 16, 1911. In 1917 the industrial agent of the "Omaha" road estimated that his company had spent \$25,000 for advertising Wisconsin lands from 1912 to 1916. Cut Over Land Conference, Land Clearing In Upper Wisconsin(Eau Claire, 1917), 26.

27 Ibid., 27.

stump puller demonstration trains and demonstration fields became common sights along the various rail lines as the railroads sought to induce immigration to northern Wisconsin, persuade settlers to develop some new specialty or employ new machinery and techniques in clearing the land and cultivating the soil.<sup>28</sup>

It is clear that many Wisconsin land and lumber companies continued to use the same methods after 1900 as had been used for some time previous to that date. The great variety of methods among land sellers, the acceleration of their activity, and the large number of people who tried their luck at colonizing or selling stump lands, testifies to the popularity of the notion that farms would one day cover northern Wisconsin. The methods of the general run of land sellers reflected the conviction that it was unnecessary to embellish their offers of land with long term credit, or services and aids to the settler. While they operated on a much larger scale, the same thing was true of James L. Gates and the American Immigration Company, with whom this chapter deals next.

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<sup>28</sup> Antigo Journal, May 29, 1914. For descriptions of demonstration activities by railroads see G. G. Hartley to Charles R. Van Hise, December 11, 1911; Henry W. Geller to H. L. Russell, June 12, 1912; R. F. Murray to E. J. Delwiche, October 6, 1913; R. F. Murray to H. L. Russell, October 14, 1913; F. S. McCabe to C. H. MacRae, November 24, 1916; in the College of Agriculture Files, Northern Wisconsin. These files are located on the fourth floor of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin.

## ii. Stumpland Gates

Among the many speculators and promoters of northern Wisconsin lands none had so colorful a career as James Leslie Gates. Beginning as a log broker, he rose to fame within thirty years, a fabulous speculator who combined the advocacy of free silver with the reputation of being one of the nation's most heavily insured capitalists. Perhaps the largest individual holder of Wisconsin's cut-over lands, he controlled over half a million acres at the peak of his career and did much to spread the faith that northern Wisconsin would one day be a prosperous agricultural region.

Gates was born in New York in 1850. He claimed descent from the Revolutionary general, who died, genealogies show, without male issue. His parents came to Clark County when James was six years old and he spent his youth on the same type of cut-over land that he was later to speculate in. He wasted little time in getting started in business. He was boss of a Black River lumber camp at the age of sixteen. Later he engaged in several enterprises at Neillsville, among them a grocery business involving a jobbing trade with certain lumber camps. In 1879 he helped to found a bank, and managed it himself in 1881. He also established a mercantile firm. He was involved in the building of a railroad in Jackson and Clark counties.

By 1890 he had earned considerable local prestige through his ownership of a large amount of property in Neillsville and his prominent association with a number of community developments such as the organization of electric light, telephone and telegraph companies.

But Gates was primarily interested in timber. He apparently had access to Milwaukee capital for his interest investments in northern pine lands. Log buying became his specialty. In 1885 he handled thirty-six million feet of timber, marking him as a comparatively large operator for his day. Two years later his business interests had grown to the extent that a Milwaukee office was desirable and by the mid-nineties he claimed to be the largest individual holder of pine lands in the country, much of them southern. In addition his investments were reported to include Wisconsin iron lands, asbestos mines in Georgia, West Virginia coal and a Florida orange grove. Mineral holdings in California, Arizona, and Mexico were no doubt a factor in his monetary views. Gates' claim to the distinction of being one of a dozen men in the nation who was insured for over half a million dollars gave him additional prestige. His advocacy of free silver in a number of speeches and newspaper articles also brought a certain amount of attention to a figure who thrived on public notice, though

it perhaps did him little good in capitalist circles.<sup>29</sup>

In the mid-nineties Gates began to invest in cut-over lands with the announced intention of locating settlers on them. His investments were somewhat scattered at first, though he gradually turned his attention to northwestern Wisconsin, where he sought to control a large block of land in and around the Chippewa Valley. He advertised widely his plans for a "Gates County," and offered \$5,000 toward defraying the cost of organizing the county if it bore his name. When the legislature later re-christened it Rusk County he threatened suit to recover the \$100,000 he claimed to have spent in advertising his name-sake. In 1901 his holdings were stated to be 280,000 acres in the new county and he was said to hold a total of 700,000 acres of stump land.<sup>30</sup>

Despite such large holdings, Stumpland Gates, as he was now called, continued to offer cash for cut-over lands. He expressed the desire to own a million acres in the north.

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<sup>29</sup> For Gates' early career the writer has been forced to rely on John A. Campbell, A Biographical History With Portraits of Prominent Men of the Great West (Chicago, 1902), 380-383; The Columbian Biographical Dictionary...Wisconsin Volume (Chicago, 1895), 498-505; Howard L. Conrad (ed.), History of Milwaukee County From Its First Settlement to The Year 1895, III (Chicago, n.d.) 14-16; and Ellis B. Usher, Wisconsin: Its Story and Biography, 1848-1913, IV (Chicago, 1914), 724, 725.

<sup>30</sup> Milwaukee Sentinel, April 17, 1901; July 20, 1905.

Gates especially importuned the "Weyerhaeuser crowd," as he labelled the lumber king and his associates, to sell their large holdings. His land purchases included part of the Cornell University grant, the lands of a large number of lumber companies and lands acquired by the purchase of county tax certificates. In 1899, for example, he bought 80,000 acres in Price County.<sup>31</sup>

According to his own statements Gates purchased over 150,000 acres of stump land annually from 1898 through 1902. In the latter year he bought more than 250,000 acres. He went into debt for some \$800,000 in order to carry out this program. In 1903, his total holdings amounted to half a million acres, while his indebtedness was then more than a million dollars. He claimed an impressive sales record, however, having sold 456,000 acres of land during the same period, 1898-1902, at a figure well over two million dollars.<sup>32</sup>

Gates' approach to the lumberman was usually that of

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<sup>31</sup> For Gates' own account of his land purchases see his letters to the Laird Norton Company, July 20, September 12, 1899; November 27, 1903; Laird Norton Papers, Chippewa Lands, 1899, Cut Pine Lands, 1903. See also James L. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, July 21, 1899; March 12, April 6, 1900; Shaw Lumber Company Papers. Typical newspaper accounts of Gates' acquisition of county tax lands are found in the Milwaukee Sentinel, May 30, 1899; Phillips Bee, October 18, 1899; Tomahawk, March 10, 1900.

<sup>32</sup> James L. Gates to Laird Norton Company, September 24, 1903, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1903.

a fellow land holder as well as a sincere promoter of agricultural development. He was aiding the lumberman, he insisted, by raising the value of the cut-over lands through his sale to actual settlers. He urged lumbermen to sell only to settlers or to hold their lands and wait for the settlement to make them more valuable. He insisted that uniform prices were essential. He deplored the action of those who sold at "menace prices."<sup>33</sup>

An indefatigable promoter at heart, Gates strove to attract men of large capital to a number of his schemes. At one time he attempted to interest J. P. Morgan and the Weyerhaeusers in a proposed "billion dollar corporation" to corner all of the timber on the West Coast.<sup>34</sup> As a means of encouraging bankers to lend money on upper Wisconsin lands he employed such promotional methods as an "investor's excursion train" to northern Wisconsin. He tried to get bankers and other capitalists whom he felt were in control of Wisconsin and could influence legislation favorable to the development of the north. These men might also make direct investments, and they controlled

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<sup>33</sup> James L. Gates to Laird Norton Company, April 12, 1900, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1900. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, March 23, September 4, 1900; July 9, 1902; Shaw Lumber Company Papers.

<sup>34</sup> James L. Gates to Laird Norton Company, November 25, 1902, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1903.

credit needed for the development of the area. Eau Claire lumbermen were a little disturbed at the fact that Gates planned to take such influential figures through some of the poorest agricultural land in their district, but Gates remained breezily confident that the trip would be an impressive one.<sup>35</sup> He missed no opportunity to advocate anything that might lead to a prosperous economy in the stump lands. His acquaintances in Eau Claire were urged to establish a meat packing industry to support stock raising ventures in the surrounding country. With his son he attempted to operate a ranch for beef cattle and both men were keenly interested in the sale of 5000 acres to the Darlington brothers of the Chicago Union Stock Yards, who operated a farm on the property for some years.<sup>36</sup>

Gates had no model farm, ready built houses, or other facilities common to the colonization companies. As might be expected of so intrepid a promoter, he had great faith in advertising and took the lead in organizing several association for publicizing the stump lands. His sales were

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<sup>35</sup> James L. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, February 16, May 16, 1903, Shaw Lumber Company Papers.

<sup>36</sup> James L. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, September 21, November 19, December 31, 1904; Robert L. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, January 12, 16, 22, 24, 26, 1905, Shaw Lumber Company Papers. The eventual outcome of the Darlington ranching venture was discussed in the early pages of this chapter.

made by commissioned agents who received one dollar for every acre they sold.<sup>37</sup>

Gates was land poor. Taxes on his holdings were great and credit became more and more difficult to obtain. He complained that Chippewa Valley banks displayed a lack of faith in the future of the cut-over area by refusing to lend to him. By 1903 he was considerably behind in his payments on lands and he was forced to ask the Laird Norton Company not only for an extension of time, but for a loan as well.<sup>38</sup> As sales dropped in 1904, Gates became more pressed than ever and somewhat bitter at the La Follette Administration, which seemed to him to be unfriendly to promoters like himself.

The fact is we have not been selling hardly any land this spring, which is very unusual and I lay the bulk of destruction to our populistic, Socialistic, anarchistic La Folletism.<sup>39</sup>

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37 Gates' part in the founding of the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association is discussed in a later chapter. For comments on his agents and methods see the Chippewa Falls Weekly Herald, April 20, 1900, and James L. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, July 9, 1902; April 11, 1903; Shaw Lumber Company Papers.

38 James L. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, July 5, 9, 1902, Shaw Lumber Company Papers. Robert L. Gates to Laird Norton Company, February 27, 1903; James L. Gates to Laird Norton Company, September 24, 1903; Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1903.

39 James L. Gates to Laird Norton Company, May 24, 1904, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1904. The La Follette Administration had discontinued the State Board of Immigration and passed legislation which led to the discontinuance of free railroad passes to land seekers.

Apparently the friend of free silver was no friend of what he considered to be populism.

In 1903 difficulties at the First National Bank in Milwaukee stopped Gates' only important source of credit. Matters were now so difficult that he was forced to begin the liquidation of his huge stump empire. One of his creditors was satisfied by the transfer of timber to his credit and another by the return of lands for which Gates had been unable to pay.<sup>40</sup> His son accepted the blow with a hearty optimism, worthy of a son of Stumpland Gates:

We will have about half our holdings left, which will make an immense fortune large enough for anyone and then we can get our price for the lands, viz;--the price the lands are worth.<sup>41</sup>

But Gates himself was a little more moved by the turn of events:

Who, but the writer has put the price and value of the lands in Northern Wisconsin up to where they now are and it...cost a lot of hard work, capital and intelligence to do it.<sup>42</sup>

Gates' statement was perhaps a fitting epitaph for his career as a speculator and promoter in northern Wisconsin.

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40 James L. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, August 22, November 4, 7, 9, 11, 1905, Shaw Lumber Company Papers. James L. Gates to Laird Norton Company, September 28, October 16, 1906, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1905-6.

41 Robert L. Gates to Eugene Shaw, April 25, 27, 1905, Shaw Lumber Company Papers.

42 James L. Gates to Laird Norton Company, April 27, 1906, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1905-6.

After his death in 1911, his son managed the land company, which still controlled nearly 150,000 acres of land. The company continued in operation for a number of years, decidedly more conservative in practice than in the day when its founder dreamed of a million acre empire in the stump lands.<sup>43</sup>

### iii. The American Immigration Company

Following the decline of James Leslie Gates as the dominant figure in the promotion of settlement in the Wisconsin stump lands, lumbermen might well have concluded that some new method must be found to dispose of the cut-over lands. As early as 1904 the younger Frederick Weyerhaeuser toyed with an idea for a huge combination in which several Wisconsin lumber companies would pool their lands and place them in the hands of an agent. This scheme caused the Weyerhaeusers and their affiliates in the Mississippi River Logging Company to hesitate at selling their lands. Perhaps it was furthered by Gates' inability to pay for the lands he purchased from them. The elder Weyerhaeuser

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<sup>43</sup> The acreage held by the company was reduced to 60,000 by 1917 and its operations were typical of the usual land company of that period. See Robert L. Gates to Wisconsin State Board of Public Affairs, January 2, 1912, Wisconsin State Legislative Reference Library, Land Settlement, Promotion; Wisconsin Advancement Association, List of Members Together With Acreages And Counties Where Land is Located (Milwaukee, 1917), in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

had been impressed by meeting a number of Illinois farmers migrating to Canada. Through his son he urged his associates to hold their lands for buyers like these.<sup>44</sup>

The scheme was circulated. Various firms in the Mississippi River Logging Company responded favorably toward the idea of cooperating in disposing of their lands. They began to draw up tentative lists of lands and the prices at which they might be offered.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile the North Wisconsin Lumber Company, at Hayward, ~~experimented~~ by placing 33,000 acres in the hands of Albert Uecke, who was to sell up to 10,000 acres yearly. Uecke had an arrangement by which a German steamship line was to furnish him with immigrants. He was to supply ready built houses on each settler's tract.<sup>46</sup>

Early in 1905 the younger Weyerhaeuser again broached the idea of a company to sell cut-over lands, indicating that he had a man in view, probably Uecke, to take charge of sales. By March of the next year a movement was well under way to consolidate the stump lands of a number of

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44 F. E. Weyerhaeuser to Laird Norton Company, August 31, 1904, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1904.

45 F. S. Bell to William McCormick, September 26, 1904, Laird Norton Papers, Press Letter Book, 1904.

46 William McCormick to William H. Laird, October 18, 1904; Albert Uecke to Laird Norton Company, November 26, 1904; Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1904.

the Weyerhaeuser affiliates and in May, 1906, they organized the American Immigration Company at Chippewa Falls.<sup>47</sup> Frederick Weyerhaeuser subscribed to 2,500 shares of the 5,000 issued by the corporation, probably on behalf of the Mississippi River Logging Company and the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company, for those concerns were credited with 1,235 and 770 shares of stock, respectively, in the stock subscription ledger of the new company. The Northwestern Lumber Company of Eau Claire, the North Wisconsin Lumber Company of Hayward, the Nebagamon Lumber Company, the Laird Norton Lumber Company, of Winona, and several other concerns held shares in the immigration company. These companies together held a total of over 430,000 acres in seventeen northern Wisconsin counties.<sup>48</sup>

The lands pledged by the individual lumber companies constituted their major payment for subscribed stock in the American Immigration Company. However, each concern was to pay in cash ten per cent of the assessed valuation of the lands which they turned over to the new company. Stock was

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47 F. E. Weyerhaeuser to F. S. Bell, February 24, 1905; March 5, 1906, Laird Norton Papers, Cut Pine Lands, 1905-6. American Immigration Company, Minute Book, 1906-1940, 2-4. The American Immigration Company Records are in the manuscript collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

48 American Immigration Company, Minute Book, 1, Stock Subscription Ledger, 1907, 7.

distributed on the basis of twenty per cent of each company's total contribution in land and cash. Thus, the Laird Norton Company turned over lands assessed at \$67,778 and was to make a cash payment of slightly over ten per cent of this amount so that its total stake in the new concern would be \$75,000. For this they received credit for \$15,000 in stock.<sup>49</sup> Only twenty-five per cent of the cash assessment was called for in order to pay taxes in 1907. This yielded so large a sum that the company immediately declared a dividend of twenty-five dollars per share.<sup>50</sup>

The companies did not agree as to the value of the lands they contributed without some haggling. They finally determined to classify the lands in six grades, ranging from two to ten dollars per acre. F. E. Weyerhaeuser wished to reserve mineral rights on certain lands. J. T. Barber, of the Northwestern Lumber Company, protested that reservations made lands difficult to sell. He added a touch of sarcasm:

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<sup>49</sup> Slightly more than ten per cent of the value of their lands was charged the company in order to make a round sum for ease in bookkeeping. E. L. Ainsworth to Laird Norton Company, January 16, 1907, Laird Norton Papers, American Immigration Company, 1907.

<sup>50</sup> E. L. Ainsworth to Laird Norton Company, February 2, 1907; F. E. Weyerhaeuser to F. H. Thatcher, February 20, 1907; Laird Norton Papers, American Immigration Company, 1907.

...if all kinds of reservations are permissible the company I represent would like to put in something like a hundred thousand acres with a timber reserve on it.<sup>51</sup>

The founders of the American Immigration Company created a subsidiary corporation entitled the American Colonization Company. This company was intended apparently to handle sales promotion. Two immigration agents, F. von Pilis and George Claussenius, were stockholders in this corporation. It was agreed that these men were to maintain an office in Chicago and an agency in Europe to obtain immigrant settlers. Difficulties showed up at once in this branch of work. As Caleb Cushing and his associates had been troubled by the expenses of the notorious Count Taube nearly half a century earlier, so many of the stockholders of the American Immigration Company grew more and more anxious over the costs of maintaining promotional agents in Europe. A member of the Laird Norton Company commented in November, 1906, that the American Colonization Company expense accounts were

...rather startling, but we have no other experience with which to compare, and shall have to go on faith

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<sup>51</sup> The John S. Owen Lumber Company withdrew their lands, the only ones listed as class I, at ten dollars an acre. American Immigration Company, Minute Book, 21; C.O. Law to F. S. Bell, July 11, 1906; J. T. Barber to Fred S. Bell, August 3, 1906; Laird Norton Papers, American Immigration Company, 1907.

for a while longer, trusting the ends to justify the means.<sup>52</sup>

The Company had enough experience at the end of two months. In January, 1907, directors of the American Colonization Company considered dissolving the corporation. Clausenius, however, persuaded them that he and Pilis, then in Europe, would maintain their Chicago establishment and carry on their work in Europe without additional expense to the company.<sup>53</sup> But in June the directors decided to end their agreement with Pilis and Claussenius. They instructed their attorney to request the two agents to give bond against incurring any further expenses in connection with their advertising work. Pilis objected. He claimed that their agreement had been for one year. He contended that European advertising could not bring such immediate results as that in America. The European farmer was "slow going." Hence only time would justify the expenses now objected to by the Company. He stated that he had now taken a Berlin office and maintained agents in Finland, Russia, Scandinavia and Poland, and that he expected soon

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52 F. S. Bell to E. L. Ainsworth, November 6, 1906, Laird Norton Papers, Press Letter Book, 1906. For Organization of the subsidiary see American Colonization Company, Minute Book, 1906, 1907, 1, 3, 4, 12, 13, in the American Immigration Company records. See also E. L. Ainsworth to F. S. Bell, August 22, 1906, Laird Norton Papers, American Immigration Company, 1907.

53 American Colonization Company, Minute Book, 177.

to obtain results which would gratify the directors. But the directors were anxious to sever their connections with the two agents. Meanwhile, Albert Uecke, who had been hired as the colonization company's local agent, heard of the impending dissolution of the company and began steering settlers to the lands of other clients. Thus the experiment with the promotion of lands among foreigners came to an unhappy ending. In view of their agreement to employ them for a year, the directors of the American Colonization Company resolved to pay Pilis and Claussenius \$4,000, thus settling their claims. Then they dissolved the American Colonization Company, and turned over all of its contracts to the parent American Immigration Company.<sup>54</sup>

This discouraging experience with European agents did not prevent the American Immigration Company from continuing its attempts to dispose of the stump lands of its member companies. Moreover, directors of the company apparently learned to expect high expenditures for advertising purposes, however disturbing they found them during the first year of their organization. Advertising expenditures rose from a little more than \$1,000 in 1907, to over \$5,000

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<sup>54</sup> Copy, Pilis to American Colonization Company, June 15, 1907; J. T. Barber to Fred S. Bell, July 1, 1907; Laird Norton Papers, American Immigration Company, 1907. F. S. Bell to J. T. Barber, July 9, 1907, Ibid., Press Letter Book, 1907. American Colonization Company Minute Book, 180, 181.

the next year. In 1909, directors authorized the officers to rely upon their own judgement as to the amounts to be used for this purpose. That year \$11,000 was spent, and from 1910 to 1917 an average of \$5,000 was devoted annually to advertising lands. In 1917 the advertising account dropped sharply and continued to decline each year until in 1923, less than \$300 was spent. The experience with Pilis and Claussenius may also have persuaded the American Immigration Company to confine its promotional work to the United States. The Company contributed heavily to publicity organizations such as the Wisconsin Advancement Association, prepared and sent out a great amount of pamphlet material, and bought much newspaper space in the mid-western states. Little, if any, money was spent in Europe.<sup>55</sup>

The success of such advertising was difficult to measure. According to stockholders' accounts the company controlled a total of 434,392 acres by 1908.<sup>56</sup> In 1913, 283,434 acres remained. But the disposal of acreage was

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<sup>55</sup> American Immigration Company, Minute Book, 24, 25, Journal A, 43, 72, 119, 120, 161, 197, 246, 288; Journal B, 84, 166, 230, 281; Journal C, 20; Cash and Bank Journal A, 3, 4ff, 18ff, 33ff, 52ff, 95ff, 134ff, 178ff; Cash and Bank Journal B, 27ff, 71ff, 113ff.

<sup>56</sup> American Immigration Company's Stockholders' Accounts, Laird Norton Papers, American Immigration Company, 1908.

not necessarily a measure of successful sale of lands. One study of 514 contracts made between 1906 and 1911, involving the sale of 89,534 acres of land, revealed that only ninety-four purchasers received their deeds before 1911. Seventy-nine contracts had been cancelled after the first down payment and 341 contracts remained unsettled. These contracts had been mainly for forty and eighty acre tracts, the prices ranging from slightly over four dollars to thirty dollars per acre and averaging ten dollars an acre.<sup>57</sup>

Taxes proved to be the heaviest burden on lands of the American Immigration Company. Thus approximately \$55,000 was paid annually for the first six years of operation. They dropped below \$50,000 annually from 1917 to 1921, but rose to more than \$60,000 in the latter year. By 1927 the company was \$30,000 behind on tax payments and the directors chose not to pay taxes on poorer lands. Desperate for funds, they offered to settle outstanding contracts with the Wisconsin Colonization Company for twenty-five per cent of their book value.<sup>58</sup> By 1930 the directors had

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<sup>57</sup> The writer is indebted for the above facts to Lucille Kane, Curator of Manuscripts in the Minnesota Historical Society. They are taken from her The Lake States Pineries: Management of the Timberlands, Chapter XIII: "The Cutovers," pages 7, 8, in manuscript when the writer used it. As indicated in the preface, Miss Kane's thorough knowledge of the Laird Norton Papers and the records of the American Immigration Company were made freely available to the writer and were of inestimable value in this study.

<sup>58</sup> American Immigration Company, Journal A, 43, 72, 119, 120, 161, 197, 246; Minute Book, 48, 50.

classified lands into three grades to avoid paying taxes on lands neither suitable for farming or for sale as summer homes or resort areas. These formed the third class of lands. First class lands were those having lake frontage and those suitable for agriculture. The second class lands comprised those of some value for agriculture and recreation. Delinquent taxes now amounted to \$90,000. In 1930 the directors could pay only \$4,000 in taxes. They referred to their classification system to determine which lands to make the payments on, in the hope of losing only their poorer lands through tax delinquency.<sup>59</sup>

In the next few years a large part of the Company's lands were lost through tax delinquency. In 1934 the Company sold over 25,000 acres of land to the federal government at approximately one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre. The inventoried value of these lands had been placed at six dollars an acre, thus creating a loss of four dollars and seventy-five cents per acre on the company books. Even sales at six dollars an acre were likely to appear losses in terms of the taxes paid by the Company. A forty acre tract sold in 1930 for that price brought in \$240 as

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 53, 54.

against a total of \$251,73 paid in taxes since 1906.<sup>60</sup>

In its closing years the American Immigration Company made what settlement it could with settlers who had purchased its lands. Thomas McClaine, who managed the affairs of the Company at Hayward, was left virtually free to make such adjustments as he could. He often settled for a fraction of the debt owed by the settler. When it closed its books in 1940, the Company had paid a total of \$1,211,075.67 in taxes and had distributed \$1,538,639 to its stockholders. This amounted to an average of three dollars and fifty cents per acre on total sales of 437,947 acres, or three dollars and nineteen cents per acre on a total of 481,922 acres held by the Company, 1906 to 1939.<sup>61</sup> The purchase of an annuity for Thomas McClaine, who had served the Company for a number of years, ended the American Immigration Company's attempts to settle its northern Wisconsin stump lands with farmers.

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60 H. J. McKusick to F. S. Bell, August 24, 1934, Laird Norton Papers, American Immigration Company, 1934. The tax figures were totalled from the American Immigration Company tax register, on the South West Quarter of the South West Quarter of Section Ten, Town Thirty-nine, Range One East.

61 Tape recorded interview, Wilbur Glover and the writer, with Thomas McClaine, Hayward, Wisconsin, November 30, 1950, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. American Immigration Company, Trial Balance After Closing, December 31, 1939, a loose sheet in the Minute Book.

## VI

### THE COLONIZERS

The modern colonization company is as different from the old land selling agencies as the modern frontier is different from the frontier of yesterday. Experience has taught that it pays, in the long run, to use methods which two generations ago might have been derisively called "social uplift."

Benjamin F. Faast, 1925

After 1910 a new type of land dealer appeared in Wisconsin. He had his earlier prototypes to be sure, but a new set of conditions made his approach to the problem of agricultural settlement more important than it had been heretofore. The basic causes of the appearance of the colonizer in twentieth century garb have been discussed in previous pages. The new colonizers were unwilling to abide by the old tacit rule that it was enough to try land to see whether it was suitable for farming. According to the new concept, the colonizer must combine a number of functions; he must bring together settlers, capital, and modern machinery. In addition he must train the pioneer for his task according to the most advanced information available. The new role seems to have been accompanied by a kind of soul-searching in the real estate profession. Real estate men participated in the movement to license land agents in Wisconsin, and made much in general of their attempts to improve the ethical standards of their profession. Another

and more important aspect of the rise of the colonizer was the conviction among many members of the land selling profession that lack of capital and credit were making impossible their dreams of a northern Wisconsin dotted with farms. Some of the colonizers had experienced themselves the difficulties of obtaining credit. A. W. Edminster, who became the head of a colonization company, had begun clearing a farm in the early eighteen nineties. After he had been on his tract three years, clearing a small number of acres annually, he decided to mortgage his farm for \$500 in order to obtain enough money to build a house. Chippewa Falls bankers, he found, would not even talk about such a transaction. He could obtain the loan from a private lender only by paying ten per cent interest plus a fifty dollar bonus and twelve dollars in fees.<sup>1</sup> No doubt the experience impressed Edminster, who later became a banker and invested in Chippewa Valley Lands. When he organized a colonization company he made it easier for the settlers in his region to obtain credit.

Many other land holders were impressed by the difficulties of obtaining credit in northern Wisconsin. In 1900, for instance, a Wisconsin Central Railroad official called attention to two Chicago men who owned a total of 500 acres

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. Edminster, "The Conquest of the Cutover," Rosenkrans Magazine, II:3 (Eau Claire, July 1917), 58-60.

in Marinette County but could not raise the money necessary to move onto the land because Chicago money lenders would not take unimproved Wisconsin cut-over land as security for loans.<sup>2</sup> Although various attempts were made to ease the shortage of credit, J. T. Barber of the North Western Lumber Company of Eau Claire testified to its persistence in 1917. He declared that settlers made little progress in clearing stump lands because they did not have the necessary capital for living expenses, to say nothing of machinery, horses, and other equipment. As they were forced to work elsewhere to raise money, they could spend no time on their own land.<sup>3</sup> Barber proposed to solve the problem by obtaining government aid. In letters to Governor Emanuel Philipp and to Dean H. L. Russell of the College of Agriculture, he proposed that the federal government create a ten million dollar land clearing fund for each of the Great Lakes Cutover States. Out of this fund would come low interest bearing loans to settlers who would have up to twenty years to repay them.

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2 John D. Rowland to George W. Taylor, March 23, 1900, Wisconsin State Executive Office Papers, Immigration. Hereafter, as in previous chapters, the citation will be shortened to Executive Office Papers, Immigration.

3 The Stark Potato Company, of Oneida County, was perhaps ample evidence to many an advocate of stump land settlement that those who started with sufficient capital would succeed. The company employed machinery to clear land on a huge scale and made profits almost immediately. Rhineland News, May 22, 1914.

Both Russell and Philipp were opposed to Barber's plan. Russell was emphatic in his views that private initiative must solve the credit problems of northern Wisconsin. To him it seemed that bankers had been increasingly liberal in their loans to industrious settlers and that federal or state supervision of a loan system would be cumbersome and inefficient in comparison with local handling of credit by persons who knew the applicants for loans.<sup>4</sup>

Barber was not alone in believing that government assistance was necessary to bring about a successful settlement of the stump lands. Nevertheless in Wisconsin the various problems connected with settling cut-over lands continued to be met mainly by private enterprise, with government agencies playing a supporting rather than a controlling role. The private promoters of settlement modified their conceptions of the functions of the land agent partly in order to avoid government interference. For the most part, however, they visualized themselves as meeting the challenge of the stump lands with good business methods. The chief spokesman for this point of view among Wisconsin land dealers was Benjamin Faast, an energetic young Eau Claire

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<sup>4</sup> J. T. Barber to H. L. Russell, May 10, 1917; E. L. Philipp to H. L. Russell, May 11, 1917; H. L. Russell to J. T. Barber, May 23, 1917; in the records of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin. Files referred to in this study are stored on the fourth floor of Agricultural Hall, on the University Campus, and will be cited as College of Agriculture Files.

land dealer who became a nationally known leader in the colonization movement. As the following pages will show, Faast possessed traits commonly associated with the land speculator. What he and the new group of colonizers brought to their profession was a realization that new inducements were required to persuade people to pioneer in the twentieth century. The successful real estate dealer of the modern period must recognize what methods were needed to bring about a revival of the old pioneering movement to raw lands among a people who demanded a higher standard of living than had the settlers of an earlier day. The real estate man who could create the most tempting conditions for settlement would "get the business." He could win settlers for the stump lands. Faast and his fellow colonizers sought to put their ideas to work in a number of colonization companies. This chapter deals mainly with two such concerns. First a brief description is given of the Tomahawk Land Company, mainly to illustrate the sharp contrast between colonizers and older type land dealers. This is followed by a more lengthy and detailed picture of the workings of the Wisconsin Colonization Company. In passing a brief reference will be made to the National Land Colonizing Company, whose methods were so similar to those of the Wisconsin Colonization Company that a fuller discussion of its operations seems unwarranted.

In 1919 a county agricultural agent in Lincoln County wrote a letter describing the colonization work of the Tomahawk Land Company, a subsidiary of the Bradley Lumber Company. His brief sketch serves to illustrate the great gap between the colonizers and the ordinary land sellers in the stump lands.<sup>5</sup>

At the office of the Tomahawk Company the applicant for land received a careful screening to determine whether he was a reliable and safe risk. Once the company decided in his favor a company "field man" helped him choose his farm from the tract of 80,000 acres owned by the company. If he desired the company would clear two or three acres of the land and put a house and barn on it. When he moved onto the land he received a cow, a pig, and twelve chickens. He must agree that some litter from the pig would be distributed among new settlers. If he so desired, the settler could also obtain seeds, fertilizer or lime at wholesale prices from the company. The company furnished him with a fenced-in garden and urged that he put it to good use. They offered prizes to those raising the best gardens, distributing about seventy-five dollars annually for this purpose.

The settler had to make an initial payment of ten dollars per forty acre tract and had to promise to clear ten acres a year. In return the company pledged itself to

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<sup>5</sup> A. H. Cole to A. W. Hopkins, June 25, 1919, College of Agriculture Files.

advance credit to him at the rate of one dollar for each day he spent clearing his land. In addition the company would "grub stake" him, furnishing money for food and other necessities.<sup>6</sup> No payment other than the first ten dollars per forty acres was due for five years. The settler paid six per cent interest on the principal of his debt until it was paid up.

When he went to work at clearing the land the settler could rent a stump puller from the Tomahawk Land Company for one dollar and twenty-five cents a day. He could rent horses and harvesting machinery at the same rates. The company maintained a 350 acre farm where experiments with various crops were carried out to test their suitability to northern Wisconsin lands and to demonstrate more successful agricultural methods to the colonists. The settler learned the results of crop experiments in bulletins issued frequently by the company. Most of the bulletins were written by the local county agricultural agent. In very simple language they told the settler what and when to plant, and how to care for the crop. The company attempted to present such material in relation to its financial return to the

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<sup>6</sup> Cole did not say for how long the company would support the settler in this way. In 1921, Marion C. Calkins stated that the Tomahawk Land Company supported its settlers for two years in this fashion. Marion C. Calkins, "Colonization Projects in Wisconsin," Survey, 45:1(January 1, 1921), 484.

farmer. He learned that corn was only a "15 per cent crop," while clover was a "110 per cent crop" by comparison. Much the same technique was used to describe livestock or land clearing methods to the settler.<sup>7</sup>

The Tomahawk Land Company claimed an impressive record in promoting the acquisition of good dairy stock among its settlers, according to the county agent. Over \$16,000 worth of Holstein cattle had been brought in by the company up to 1919, and both a Holstein and a Guernsey Association had been organized among the settlers. Hand in hand with the encouragement of dairying came the organization by the company of six cooperative cheese factories.

So went the description of the county agricultural agent, who was obviously an enthusiastic observer of the efforts of the Tomahawk Land Company to colonize its huge tract of land in Lincoln County. However biased in favor of the company, his letter plainly indicated that something quite different from the usual pioneering of the nineteenth century was taking place in the Wisconsin Cutover. According to the company's advertisements its sales methods also struck a new note in land selling. No salesmen were employed to represent the company. Instead the buyer dealt directly

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<sup>7</sup> These bulletins were collected and bound under the title Tomahawk Land Settlement (Tomahawk, n.d., about 1920). A copy is in the College of Agriculture Files.

with the owner of the land, who offered a twenty year land contract and claimed that he had never foreclosed on a settler.<sup>8</sup>

Further testimony by a less partial observer, Marian Calkins, also revealed much that was different in the methods used by the Bradley Lumber Company to dispose of its cut-over lands. She noted that a home demonstration agent worked among the women of the colony. There was also a veterinarian hired by the company for the benefit of the colony. According to Miss Calkins the manager of the colonization company stated that the best farmers started penniless, that the company spent \$30,000 yearly to support its colonists. The manager preferred to deal with foreigners, he said, because they made the best pioneers. Miss Calkins found however, that the company supervised its settlers very closely and that many settlers chafed under its heavy paternal hand and failed to remain on their lands. In contrast she pointed to the work of the Wisconsin Colonization Company, in another part of the state.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly Benjamin Faast and his associates in the northwestern part of the state made the outstanding effort to apply new concepts in long term financing, the use of

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<sup>8</sup> M. L. Schmidt to E. Mayer, June 3, 1922; M. L. Schmidt to J. L. Pasken, February 8, 1923; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

<sup>9</sup> Calkins, "Colonization Projects in Wisconsin," 480-485.

machinery and modern technical knowledge, in training settlers and supplying a number of aids to insure their success on the land. Faast had been in the land business for some time before the formation of the Wisconsin Colonization Company, his most widely known organization. In earlier land companies he had put into practice much of the theory that led to the formation of that concern. A friend of President Van Hise of the University of Wisconsin, and especially of H. L. Russell, Dean of the College of Agriculture, he put into practice many of the advanced ideas which came out of the agricultural experiment station at the College. He worked closely with the branch experiment stations of the College in their efforts to develop better crops and farming methods for the area in which he was interested.<sup>10</sup>

By 1915 Faast's experience had elevated him to an advanced position among the land sellers of his day. His Rusk Farm Company and the Faast Land Company utilized land selling techniques far different from those of the more common types of land companies in northern Wisconsin. A settler could purchase a "ready-made farm" from the Rusk

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<sup>10</sup> G. D. Jones to C. K. Ellingson, December 4, 1912, College of Agriculture Files. Jones, a member of the University Board of Regents and a land seller himself, comments on Faast's cooperation with the University and adds: "No one else in Rusk County has done so much in aid of relieving pioneer conditions as has the Faast Land Company."

Farm Company, so the advertisements ran. Included with the forty acre plot would be a house, a milk cow, two pigs, a dozen chickens, and enough wire to fence ten acres. The total cost for such a farm came to approximately \$1200. The buyer must pay \$250 in cash; then he need make no more payments for the next three years. His remaining payments could be conveniently arranged to extend over a long period of time. A 700 acre farm was located in the center of the "Rusk Farm Colony." Here a university trained farmer, who kept in close touch with the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture, gave advice to settlers. At Rusk Farm a special effort was made to develop seeds suited to the north, and the company maintained high grade stock for sale to the settlers.<sup>11</sup>

At Rusk Farm Colony Faast developed the ideas which were to make his enterprise widely known. He made these ideas clear to the members of his profession in a number of addresses and articles. One of his associates recalled in later years that one of Faast's first principles was an ethical consideration for the settler:

We must never sell a piece of land to anyone unless we ourselves believe that it can be developed

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<sup>11</sup> Rusk Farm Company, Be Independent, Own a 40 Acre Farm in Rusk County Wisconsin (one page illustrated folder, n.p., n.d., about 1915), in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

into a successful farm as the man dreams who is buying it.<sup>12</sup>

While such conceptions would have started only a few members of his profession, Faast held other opinions more striking in nature. Faast maintained that because the standard of living had risen so high among the potential settlers of areas like the northern Wisconsin stump lands, few would accept the pioneering conditions commonly connected with making a new home on unimproved land. Farm life would have to be made attractive to draw settlers. The modern real estate man in the Cutover would have to offer what Faast called the "essentials of a great human ideal." By this he meant community planning: colonizing settlers to avoid isolation, arranging schools, parks and playgrounds close to the settlements, making soil surveys to find the lands most suitable for agriculture. All these must be provided by the modern colonizer. Moreover, he must cooperate with national as well as state governments to bring about land settlement, because colonization was a vital aspect of national welfare. The real estate man who solved these problems, along with that of furnishing long term credit for the settler, would be successful in his business,

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<sup>12</sup> B. M. Apker, quoting Faast, in a tape recorded interview with Wilbur Glover, Chetek, Wisconsin, December 19, 1949, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, hereafter cited as the Apker Interview.

Faast believed. Yet the new land colonization must not concern entirely with business and profits, Faast held; it was necessary to preserve the "American frontier" as a means of safeguarding American democracy.<sup>13</sup> While he was never explicit as to his meaning here, it was apparent that he believed the settlement of "frontier" agricultural lands acted as something of a "safety valve" in preventing strife among the urban working classes. Faast shared this view with a number of his contemporaries, including Dean Russell of the College of Agriculture. He also believed that the leaders in the nation's industry, business and agriculture came from pioneer homes.<sup>14</sup>

To implement the ideas he felt to be so vital for a successful settlement of the Wisconsin stump lands, Faast and a number of his associates organized several colonization companies in Rusk, Sawyer and Chippewa counties. In addition to the Rusk Farm Company and the Faast Land

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13 Benjamin F. Faast, "The Real Way For Colonization," *National Real Estate Journal*, 15:1-2 (January and February, 1917), 33-36; "The Settlement of New Farm Lands," *Ibid.*, 24:13 (June 18, 1923) 22-26; "Practical Policies of Land Colonization," *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, 1:3 (July, 1925), 300-304. Wisconsin Colonization Company, *Colonization and Community Development* (Eau Claire, 1920) 22; *Analysis of Real Estate Situation*, a typewritten form letter, undated, about 1922, in the Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

14 Russell's views on this subject will be discussed and references will be made to similar points of view held by others, in a succeeding chapter. Faast, "Practical Policies of Land Colonization," 304.

Company, he was interested in the Wisconsin Colonization Company and the Chippewa Valley Colonization Company, founded in 1917 and 1918 respectively. Faast and Dean Russell were the largest stockholders in the Wisconsin Colonization Company, capitalized at \$211,400. Both were among the six largest stockholders in the Chippewa Valley Company, which was capitalized at slightly over \$100,000. The four companies in which Faast was interested represented a total of 116,000 acres of land in their original tracts, and a capitalization of \$469,350.<sup>15</sup>

The most widely known of the four land concerns with which Faast was associated was the Wisconsin Colonization Company. In 1917 the first steps in the organization of this company began with the purchase of 50,000 acres of land in southern Sawyer County. Some of the land was purchased from the American Immigration Company. Immediately Faast's conception of the real estate dealer as a rural planner was put into practice. The large tract was surveyed to plan for roads, villages, and community centers. Then the lands to be settled were blocked into farm units of from forty to 160 acres, and these units were studied and

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<sup>15</sup> See the individual statements of the Wisconsin Colonization Company and the Chippewa Valley Colonization Company, and the Consolidated Statement of the Wisconsin Colonization Company, the Chippewa Valley Colonization Company, the Faast Land Company and the Rusk Farm Company, all dated June 25, 1921, in the Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

mapped by soil experts who indicated suitable locations for farm buildings and the best uses to which lands could be put on each farm.<sup>16</sup>

Thus Faast declared his intention to follow new and almost revolutionary procedures in selling cut-over land. But he was not entirely free from the motives commonly found among real estate promoters. This was revealed by his desire to develop a townsite and withhold surrounding lands from sale until they had risen considerably in value. Faast confided his plans to his leading stockholder, Dean H. L.

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<sup>16</sup> Wisconsin Colonization Company, Colonization and Community Development, 3ff; Anonymous, "Made to Order Farms," National Real Estate Journal, 23:3(January 30, 1922), 41-42. Reference to land purchased from the American Immigration Company is found in W. N. Clark, Proposed Plan of Activities, 1919, typewritten manuscript in the Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

Much could be made of the soil survey as a means of luring settlers. The National Land Colonizing Company of Madison, Wisconsin, claimed that before their soils experts would accept a tract of land for settlement he "carefully goes over it to see that there is absolutely no sand, and no hills, and that the land is all a rich mellow clay loam soil." National Land Colonizing Company, How You Can Get A Wisconsin Farm (Bulletin I, Madison, n.d.), 5.

The National Land Colonizing Company, a contemporary of the Faast companies, employed methods similar in most respects to those of the Wisconsin Colonization Company. Its founder was Ralph S. Crowl, of Madison. Crowl had earlier formed a Liberty Farms Foundation, in Madison, through which investors could finance the settlement of cut-over farms by men who needed capital. At least nine members of the faculty of the College of Agriculture were members of the National Land Colonizing Company, capitalized at \$100,000. It operated in Marathon and Rusk counties, with headquarters in Madison. Liberty Farms Foundation, Help To The Man Who Wants A Farm (Bulletin 10, Madison, September 1, 1917), 1-9, 21; National Land Colonizing Company, How You Can Get A Wisconsin Farm, 2.

Russell. He had selected a 290 acre tract upon which to develop a new village. The land had cost the colonization company \$8,800. They would form a new townside development company and buy it for \$15,000. The colonization company would use the profits from the sale to advertise and improve the townsite during the next five years. In the meantime they would reserve from sale approximately 3,500 acres surrounding the proposed village. With no village these lands would sell at about twenty dollars an acre. With a village laid out Faast hoped that the lands would sell at thirty dollars an acre within one year. In addition he proposed a more elaborate plan to raise the value of the reserved lands still further. On the 3,500 acres surrounding the new village he would place three farms of one thousand acres each. These farms would be fenced and stocked with cattle and hogs by the farm department of the colonization company. Faast believed that he could raise the value of the reserved lands to approximately fifty dollars an acre in five years. The colonization company could expect to profit by more than \$100,000 if the scheme were carried out. The other lands of the company would also increase in value as much as five dollars per acre. Faast expected four or five thousand acres to be

affected in this way, outside of the lands reserved by the colonization company.<sup>17</sup>

Faast proceeded to plan and lay out his new village. It was to be a model community in every way. Professors Leonard Smith and Franz A. Aust, specialists in city planning and landscape designing at the University of Wisconsin, drew the plans and aided Faast in naming the village. They selected Ojibwa as an appropriate title. Ojibwa was not to be the haphazard product of laissez faire development; it was carefully zoned into residential, business and industrial districts with strict regulations as to the type of construction to be allowed in each district. Only colonial architecture was to be permitted in the model town. In the more exclusive residential section, separated from the workers' dwellings, no houses were to be built costing less than \$3,000. A large area was set off for the Ojibwa Council Place, as Faast named the recreation center, and the company began to plant pine trees in a large area along the Chippewa River to be set aside as a park. Another section of the model village was to contain workingmen's garden plots. Faast had the planners include space for a county court house, evidently convinced that his village would one day be the

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<sup>17</sup> New Townsite at Crooked Rapids, typewritten, undated, in the Wisconsin Colonization Papers. A pencilled note in the margin indicates that Faast submitted it to Russell for examination.

county seat. Space was also allocated for what one of his consultants referred to as

...a higher educational institution in the agricultural field which you have in mind to establish near the townsite...<sup>18</sup>

By 1921 Faast could report to his stockholders that the model village had a railroad station, a state graded school, and several business buildings. These had been carefully planned and finished in the white colonial style of architecture called for in the original plans. Plans were laid for a home owners' corporation to control the village, to enforce the building restrictions and to undertake necessary maintenance work.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile the efforts to promote sales of lots in and near Ojibwa went forward, while the acreage immediately around the townsite was withheld from sale, as Faast had planned. Company advertising was lush. One of Faast's associates invited fellow real estate dealers to

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<sup>18</sup> Anthony U. Morell to B. F. Faast, October 31, 1918, Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. Morell represented a Minneapolis firm of architects consulted by Faast. For other matter relating to the planning of Ojibwa see Franz A. Aust to Benjamin F. Faast, September 30, 1919; Tyrie and Chapman to B. F. Faast, October 10, 1919; W. N. Clark, Proposed Plan of Activities, 1919; Leonard S. Smith to B. F. Faast, February 23, 1920; Leonard S. Smith, Declaration of Restrictions and Protections, typewritten, undated; Morell and Nichols to E. G. Keuhl, January 8, 1920; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

<sup>19</sup> President to Stockholders, undated; P. M. Beach to Ben F. Faast, August 31, 1920; Ojibwa Homes Company, Agreement, undated; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

...come with me to the edge of the frontier, up Ojibwa way, and I pledge you that as human wealth is greater than material wealth, as good citizenship is to a nation more valuable than gold and incense, so will the life in the open be to you and to your family more valuable than...riches accumulated in the mad struggle of the cities' rabble.<sup>20</sup>

Equally optimistic in tone, although appealing more to the materialistic interests of his clients was the letterhead of a Minneapolis land agent advising his clients of the great opportunities to be had in locating near the big city being built in Sawyer County. "Buy at once, the cordwood will pay for it," and "There will be work in the mills for those who want it," he advertised.<sup>21</sup>

Faast also carried out his plans for the construction of farms around Ojibwa, a part of the original scheme to enhance the value of the Wisconsin Colonization Company lands. Although these farms were advertised as being of great demonstration value among the settlers, the company's farm manager expressed different views:

The work that is done on the different company farms is done not because the farm department wishes to engage in farming operations, or because the farms

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<sup>20</sup> W. A. Blackburn, "Up Ojibwa Way," a paper read before the Wisconsin Real Estate Brokers' Association at Madison, February 19, 1919, in the Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

<sup>21</sup> See the letterhead of Eric O. Whited, undated, in the Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. Reservations of land around Ojibwa can be seen on the Map of South Central Sawyer County, undated, Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

have any particular demonstration value to the settlers that are living up here, but because it is necessary for us to have a place to keep the stock we are delivering to the settlers, and because it has seemed that company farms have had some advertising value.

He declared frankly that the company could not hope to make money on its farms, but the value of the land itself increased while it was being withheld from sale.<sup>22</sup> This does not necessarily represent Faast's point of view. Although it is clear that Faast knew the advantages of company farms in these respects, he also had a long record of cooperation with the College of Agriculture in experimental work and had devoted a great deal of effort to carrying out these experiments in his colonization projects.

While the plans for Ojibwa and its surrounding lands were progressing, the Wisconsin Colonization Company was engaged in preparing the rest of its 60,000 acres for settlement. The company engaged a concern known as the American Rural Planning Association to survey individual farm units and prepare maps to guide the settler in planning his farm. The typical colonist received maps showing a "High Class Grain and Dairy Farm As You Will Find It," and a "High Class

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<sup>22</sup> W. N. Clark, Proposed Plan of Activities, 1919, Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

Grain and Dairy Farm As It May Be Developed." The first map indicated easiest parts of the farm to clear and places where timber suitable for constructing buildings might be obtained. On the second map the settler found suggestions for locating woodlot, garden, fields and buildings. These suggestions were based on topography and the types of soil found on the farm. The Wisconsin Colonization Company claimed that this service was the first of its kind in the field of colonization.<sup>23</sup>

At first the company's plans included clearing part of the lands for the settler. This was stopped, a company official stated, because the new settler was too often tempted to cultivate only the patch cleared for him and spend no time clearing the rest of his farm. It was better, he explained, that the settler begin his farm by clearing, thus acquiring the experience and confidence needed to make a farm in the stump lands.<sup>24</sup> However, the company did not greatly alter its plans to offer the settler a "made to order farm." He had a choice of from forty to 160 acres at from twenty-five to forty dollars an acre. Once his tract was selected he could choose one of several styles of farm houses built by the company, varying in cost from \$500 to

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<sup>23</sup> Wisconsin Colonization Company, Colonization and Community Development, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Peter A. Speek, A Stake In The Land (New York, 1921) 53, 54.

\$1,000 and having one to four rooms. The company also built a shed on the new farm to serve as a temporary barn. In addition a cow and two pigs, tools and seed were supplied to the settler. He also received clearing tools and clover and timothy seed for his new clearing. The company would even provide the furniture for his home if he asked for it.<sup>25</sup>

The houses offered to the colonist were very simple in construction. "House Number One" was a single room, sixteen by twenty feet in size, with three windows. The house was set on blocks, and only the front and sides were covered with siding, the back being covered with roofing paper. Other types of houses varied in the number and size of rooms, the basic construction remaining the same in all units. Inner furnishings were of the barest sort; chimneys were set on brackets half way up the walls, while bedrooms and closets contained no wallboard.<sup>26</sup>

Faast endeavored to have the buildings ready for settlers when they moved to their tracts. On his part the

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25 Anonymous, "Made to Order Farms," 42-44.

26 Ibid., 43. Richard T. Ely lists the items in "Plan Number Three:" Forty acres of land with house, barn, livestock and tools. A house fourteen by twenty feet in size, one and one-half stories high. A barn twelve by fourteen feet in size, one cow, four chickens, two small pigs, flower and vegetable seeds, one bushel of mixed clover and timothy seed, one garden cultivator, one cross-cut saw, one axe, a brush scythe and a mattock. The cash payment was \$400, the total cost, from \$1250 to \$1500. Richard T. Ely, "Private Colonization of the Land," American Economic Review, 8:3(September, 1918) 528.

settler made a cash payment of from \$500 to \$1,500, depending on the improvements he requested. The first payment was supposed to cover twenty per cent of the value of the land purchased and fifty percent of the value of buildings, stock, and tools. The remaining payments on the farm were placed on a thirty year amortization plan with semi-annual installments to be met by the settler. On a debt of \$1,000 the semi-annual payment amounted to approximately forty dollars. For the first three years only the taxes need be payed by the settler.<sup>27</sup>

With the settler making such small annual payments the Wisconsin Colonization Company had to push improvements on each farm as rapidly as possible in order to make the farms mortgageable in the regular money markets. This was especially true of lands for which the colonization company was itself in debt. If the settler's debt to the company could be turned into a mortgage and then sold to an outside investor the company would then have funds to pay for lands and to carry on its operations. Hence the company resorted to a number of techniques in order to get the farms cleared and stocked to the point where other investors might be willing to risk buying the settler's mortgage. This meant that the company must take care to get reliable settlers in

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27 Anonymous, "Made to Order Farms," 44; Wisconsin Colonization Company, form letter to land purchaser, June 14, 1919, Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

the first place. Those not considered likely to succeed were discouraged from buying. Faast sought to eliminate "down and outs" and to obtain what he called

...pioneers in the true sense--who have ideals, who are willing to work hard for those ideals,<sup>28</sup> and who make good neighbors and good citizens.

Once a prospective colonist had been accepted the company urged him to move to the land as soon as possible. Moreover, he was at once subjected to an intense campaign to make him clear his farm. The agricultural advisor for the company tried to reach the settler as soon as he was on the land, for he felt that the colonist was more open-minded and likely to accept advice during the first few weeks. Following his first visit the advisor made it a point to see every settler at least once a month. The company made liberal offers to settlers who would clear land. If he would clear a given number of acres each month, the company would lend back to the settler in monthly installments up to \$500 of his original cash payment for the farm.<sup>29</sup>

As a means of encouraging stump and brush removal Faast and his associates sponsored land clearing contests with special prizes for settlers who cleared the most land.

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<sup>28</sup> Wisconsin Colonization Company, Analysis of the Real Estate Situation; Robin Hood, A Story of Land Plus Service (1925), Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Clark, Proposed Plan of Activities, 1919; Wisconsin Colonization Company, Analysis of the Real Estate Situation, Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

The company resorted to more forceful methods also, in order to get settlers to devote their time to clearing brush and removing stumps. Faast exhorted the settler to clear the land in letters which warned that laziness would be justly rewarded with failure. When a settler ignored a company plan to assist him to remain on his farm and clear land instead of working elsewhere, he received a letter from the secretary of the company requesting him to pay up his debts to the company.

I am sure you will do one thing or the other; You will either take advantage of our clearing offer and stay at home to plow and brush a lot of land or you will send us a check for the amount of your account that may be past due.<sup>30</sup>

No doubt such tactics proved effective, especially among the large number of immigrant families, who may have been unaccustomed to the brusque methods of American business men.

While profit motives often appeared evident in company dealings, much that was commendable existed in the relationship between the Wisconsin Colonization Company and its colonists. Faast and his employees made sincere efforts to get colonists to adopt better farming methods and avoid pitfalls common among settlers on stump lands. The company

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<sup>30</sup> E. G. Kuehl to All Wisconsin Colonization Company Farmers, undated; B. F. Faast, An Open Letter to Southern Sawyer Farmers Who Purchased Land From The Wisconsin Colonization Company, June 1, 1921; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. Land clearing contests are discussed in Wisconsin Colonization Company, Colonization and Community Development, 13, 14.

advisor helped to solve countless problems for new settlers, ranging from the care of sick children to personal financial problems, to say nothing of those concerned with farm management. A settler who planned a large home might be advised to save part of his funds for emergencies and get along with a smaller house.<sup>31</sup> The company sponsored garden contests, clubs, movies, activities comparable to the later 4H clubs for younger settlers, tree and flower planting, and a number of other devices to make life more interesting in the colonies. There could be little doubt that Faast had conquered much of the problem of isolation in the stump land settlement.<sup>32</sup>

Naturally some settlers were dissatisfied. One settler told an investigator that the settlers worked like animals and were housed scarcely better. He complained that most colonists had to leave their homes for work in the cities in order to feed their families. He hinted that the company profited on sales of tools and seeds which they

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<sup>31</sup> Copy of a letter, unsigned, to E. N. Ellsworth, undated, Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. For general comment on relations between company and settlers see Anonymous, "Made to Order Farms," 44ff, and Speek, A Stake In The Land, 62, 63. For a company bulletin prepared to aid beginning farmers, see E. J. Delwiche and J. G. Milward, Crops For New Land (Eau Claire, 1922).

<sup>32</sup> Wisconsin Colonization Company, Colonization and Community Development, 12-20. See W. N. Clark, To The Boys and Girls, undated, and countless similar letters in the Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

supposedly offered at cost. Further, the colonists were apprehensive about their future; would they not always be subjects of a paternal system with the company controlling the banks, and large estates disguised as demonstration farms? Faast denied the charges. He stated that the company houses were not makeshift, that no colonization project furnished better housing. The company had never denied that settlers might have to work part time elsewhere, but did its best to provide work for the settlers when possible. There were no company stores to profit on the settlers' needs; the company lost money in attempting to furnish livestock for its farmers. If the company reserved land for demonstration farms, he said, it could also point to former demonstration farms which had been divided into smaller farms and sold to settlers rather than reserved as estates. In the oldest colony not a foot of land had been retained by the company; even the company owned cheese factory had been turned over to a cooperative.<sup>33</sup>

In all probability there was much to be said on both sides, But there could be little doubt that Faast and the Wisconsin Colonization Company had come a long way from the methods employed by the speculators and the promoters of the Wisconsin Cutover in the past. It was probably as much a comment on the immensity of the problem of colonizing

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33 Speek, Stake In The Land, 72-74.

the stump lands as it was on the methods of Faast's company that the most satisfactory and successful of the colonies according to Faast was the Polish settlement. Those who came from the "little Polands" of Detroit, Chicago and Milwaukee were satisfied with a lower standard of living, were willing to work harder and gave the company less trouble than the more "Americanized" settlers.<sup>34</sup>

The Wisconsin Colonization Company employed the usual advertising methods to bring settlers to its lands. Faast advertised in most of the Chicago newspapers and in many others throughout the Mid-West. The company virtually subsidized a local newspaper, partly for advertising purposes and partly to have a means of disseminating news and company propaganda among settlers. For an annual payment of \$300 the Radisson Courier provided the Wisconsin Colonization Company with space for advertising, additional space for a company owned bank to advertise, and two full columns for reading material each week. The company received 150 extra copies of every edition and paid for a subscription for every person buying land. The 150 copies were mailed as advertising to bankers, public officials, company sales agents and stockholders. The material for the two columns reserved for the company was usually written by the company's agricultural agent or selected by him from other sources,

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34 Ibid., 54, 55, 71, 72.

but it was well dispersed throughout the newspaper to avoid the appearance of company sponsorship. He avoided direct mention of the colonization company in the articles. The Company exerted considerable pressure on the editor of the paper in such matters as the printing of local news and in his organization of the paper.<sup>35</sup>

Faast attempted to reach potential settlers through those who already occupied company lands. When one of his colonies won first prize on a showing of produce at the Sawyer County Fair, he had postcards made picturing the exhibit and distributed them among the settlers. He urged them to send the cards to friends, obviously to create interest in the company. In form letters he asked farmers to "pick your neighbors" by writing to friends and urging them to come to settle in one of the colonies.<sup>36</sup>

The colonization company spent large sums yearly for

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<sup>35</sup> Agreement Between Wisconsin Colonization Company and Courier, undated, typewritten manuscript in the Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. The National Land Colonizing Company was much less subtle in its approach to propaganda. It issued a duplicated Settlers' News Letter once a month. Settlers were harangued on a number of subjects having to do with their progress in farm making. The following is typical: "Come out of it, man! Spread yourself and get your blood to moving. Grab the old brush hook and axe. There is still time to wear a lot of callouses on the handles." Settlers' News Letter, October, 1921. A copy is in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

<sup>36</sup> B. F. Faast to Meadowbrook Friends, undated; Form letter to settlers, undated; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

advertising. In 1923 more than \$11,000 was spent for advertising, nearly \$1,000 in Polish newspapers alone. However, the expenditures dropped sharply in 1924 to \$3,500 and were less than \$2,500 by 1925.<sup>37</sup>

Faast was interested in a number of enterprises which aided in the work of the colonization company. Banks and cooperative marketing organizations were among these groups. However, the most important adjunct of the Wisconsin Colonization Company was the First Wisconsin Land Mortgage Association, founded in 1913. Faast was the principal stockholder in this concern, and a number of his associates in colonization work were among the larger stockholders. Its function was to purchase mortgages from land companies, thus providing the funds necessary for the latter concerns to operate. Capital for the mortgage associations was raised by grouping large numbers of mortgages and issuing bonds on them. Such a device was especially important in colonizing work, where settlers' payments were amortized over a long period, and loans and services to settlers drained the operating funds faster than returns from the land could be expected to build them up. In 1922 the Wisconsin Colonization Company entered into a similar arrange-

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<sup>37</sup> Wisconsin Colonization Company, Operating Ledger, 1923, 111; 1924, 111, 112; 1925, 43.

ment with the First Wisconsin Trust Company.<sup>38</sup>

Faast and his employees kept a careful record of the progress of settlement on the company lands. In their first year of operation they sold land to fifty-six buyers, in 1918 to 119 buyers, and to 173 in 1919. Settlement lagged behind these figures, only eighty colonists actually having been located by 1919. Sales dropped after that date, reaching a low point in 1921, then climbing slightly again. By January, 1920, the company had constructed 173 houses and 133 barns for settlers.<sup>39</sup>

The colonization effort never succeeded from the standpoint of the stockholder. In 1922 the secretary of the company announced that dividends were being paid only to preferred stockholders. This was still the case in 1924, when Faast declared that no dividends could be paid to

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<sup>38</sup> Financial Statement of the First Wisconsin Land Mortgage Association, June 25, 1921; President of the Wisconsin Colonization Company to Stockholders, undated, 1922; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. The Wisconsin Colonization Company sold a total of 180 mortgages to the First Wisconsin Land Mortgage Association, twenty-eight of which were delinquent by 1924. Statement of Mortgages Sold to First Wisconsin Land Mortgage Association By Wisconsin Colonization Company, undated, about 1924, in the records of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Division of Immigration, in the Archives Division of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

<sup>39</sup> W. N. Clark, Proposed Plan of Activities, 1919; copy of a letter, unsigned, to Ben. F. Faast, February 2, 1920; B. F. Faast to Stockholders, undated, 1924; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. Wisconsin Colonization Company, Colonization and Community Development, 10.

general stockholders until land sales got "back to normal."<sup>40</sup> The company had to issue preferred stock frequently in order to raise necessary operating funds. Faast attempted to assure stockholders that pessimism was unwarranted, that the depression would not strike in the dairying region as it had in the wheat raising areas.<sup>41</sup> He was wrong. Settlers failed to meet their payments when they came due. The company lagged far behind on its payments to the American Immigration Company for land purchased in 1917. The latter concern extended the contract three years beyond its expiration date and offered to settle for two-thirds of the sum owed to them if the Wisconsin Colonization Company could raise the sum. By 1929 the American Immigration Company, in straits itself, was willing to settle for twenty-five per cent of the remaining debt, but Faast could not raise the money and they were forced to foreclose on the colonization company.<sup>42</sup> Much the same thing happened in the case

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40 E. G. Kuehl to Preferred Stockholders, January 16, 1922; B. F. Faast to Stockholders, undated, 1924; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

41 President to Stockholders, undated, 1921; E. G. Kuehl to Preferred Stockholders, January 16, 1922; Secretary to Preferred Stockholders, undated, September, 1922; Wisconsin Colonization Company to Stockholders, April 10, 1924; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers.

42 American Immigration Company, Minute Book, 1906-1940, 43, 48, 50, in the records of the American Immigration Company, Manuscripts Division, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

of other creditors of the Wisconsin Colonization Company, with the result that one of the most significant attempts to settle northern Wisconsin collapsed. Ojibwa, Faast's dream of a model village, retired into oblivion, a sleepy little village of less than twenty homes. Wide streets and a few scattered buildings of colonial style were all that remained to recall its grand design.<sup>43</sup>

But Faast's settlers did not all disappear with the failure of his company. Twenty years later one of Faast's associates testified that "eight out of every ten we sold to are on that land yet." In this sense, he held, Faast's company had not been a failure. The depression "didn't wreck the country, it broke the company." To him the main reason for the failure of the colonization companies was the restriction of immigration. New blood was needed to conquer the Cutover, he insisted; native Americans were not good pioneering stock like the Polish settlers who had been more willing to grub out their new farms in the stump lands.<sup>44</sup>

Available statistics indicate the reasons for the reluctance of native Americans to pioneer in the cut-over districts. The standard of living in the colonies was indeed low. A statistical study of 145 settlers who purchased land from the Wisconsin Colonization Company and the Chippewa

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<sup>43</sup> Apker Interview; typewritten manuscript of a Hearing Before the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, at Ojibwa, February 5, 1932; Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. St. Paul Pioneer Press, May 12, 1946.

<sup>44</sup> Apker Interview.

Valley Colonization Company between 1918 and 1922, and held mortgages with the First Wisconsin Land Mortgage Association, reveals that the average settler was beginning his new and difficult undertaking at the late age of thirty-nine years. He had \$430 in cash at the time he moved to his farm, which averaged about seventy acres in size.<sup>45</sup> In a year or two this average settler had progressed to the point where his farm could be mortgaged at slightly less than \$2,500. But his progress in clearing fields and acquiring herds was painfully slow. After an average of three and one-half years on the land, he had cleared only seven acres and was cultivating an additional ten acres with the stumps still in. Over fifty acres of his farm remained in brush and stumps. He possessed two or three cows, a heifer, perhaps a calf, and about twenty-five chickens. He or his neighbor had a team of horses, an average of about one horse per farm.

The average settler had nearly \$1,000 worth of buildings on his farm, according to appraiser's estimates, and he owned \$115 worth of machinery. In total the value of his land, stock, machinery and buildings was estimated to exceed his indebtedness by slightly under \$2,500, although he probably could not have liquidated so profitably. He had gained in net worth approximately \$650 a year since he

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<sup>45</sup> The arithmetical average is, of course, misleading in this respect; most farms were forty or eighty acres in size.

settled. In addition to what he owed on his mortgage, he had incurred other debts amounting to slightly over eighty dollars.<sup>46</sup>

Considering the fact that the Wisconsin Colonization Company represented the efforts of some of the most progressive land sellers of its day, certain conclusions seemed almost inevitable at its downfall. These conclusions were the more valid in consideration of the extremely slow progress made by settlers under conditions which might be labeled as ideal when contrasted with those in areas hitherto settled by pioneers. It was probable, first of all, that the promoters of land settlement in the stump lands had never grasped the immensity of the task which they were attempting. Faast and his associates, and others like them, had attempted to create organizations which would meet the demand for a

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<sup>46</sup> These statistics have been prepared from records of farmers whose mortgages were held by the First Wisconsin Land Mortgage Association, filed in the records of the Division of Immigration. A number of studies have been made of the status of farmers settled by land and colonization companies. Richard T. Ely, "Private Colonization of the Land," 533, 534, has a rather complete set of data on seventy settlers in northern Wisconsin. John D. Black and Lewis C. Gray, Land Settlement and Colonization in the Great Lakes States, United States Department of Agriculture, Bulletin 1295 (Washington, 1925), while not confined to Wisconsin, contains much material on that state and is an admirable study of most of the economic aspects of cut-over land settlement. W. A. Hartman and John D. Black, Economic Aspects of Land Settlement in the Cut-Over Region of the Great Lakes States, United States Department of Agriculture, Circular 160 (Washington, 1931), is based on studies made in 1919, 1920, and 1928, and is thus important for the period under consideration here.

high standard of living among twentieth century pioneers while remaining within the traditional framework of free enterprise. Their plans were never free of the optimistic dreams of the speculator. It would have been too much to expect that they should be. The colonization companies were created in a period of rising farm prices as well as an era when it appeared that food shortages would insure the need for agricultural production on a huge scale indefinitely. Wartime demands on American agriculture played a large part in the rosy picture which men like Faast painted of the agricultural possibilities of the stump lands. Still, their experience did not lead inevitably to any conclusion that state colonization was the only method to settle northern Wisconsin. All that could safely be said was that under the most ideal conditions yet provided by any group of promoters of cut-over lands, a prosperous agricultural population had failed to be attracted to the stump lands of northern Wisconsin. True, the collapse of farm prices following the war played a large part in the failure of the colonization efforts. But the colonization companies were few and far between. They had dealt with a relatively small proportion of the wastelands. The truth of the matter was that it did not make much difference that Faast had in a way succeeded, that he left many settlers on the land, even if his company failed. What was important was the fact that colonization

did not create conditions which would bring any sizeable flow of settlers to northern Wisconsin. Seven acres of garden, two cows, twenty-five chickens and a twenty-five hundred dollar mortgage were not exactly the fulfillment of the average American's dream. As the following chapters will show, the failure of organizations like the Wisconsin Colonization Company brought into question the wisdom of continuing the traditional efforts to promote settlement in the stump lands.

## VII

### PUBLICIZING THE STUMP LANDS AFTER 1900:

#### NEWSPAPERS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Many familiar land selling or promotional techniques continued to be used in a number of newspapers and organizations advertising the stump lands after 1900. However, there were several new features in the propaganda of the later period. The modest success of a few farmers in raising sheep, Angora goats, beef cattle or some new crop was widely publicized and frequently urged as the type of agriculture which would be both satisfactory and profitable. Some continued to advocate dairying as the only suitable industry for northern Wisconsin. A second new feature of the propaganda after 1900 was its strong anti-western and anti-Canadian tone. Canadian land agents seeking to sell land in Wisconsin aroused great antipathy among the land holders, while the advertising campaigns of Canadian and western United States land companies provoked widespread hostility. The promoters were sometimes a little shrill in denouncing that small group which had appeared by 1900 to urge that northern Wisconsin be replanted to forests. A later chapter dealing with state policies will discuss this matter.

The publicity organizations formed after 1900 employed tried and tested techniques. But they also introduced new

devices to sell land. They found new methods for advertising the opportunities to be had in the Cutover. Several of the associations reached a much greater size and enjoyed considerably more financial support than their precursors. Some worked diligently to aid and educate the settler in order to insure successful farming in the stump lands. Dairying associations and land clearing associations were typical examples of such activity. A great number of organizations not directly concerned with land settlement took part in the campaign to get settlers. Bankers from all parts of the state and organizations like the Milwaukee Association of Commerce devoted energy to the cause.

In the following pages the characteristics of the twentieth century land promotion will be discussed in some detail. As in the chapter devoted to similar efforts before 1900, the work of newspapers and the opinions of various individuals will receive first consideration. Then the work of a number of associations in getting settlers and trying to insure a stable agricultural economy in the Cutover will be treated.

By 1900 stories on the agricultural possibilities in northern Wisconsin had become standard front page and editorial material in most dailies and weeklies of northern Wisconsin. A statement by some prominent individual, a tour of the county by an editor, statistics on the crops

grown in the local county, in short, almost anything was sufficient to call forth an article on the great future for farming in the stump lands.<sup>1</sup> A set of standard phrases began to be used in referring to cut-over lands. Northern Wisconsin lands were the "Poor Man's Paradise," the "Land of Promise," or a "Gilt Edge Investment." Many fancied that farming in the region was now past the experimental stage. Northern Wisconsin "has arrived," one writer proclaimed.<sup>2</sup> Old arguments were repeated in editorial columns long after their validity became open to doubt. As late as 1922 the Bayfield Progress contended that anyone unable to bring his produce to city markets in northern Wisconsin would find ready markets in the lumber camps of that region. Some editors and promoters continued to point to the iron mining regions of northern Wisconsin as a large and steady market for agricultural produce.<sup>3</sup>

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1 A number of such articles might be cited. See for example the Medford Taylor County Star and News, February 16, 1901; Marinette Weekly Eagle, December 12, 1902; The Tomahawk Wisconsin, August 20, 1904; Bayfield County Press, November 10, 1905; Cadott Blade, September 13, 1907; Rhineland News, July 12, 1912.

2 See the articles, some of them reprinted from other northern weeklies, in the Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, June 21, 27, 1902. D. O. Thompson, "Northern Wisconsin 'Arrived'," Wisconsin Farmer, 27:37 (September 10, 1908), 3; Ellis B. Usher, "Wisconsin, The Land of Promise," World Today, 7:3 (September, 1904), I-IV.

3 Bayfield Progress, November 29, 1922; Iron River North Wisconsin Farmers' Call, 1:1 (August 1, 1904), 5; Clipping from the Farmer's Tribune, December 7, 1905, in a pamphlet box entitled Northern Wisconsin, Clippings, in the library of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin.

By far the outstanding characteristic of newspaper promotion of the stump lands after 1900 was the enthusiastic espousal by editors of a number of possibilities, each hailed as a great boon for the advancement of farming in northern Wisconsin. Dairying received steady and logical support, buttressed by quotations from professors of the College of Agriculture and other authorities.<sup>4</sup> But in 1900 many land holders looked upon sheep raising as the most promising type of farming. Their hopes rose when Colonel W. W. Burch, editor of the American Sheep Breeder, began a sheep ranch in northern Wisconsin. Burch's comments on the cut-over lands and his decision to graze sheep there were hailed far and wide as the harbingers of a new era for the stump lands.<sup>5</sup> The Superior Evening Telegram took occasion to print the lush description of northern Wisconsin by one Captain McCann, described as a famous sheep breeder of West Virginia.

If you mean a land where trout streams murmur and broad rivers gleam through walls of cedar, and the gold of buttercups is mingled with the white bloom of clover, then I have seen the fair land of

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4 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, January 10, 1902; Ladysmith Weekly Budget, August 13, 1904; Neillsville Times, January 10, 1907. See also L. K. Wright, The Resources of Northern Wisconsin(Madison, 1902), 5, 6, and Frederick Rietbrock, "Dairy Possibilities in Northern Wisconsin," Wisconsin Dairymen's Association, Thirty-First Annual Report(1903), 158-172.

5 Phillips Bee, August 30, October 4, 1899; Milwaukee Sentinel, April 9, 1901; Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, April 26, 1901.

which you dream, a country gently undulating like the billows of the sea, fruitful and rich in all the grasses that a shepherd loves....<sup>6</sup>

While few citizens of the northern counties thought of the brushy waste lands in such glowing terms, many seized the opportunity to fortify their faith in the future of their sections. Indeed, the Secretary of the State Board of Immigration testified that Burch's articles in the American Sheep Breeder had created great interest among western sheep men, and in the following years a number of them brought flocks to Wisconsin. Local newspapers followed these tests avidly. Moreover, they reported that sheep were great brush destroyers and were likely to prove of great help in clearing land.<sup>7</sup> But sheep raising was never successful. When W. H. Webb, a Superior land dealer, considered investing in a flock of sheep, Dean Russell, of the College of Agriculture, warned him that sheep could not be put on wild lands successfully. They suffered from parasitic infections, Russell said, and

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<sup>6</sup> Superior Evening Telegram, February 15, 1902.

<sup>7</sup> George W. Taylor to B. W. Basseth, December 4, 1890, Wisconsin State Executive Office Papers, Immigration Letter Books, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Hereafter cited as Executive Office Papers, Immigration Letter Books. Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Immigration...1900, 4. For typical newspaper articles on sheep grazing in northern Wisconsin see: Iron River North Wisconsin Farmers' Call, I:1(August, 1904), 9; III:1(October, 1906), 22; Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, January 13, 1905; Ladysmith Gates County Journal, August 19, 26, 1905; Ladysmith Rusk County Journal, September 22, 1906.

did not thrive on brushy lands. A Chicago man who had raised sheep on cut-over land expressed much the same opinion.<sup>8</sup>

While the movement to make the Cutover into a large sheep pasture could hardly be described as a craze, that term seems applicable to the Angora goat fad of the same period. Angora goats, because they ate brush, became the object of a great deal of hopeful conjecture. Many promoters considered that they had at last discovered the ideal stock for the stump lands: animals that would clear land and produce wool and meat.

Currie G. Bell, editor of the Bayfield County Press, claimed that he had first suggested raising Angora goats in northern Wisconsin. But even before Bell and others formed an Angora goat company, A. R. Hall of Dunn County had aroused considerable interest by exhibiting a herd of goats at the Dunn County fair. He had purchased these in Texas, in 1899, for the express purpose of testing their ability to destroy brush.<sup>9</sup> Early the next year a number of newspapers carried stereotyped articles extolling the virtues of Angora goats. The Bayfield County Press even printed an article by a Texas

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8 H. L. Russell to W. H. Webb, December 21, 1917, College of Agriculture Files, folder marked Northern Wisconsin. Minutes of the Eau Claire Cut-Over Land Conference, typewritten, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing... 1916, 1917. The files designated above are stored on the fourth floor of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin.

9 Menomonie Dunn County News, September 22, 1899.

goat salesman who claimed that Angoras were used effectively in the virgin forests in Oregon. Editor Bell and a number of local citizens organized the Bayfield Angora Goat Company in 1900, and purchased 100 goats in Iowa.<sup>10</sup> Without waiting to see the results of his experiment, Bell boasted that the goats would clear brush from cut-over land and enrich the soil at the same time. They needed little shelter. In fact the Angora was the ideal animal for the stump lands.<sup>11</sup> Other newspapers reprinted Bell's articles and the whole of northern Wisconsin became interested in Angoras. Goats or rumors of goats appeared first in one county, then in another. The Marinette Eagle proclaimed that Angoras would "transform the waste lands into flourishing fields...."<sup>12</sup> The Wisconsin Farmer reported a "phenomenal increase" in the sale of Angoras during 1900 and 1901. In the latter year, the Farmer stated, the American Angora Goat Breeders' Association had held the most successful sale of its existence.<sup>13</sup> According to the American Sheep Breeder, a "goat boom" was sweeping Wisconsin. Some twenty-five or thirty flocks of

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<sup>10</sup> Bayfield County Press, March 3, 10, 17, 22, 24, May 26, 1900.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., March 3, 1900.

<sup>12</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, April 6, 1900; Tomahawk, April 14, 1900; Medford Taylor County Star and News, May 4, 1901; Marinette Eagle, March 7, 9, 12, 1901.

<sup>13</sup> Wisconsin Farmer, 20:44(October 31, 1901), 525; 45(November 7, 1901), 535.

the animals had been sold in northern Wisconsin in two and one-half years.<sup>14</sup>

Editorial enthusiasm continued undiminished. One owner was quoted as reporting that his herd of goats was the equivalent of one man kept steadily at work clearing land. This story became a standard part of the goat gospel. It was repeated throughout the north, as in the Journal of Burnett County:

A flock of Angoras, it is said, is equal to the best woodsman in clearing cut-over brush land.<sup>15</sup>

But there were few, if any, claims that Angora goats brought any profits to their owners either from mohair or meat. Moreover, the farmers soon found that high fences were needed to get Angoras to clear the right land. Their kids required special care and were unable to withstand cold, damp spring weather. But, worst of all, goats did not thrive on brush, as some had expected; they required good grass pasture as well.<sup>16</sup> The enthusiasm for goats soon diminished and newspapers of northern Wisconsin turned to other hopes

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<sup>14</sup> American Sheep Breeder, 22:1(January, 1902), 21; 22:4(April, 1902), 213.

<sup>15</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, January 13, 1905; Iron River North Wisconsin Farmers' Call, I:1(August 1, 1904), 15. See the enthusiastic articles in the Tomahawk, June 21, 1902 and January 3, 1903.

<sup>16</sup> See the article by Professor Thomas Shaw, in Wisconsin Central Railway, Wisconsin And Its Opportunities (Milwaukee, 1905), 30, 31.

for promoting a successful agriculture in the stump lands.

From time to time other possibilities stirred northern editors. Sugar beets aroused sporadic interest both before and after 1900. As early as 1869 the Wisconsin Emigrant Company had proclaimed that great profits would be made from this crop in northern Wisconsin.<sup>17</sup> Governor William R. Taylor had investigated the possibilities of bringing the beet to Wisconsin. In the early nineties the Agricultural Experiment Station of the College of Agriculture conducted tests with the sugar beet, only to find that wet cold weather in the northern counties caused them to rot in the ground.<sup>18</sup> Interest in sugar beets continued to grow, accompanied by talk of beet sugar factories in the northern counties. Correspondents engaged in a long argument in the columns of the Phillips Bee over the relative merits of dairying and raising sugar beets.<sup>19</sup> Discussions of the possibilities of the sugar beet continued intermittently after 1900, another means of sustaining the great

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<sup>17</sup> Wisconsin Emigrant Company, One Million Acres of Wheat and Timber Land of the West Wisconsin Railway Company (New York, 1869), 4, 9, 10.

<sup>18</sup> William R. Taylor, Notes for an autobiography, in the Taylor Papers, Correspondence, 1896-1919, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. University of Wisconsin, Agricultural Experiment Station, Sugar Beet Culture in Wisconsin (Bulletin 26, Madison, January, 1891), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Marinette Eagle, April 1, 1899; Phillips Bee, January 19, 26; February 2, 9, 1898.

expectations of northern editors.<sup>20</sup>

Stump land promoters waged ceaseless war on Canadian lands for some time after 1900. The success of Canadian government land agents in persuading Wisconsin families to move to the western provinces obviously disturbed them. Canadian agents reported that their activities first met opposition only among Wisconsin railroad interests, that they received cordial treatment at local fairs and at the Milwaukee State Fair.<sup>21</sup> But during 1901 and 1902 the flow of Wisconsin people to Canada increased, and promoters of cut-over lands became alarmed. The Canadian agent at Milwaukee reported that he was now being opposed by land owners as well as railroad men. In 1904, the agent at Wausau complained that local land owners had published a fake report to discredit Canadian lands. They accomplished this, he said, by sending several "emigrants" to Alberta in the spring of 1903 and having them return with tales of bad treatment and disillusionment in Canada. These stories were then widely published in newspapers throughout the state. In addition, the agent reported that he could not obtain space for an exhibit at the Wausau fair and was forced to

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<sup>20</sup> The Tomahawk, June 28, 1902; Ladysmith Rusk County Journal, May 16, 1912. See the clipping from the Eau Claire Weekly Leader, undated, in Northern Wisconsin, Clippings, library of the College of Agriculture.

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Sessional Papers, 1900, 13: 188-199; 1901, 25: Part 2, 188.

rent a vacant store for his display.<sup>22</sup>

Wisconsin newspapers were delighted with stories of bad conditions in Canada. The Journal of Burnett County stated that a cycle of long summers and short winters had made Canada appear better than it really was. Not only would weather conditions change for the worse, but settlers would find themselves at the mercy of one railroad when it came to marketing crops in Canada. They would also find coal prices very high, the Journal warned, amidst predictions that there would soon be a reaction and a trek of settlers away from this bleak and frosty land.<sup>23</sup> Other newspapers joined the cry against the Canadian prairies with equally dour predictions as to the fate of those who migrated across the border.<sup>24</sup> No doubt the antipathy toward Canada varied directly with the rate at which she drew settlers across the border. A Canadian agent at Milwaukee reported his greatest success in 1913. He also met more opposition in

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22 For reports by Canadian immigration agents concerning the movement of Wisconsin settlers to Canada, see Canadian Sessional Papers, 1903, 25: Part 2, 128-162. The report of the Wausau agent concerning the faked emigration story, and the fair incident, is contained in Sessional Papers, 1904, 25: Part 2, 138, 139. The story told by the supposed emigrants is found in the Wausau Daily Record, May 4, 1903.

23 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, March 23, December 23, 1904; June 9, 1905.

24 Marinette Weekly Eagle, December 12, 1902; clipping from the Farmers' Tribune, December 7, 1905, in Northern Wisconsin, Clippings, library of the College of Agriculture; Ladysmith Rusk County Journal, June 30, 1906.

that year than ever before. He had found northern Wisconsin to be a particularly good field for obtaining settlers because many farmers were ready to quit their clearings on account of stony lands, summer frosts and other difficulties.<sup>25</sup>

Western lands in the United States also came in for a share of criticism in the northern Wisconsin press. The editors warned of terrible droughts, the lack of timber and fuel, hail, prairie fires and other calamities which might overtake settlers who moved to western lands.<sup>26</sup>

The competition offered by western and Canadian land promoters probably had much to do with the formation of one of the first publicity organizations for promoting settlement in the stump lands after 1900. Land holders who met to discuss a promotional organization at Eau Claire, in the spring of 1903, heard one of their number express the belief that proper advertising could divert many settlers to northern Wisconsin who might otherwise go to Canada or the West. Soon after, a number of land holders contributed \$100 each to form the Wisconsin Development Association. They proposed through this organization to advertise north central Wisconsin lands for settlement. By July they had raised several thousand dollars which they used to buy

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<sup>25</sup> Canadian Sessional Papers, 1914, 25: Part 2, 119, 120.

<sup>26</sup> Superior Telegram, September 28, 1904; Ladysmith Weekly Budget, November 22, 1906.

advertising space in the newspapers in Wisconsin and adjoining states. Frederick Rietbrock, a Marathon County lumberman and colonizer, headed the association. He prepared an article on farming advantages in northern Wisconsin which was published in several newspapers. The Association's secretary, L. K. Wright, had published a pamphlet on the Resources of Northern Wisconsin (Madison, 1902) and no doubt contributed much of the promotional material of the association. Apparently no effort was made to keep the group intact after its original contributions had been expended.<sup>27</sup>

The desire to compete with the promoters of Canadian and western lands also inspired the organization of the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association, in 1905. This organization embodied the plans of the Milwaukee promoter, James L. Gates, who had long urged land holders to combine their advertising efforts.<sup>28</sup> However, Gates' immediate interest in 1905 was to combat the railroad legislation passed by the state legislature during that year. State laws now forbade rate discrimination and free passes. As a result, railroads discontinued the practice of giving half-fare tickets to land seekers. These were still issued in neighboring states, consequently Gates and other land holders

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<sup>27</sup> Wausau weekly Record, April 9, 1903; Wausau Daily Record, May 1, June 9, July 31, 1903; Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, June 26, 1903.

<sup>28</sup> Tomahawk, March 10, 1900.

blamed the fall in land sales during this period on the anti-pass laws and called for an organization of land owners to protest to the State Railroad Commission.<sup>29</sup> Robert Gates, who arranged the meeting proposed by his father, urged that land owners also consider forming a large advertising pool for drawing attention to their lands. This, he said, would counteract the publicity of similar pools in the West and in Canada, which were cutting into Wisconsin land sales.<sup>30</sup>

Thirty-five land owners and agents responded to Gates' call to meet in Madison on July 18, 1905. There they formed the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association and appeared before the Railroad Commission to argue for homeseeker's half-fare rates. The commission decided that if railroads so desired, they could continue to give lower rates to land seekers. Such rates were not put into operation immediately and Gates, in financial difficulties and bitter over the decline in land sales resigned his active leadership in the association early the next spring.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See the circular letters written by Gates and his son Robert to the Shaw Lumber Company, June 28, July 12, 1905, Shaw Lumber Company Papers, in the Eau Claire Public Library. Milwaukee Sentinel, July 11, 1905.

<sup>30</sup> Robert L. Gates, circular letter to Eugene Shaw, July 14, 1905, Shaw Lumber Company Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Milwaukee Sentinel, July 19, 20, September 16, 1905; March 15, 1906. Biennial Report...of the Railroad Commissioner of the State of Wisconsin...1906, 23-38. James L. Gates to Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, August 19, 1905; Gates to Eugene Shaw, November 22, 1905; Shaw Lumber Company Papers. Former Governor William Upham replaced Gates as president of the association.

Meanwhile, at its Milwaukee headquarters, the Association made plans for carrying on an intensive campaign to advertise northern Wisconsin. Edgar T. Wheelock, an editorial writer for the Milwaukee Sentinel, became the secretary of the organization. He at once began a campaign to get the state legislature to create a state board of immigration. Wheelock wrote a number of newspaper articles to win public support for his cause. The Association's committee on legislation persuaded the Republican Party to adopt a plank in favor of an immigration agency. Wheelock obtained the assistance of Charles McCarthy, head of the Legislative Reference Library in preparing a bill and got it introduced in the Assembly. The result was the creation, in 1907, of a new State Board of Immigration.<sup>32</sup> This done, Wheelock undertook a campaign to create a number of development associations in the northern counties. Styling himself as an "Industrial missionary," he toured a number of counties, persuading local citizens to create agencies to advertise the farming opportunities of the area. He con-

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<sup>32</sup> Annual Report to Members of the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association For Year Ending September 11, 1907, 7-10. For other details concerning the organization of the Association see Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association; Its Purposes, Endorsements and What the Milwaukee Press Says of It (Milwaukee, 1906) and Articles of Association and By-Laws of the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Marinette, n.d.). All the above are in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

fined his work mainly to the northern counties, where one association after another was formed.<sup>33</sup>

Organizing county associations and advertising the stump lands completed the activities of the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association. In 1907, some thirty members had contributed amounts ranging from twenty-five dollars to \$400. Apparently no further assessments or contributions were arranged for. Other organizations now took the lead in advertising the stump lands.

While Gates and fellow organizers had been at work forming their Immigrant and Development Association at Milwaukee, a similar organization was well under way in the northwest corner of the state. In February 1904, a number of citizens of Douglas, Bayfield, Ashland and Iron counties issued a call for a conference at Iron River to

....devise ways and means whereby the advantages of this region as a home for the farmer and stock raiser, the fruit grower and the dairyman, may be properly and effectively set forth, and steps be taken to bring more homeseekers into these counties.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Antigo Republican, August 15, 1907; Shawano County Advocate, August 22, 1907; Marinette Daily Eagle-Star, August 26, 30, 1907; Milwaukee Sentinel, August 19, 23, September 1, 2, 1907. Under the new law creating the State Board of Immigration, county development associations could obtain printed immigration pamphlets free for distribution to prospective settlers. Wisconsin Session Laws, 1907, Chapter 407. An earlier law had legalized appropriations by county boards for such work, Ibid., 1905, Chapter 458.

<sup>34</sup> Iron River North Wisconsin Farmers' Call, I:1 (August, 1904), 29.

The conference, held on March 1, 1904, resulted in the formation of the North Wisconsin Farmers' Association. Superior and Ashland real estate dealers formed the backbone of this group. By May they claimed to have 2,000 members, each paying a fee of one dollar. They made provision to admit members from other counties than the original four, should interest in the association spread.<sup>35</sup>

Members of the North Wisconsin Farmers' Association published the usual promotional magazine associated with such an organization, the North Wisconsin Farmers' Call. But they conceived another device, new to northern Wisconsin, for advancing their cause. They remodelled a railroad passenger car and filled it with exhibits of agricultural produce grown in the member counties. Then they sent it on tour. In 1904 and 1905 the "Grasslands Car" toured southern Wisconsin, northern Illinois and eastern Iowa. During the next year it visited Minnesota, Iowa and Nebraska. The idea appealed to a number of people in neighboring counties. By 1906, fifteen counties had representatives in the Association. They arranged an impressive exhibit on wheels. Two huge maps showing the fifteen sponsoring counties were painted on the outside walls of the car. These maps showed

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 29. North Wisconsin Farmers' Association, The North Wisconsin Farmers' Association Invites Homeseekers To a Land of Promise and Plenty (Ashland, 1904). John F. Scott, an Ashland manufacturer, was the president of the Association. Its secretary was H. S. Fairall, of Iron River.

rivers, cities, villages, railroads, creameries and cheese factories. An electrically lighted sign on the roof announced that the car contained "FARM PRODUCTS FROM THE BEST REGION ON EARTH FOR THE HOMESEEKER." Along the outside of the car, underneath the windows, heavy glass panels covered displays of choice grasses and large photographs of farms and cities.<sup>36</sup>

Inside the Grasslands Car, the ceiling was covered with sheaves of oats, rye, barley and other grains. Bunches of grapes, jars of honey and ears of corn occupied the top shelves of a large rack running through the center of the car. On lower shelves lay displays of fruits and vegetables, enormous potatoes, and pumpkins weighing up to 100 pounds. On outer walls of the car were spread pictures: alluring scenes of farms, hunting and fishing, and city life in northern Wisconsin.<sup>37</sup>

Until the fall of 1906, railroads hauled the Grasslands Car free. However, after that date they contended that they were unable to do so because of an amendment to interstate commerce laws. This placed a much larger financial

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<sup>36</sup> Iron River North Wisconsin Farmers' Call, 3:1 (October, 1906), 35-37. Fond du Lac Commonwealth, November 6, 1906.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., November 6, 1906. The idea for the Grasslands Car apparently came from the use of similar exhibits in the far West. One from Stanislaus County, California, was brought to Ashland in 1907. Possibly some had visited northern Wisconsin before the founding of the Farmers' Association. North Wisconsin Farmers' Call, 3:1 (October, 1906), 35; Ashland Weekly Press, October 26, 1907.

burden on the Farmers' Association, resulting eventually in the formation of a new promotional group and the discontinuance of the exhibit car.<sup>38</sup>

Probably as a result of activity by the State Board of Immigration, and the work of Wheelock and the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association, some twelve of the counties involved in the Farmers' Association had formed local county development associations. The Farmers' Association had worked for a federation of these county groups. Hence, on November 7, 1907, they sent delegates to Hayward, where it was decided that the county groups should be amalgamated in a Northern Wisconsin Development Association. Later in November they met at Ashland to lay new plans for bringing settlers to their region. Members of this new publicity association decided to abandon the Grasslands Car and invest in a stereopticon and a lecturer. Moreover, they limited considerably the area in which they were to make their appeal. They concluded that the most desirable region from which to obtain settlers was that bordering Lake Michigan, beginning below Green Bay and extending into northern Illinois. They expected to find some settlers in this region who could bring a knowledge of dairying into cut-over country. They also hoped to find large numbers of dissatisfied workers in the

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<sup>38</sup> Cadott Blade, September 13, 1907; Ladysmith Rusk County Journal, September 8, 1906.

towns bordering the Lake, who could be persuaded to come to the stump lands.<sup>39</sup>

The Northern Wisconsin Development Association struck a snag when it came to raising money. Several county boards had promised support. The Bayfield Board of Supervisors enthusiastically appropriated \$1,000 but then thought better of it and cut the amount to \$250. Then they decided to withhold this sum until they saw what other counties did. Ashland supervisors held back their contribution for the same reason. The appropriations of other counties did not materialize. A. D. Campbell, secretary of the State Board of Immigration, attempted to press certain members of the Association on the matter of appropriations. This infuriated President D. M. Maxey, and he resigned. The organization fell apart in a short time.<sup>40</sup>

The Wisconsin Advancement Association, founded in 1910, outlasted all of the publicity organizations engaged in promoting the settlement of the Wisconsin stump lands. This association grew out of a "call" issued by A. D. Campbell, State Commissioner of Immigration, in June 1910. He asked

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<sup>39</sup> Bayfield County Press, November 1, 13, 16, 1907; Ashland News, November 9, 1907; Ladysmith Rusk County Journal, December 7, 13, 1907. D. W. Maloney, Ladysmith editor and secretary of the association, was to undertake the stereoptican lectures.

<sup>40</sup> Bayfield County Press, January 17, February 7, 1908; Ashland News, January 31, 1908.

landowners to meet in Milwaukee for the purpose of forming a state development association. He urged that Wisconsin landowners begin an active campaign to prevent settlers from passing by northern Wisconsin lands for those in the West. Once a man had failed in the semi-arid regions he would return to city life, Campbell claimed. His capital gone, he would be lost to northern Wisconsin promoters.<sup>41</sup>

In August, 100 business leaders and land holders met in Milwaukee to organize the Wisconsin Advancement Association. Seventy-five landowners pledged a penny an acre on more than one million acres, to create the fund necessary for operating the new advertising scheme. Non land owners paid membership fees of ten dollars.<sup>42</sup> By June the Association had over 400 members. Among the larger contributors to its penny an acre fund, the "Soo" railroad gave \$4,000, James L. Gates, \$1,500 and the American Immigration Company, \$3,250.<sup>43</sup> The large funds of the Association were put to a number of uses. A publicity office was opened in Chicago for agricultural and industrial exhibits. The Association organized a new bureau to distribute promotional releases to newspapers and farm

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41 A. D. Campbell, Call For Meeting of Land Owners (July 9, 1910)..

42 Milwaukee Sentinel, August 11, 1910; Milwaukee Journal, August 12, 1910.

43 Wisconsin Advancement Association(Milwaukee, n.d., about 1911), a leaflet in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

journals of the Mid-West. They hired Mayor La Mont, of Wausau, to tour Iowa and Illinois, delivering lectures and showing slides about northern Wisconsin.<sup>44</sup>

The Wisconsin Advancement Association also lobbied for legislation favorable to the land interests of the Cut-over. They supported bills for a revised edition of Dean Henry's Handbook For The Homeseeker (1895), and attempted to get larger appropriations for the State Board of Immigration. They fought attempts to abolish the Board.<sup>45</sup> Other activities included organizing county promotional bodies and conducting land clearing contests, in which prizes were offered to those who developed the best types of stump pulling machines.<sup>46</sup> Although the Association lasted longer than any previous organization of its type, its membership diminished as did its operating funds. Of the original 400 members of 1910, only 250 were left in 1914, and in 1917, only eighty members remained.<sup>47</sup>

In 1917 the Association was virtually wrecked by a dispute between the directors and A. D. Campbell, who had

44 Wisconsin State Board of Immigration, Second Biennial Report, 16. Remarks in Support of Bills...Submitted by the Special Committee of the Wisconsin Advancement Association, 1911, 6, 7.

45 Ibid., 2.

46 Ibid., 4, 6.

47 Wisconsin Advancement Association, List of Members and Counties in Which They Own Land (Milwaukee, 1914, 1916, 1917).

managed its affairs since leaving the State Board of Immigration in 1911. Campbell had become involved in a scheme to persuade the legislature to appropriate \$35,000 for purchasing two thousand stump pullers. These were to be rented to farmers at twenty-five cents a day. In his letters concerning the project Campbell mentioned only one make of puller. He and the manufacturer of this machine, A. J. Kirsten, appeared together at Madison to lobby for such a bill. They aroused the suspicions of many and the wrath of several proponents of a bill to appropriate a sum of money for demonstration work by the College of Agriculture. The result was that Campbell was dismissed by the board of directors.<sup>48</sup> The Association struggled on for at least a year after this incident but it was no longer of any great significance in promoting the stump lands for farming.

There were several small scale contemporaries of the Wisconsin Advancement Association. One was a second North Wisconsin Development Association, started in 1914. Another, the Chippewa Valley Cooperative Association, was launched in 1918. The first organization grew out of a meeting in

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<sup>48</sup> See the typewritten notes, probably Dean Russell's, describing the entire incident. See also, F. B. Morrison to A. D. Campbell, May 4, 1917; C. P. Arpin to F. M. White, May 18, 1917; in College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1916-1917. Campbell defends his record, without referring directly to the incident, in Confidence, Cordiality, Cooperation (Milwaukee, 1917). See the copy in the College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1916-1917.

January, 1914, at Antigo, to arrange for postponing the date of the State Fair, at Milwaukee. This would give northern counties more time to ready their agricultural exhibits. Delegates to the meeting found other common grievances and they arranged to meet at Wausau, in May, 1914, to complete a permanent organization. They resolved to protest the inclusion of their region in the Minneapolis Federal Reserve District and to promote the water power resources of the northern counties. At the Wausau meeting the Superior land agent, W. H. Webb, declared:

We do not wish to sell land to any more immigrants who are unable to till it intelligently. At the present time there are too many farms in this part of our state which are failures because the owners are working them single handed, unaided and uninformed. We do not want any more of this kind of settlers.<sup>49</sup>

These promoters of the stump lands seemed thus to have made an about face. But they were not ready to give up promoting northern lands for settlement. A key to their sentiments on this matter was the delegates' strong protest against a state reforestation program in northern counties. In fact, this may well have been the basic cause of the meetings.<sup>50</sup>

When an Oneida County Immigration Society was formed as a local adjunct of the North Wisconsin Development As-

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<sup>49</sup> Antigo Journal, January 30, February 6, 1914; Rhineland News, May 1, May 8, 1914.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., May 8, 1914.

sociation, the editor of the Rhineland New North attacked the latter organization as an aid to big landholders. He characterized the secretaries employed by such groups as

men who exchange an avalanche of wind for a fat salary and remain in one place until the pocket books of...employers refuse to stand the strain.

All that landholders needed to do to bring settlers to northern Wisconsin, he declared, was to sell their lands at fair prices.<sup>51</sup> Apparently the Development Association was mainly a protest organization, for no evidence exists of any advertising or promotional efforts.

The Chippewa Valley Cooperative Association grew out of a "booster banquet" held at Eau Claire, in November, 1917. Its few promotional energies were channeled through its official organ, The Chippewa Valley, which had previously been published as The Rosenkrans Magazine.<sup>52</sup>

A number of village and city advancement associations attempted to do for their communities what their larger counterparts did for the whole of northern Wisconsin. Many of these undertook the usual business of advertising their communities to potential settlers.<sup>53</sup> Others tried to improve

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<sup>51</sup> Rhineland New North, July 23, 1914.

<sup>52</sup> The Rosenkrans Magazine, 3:1(January, 1918), 1, 2; The Chippewa Valley, 3:4(October, 1918), 1.

<sup>53</sup> For a typical example see the description of the Rhineland Advancement Association in the Rhineland News, July 10, August 7, 1914; March 12, 1915.

farming methods in their localities. They were particularly concerned with dairy improvement. In one of the earliest forms of agricultural extension work of its kind, the Athens Advancement Association hired a University of Wisconsin graduate to make butterfat tests in the area around the village. They offered this service to farmers free of charge and printed results of the tests in the local newspapers. Gradually the tester hired by the association took over new duties. He gave demonstration talks to farmers on feeding and caring for cattle. He discussed crops suitable for the stump lands. A village market day aided the Advancement Association in bringing farmers together for demonstrations and stock sales.<sup>54</sup>

In 1900, Ed L. Peet, editor of the Journal of Burnett County, had suggested that Grantsburg business men finance the purchase of cattle for local settlers.<sup>55</sup> Peet's idea was probably put to practice in a number of localities without receiving wide notice. In 1913, however, what was known as the Ashland Dairy Plan was widely touted throughout the state. This plan really had its start in Iron River, where

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<sup>54</sup> Athens Record, February 9, March 23, May 11, July 13, 1905; D. O. Thompson and Wilbur Glover, "A Pioneer Adventure in Agricultural Extension," Agricultural History, 22:2 (April, 1946), 124-128; Arlan C. Helgeson, Athens, Wisconsin: The Economic Development of a Northern Village, Master's Thesis, 1948, on Microcard in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, 52-54.

<sup>55</sup> Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, July 6, 1900.

a local bank bought some good dairy cows and sold them to farmers, arranging to take one-half of each month's income from the cows until the debt was paid. In Ashland this plan was modified to the extent that local businessmen countersigned the farmers' notes, thus guaranteeing the banks' security for the loans. In addition, they obtained the assistance of the University College of Agriculture in choosing cattle to be purchased under the plan. In Superior, the Rotary Club and other business groups formed the Superior Rural Development Association for the same purposes. Farmers paid three dollars a month to this group, to pay back loans for cattle purchases. The Antigo Commercial Club sponsored a similar program.<sup>56</sup>

A service-type organization commonly found in northern Wisconsin after 1916 was the land clearing association. One of the earliest of these was formed in Marinette County under the leadership of the College of Agriculture and the Skidmore Land Company. The association started by making a survey of clearing needs in the county, with the objective of clearing six acres on every farm. In order to reduce cost they pooled orders from farmers for dynamite and other equipment

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<sup>56</sup> Henry C. Taylor, "Farm Credit in Wisconsin," *Hoard's Dairyman*, 57:18(May 23, 1919), 906, 907. Carl A. Rudquist, The Ashland Dairy Plan (reprinted from an address delivered to the Wisconsin Bankers Association at Wausau, May 26, 1915) in the library of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin. Antigo Journal, May 15, June 12, July 24, 1914.

needed in stump removal. Local banks financed the program and the University conducted a land clearing school to acquaint settlers with the best methods of clearing land. In twelve months 18,000 acres were cleared in the county.<sup>57</sup> By 1922, there were at least ten such land clearing associations in northern counties, five of them employing special agents to take charge of the work, while the other five placed their county agricultural agents in charge.<sup>58</sup>

After 1900 several business groups displayed great interest in the development of the cut-over areas, although they were not directly in the land selling business. Among these were state bankers and the Milwaukee Association of Commerce. The interest of a local banker in the agricultural development of his community was based largely on the financial stake involved. This was true also of southern Wisconsin bankers who often furnished credit for northern ventures. Some bankers were disturbed by the drain of funds from their communities to western areas. Thus a Wood County banker who joined the Wisconsin Advancement Association in 1910 reported that \$80,000 had been drawn from the banks in

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<sup>57</sup> Larry F. Livingston, "Regional Consideration in the Matter of Land Clearing," Tri-State Development Congress, Proceedings, 1921, 78-81. Marion C. Calkins, "Cutover Country," Survey, 45:9 (November, 1920), 304, 305. The impetus of wartime demands for food production must be taken into account here.

<sup>58</sup> Wisconsin Land Clearing Associations, typewritten chart and map, dated February, 1922, in the College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1920.

his county in one month for western land purchases.<sup>59</sup> This no doubt partially explained the fact that representatives of ten banks in Wood County formed a development association in 1913.<sup>60</sup>

Bankers chose a number of ways to promote the agricultural settlement of the deforested region. A Wausau banker wrote to Dean Russell asking for the name of some good agricultural publication which he might send to new settlers in his county. He charged the cost of such activities to the bank's advertising accounts, feeling that the expenditures would eventually benefit the firm.<sup>61</sup> The Wisconsin Banker's Association devoted considerable attention to the problems of the stump land farmer. They supported stock improvement work, local fairs, corn raising contests, and lobbied for bills to aid agricultural development. In addition they issued for a time, the monthly Wisconsin Bankers' Bulletin, prepared by several professors at the College of Agriculture on appropriate farming subjects. Some sixty banks distributed as many as 80,000 of these

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<sup>59</sup> Remarks in Support of Bills...Submitted by the Special Committee of the Wisconsin Advancement Association, 1911, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Wood County Reporter, December 11, 1913.

<sup>61</sup> H. G. Flieth to Dean Russell, April 12, 1911, College of Agriculture Files, Northern Wisconsin.

publications monthly to farmers in the state.<sup>62</sup> Bankers also tried to solve credit problems in the Cutover by pooling their loaning facilities in Bankers' Mortgage Associations in order to facilitate the sale of northern Wisconsin mortgages.<sup>63</sup>

The motives of bankers in aiding settlement varied considerably. One banker proposed a land development company, supervised by bankers, to aid poor people in acquiring land. His plan was conceived to fight what he considered a dangerous trend toward radicalism among the dissatisfied working classes.

There is no time to waste on this proposition in my judgement. This "Bolsheviki" stuff is coming very rapidly and I would like to see something done to relieve the situation in industrial centers, to get men who are lovers of the soil where they belong as soon as possible.<sup>64</sup>

The Milwaukee Association of Commerce also attempted to promote the agricultural settlement of northern Wisconsin. During 1917 the Association became interested in advancing the sheep grazing industry in northern counties. The next

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<sup>62</sup> Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Wisconsin Bankers' Association (Milwaukee, 1913), 135-142. For a typical bulletin see George McKerrow, Silo and Silage, Wisconsin Bankers' Farm Bulletin (Bulletin 12, July, 1914). For other methods employed by bankers to aid agricultural settlement see W. A. Blackburn, "How Rusk County Banks Have Aided Advancement," Cutover Land Conference, Land Clearing in Upper Wisconsin (Eau Claire, 1917), 30, 31.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, "Farm Credit in Wisconsin," 908.

<sup>64</sup> H. A. Moehlenpah to H. L. Russell, February 8, 1919, College of Agriculture Files, Soldier Settlement.

year an Agriculture and State Development Committee devoted itself to this and other matters concerning the stump lands. At times this committee had all the appearances of a group of frustated expediters, as when they acted hastily on a rumor that Antigo potato growers could not get their potatoes to market because of a shortage of freight cars. The Milwaukeeans hurriedly procured cars, telegraphed and wrote the growers, only to discover they had been misled. "It was found," the secretary of the association later reported

...that the growers did not have potatoes in readiness for shipment. Investigation led to the conclusion that shipments from these districts were not halted by lack of cars, but rather because growers were not particularly desirous of reaching markets with their products at that time.<sup>65</sup>

The Association's committee on agriculture engaged in a "saving the lambs" project, by purchasing lambs shipped to Milwaukee stock yards and sending them north to farms in the Cutover. A representative of the Association toured western states with delegates from "Cloverland" to interest western sheep and cattle men in the stump lands. By 1919 the Milwaukee group claimed to have had a hand in bringing over 100,000 sheep to northern Wisconsin from drought stricken areas in the West.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Milwaukee Association of Commerce, Annual Report, 1917, 34; 1918, 14. Much of the zeal of the Association of Commerce undoubtedly came from a desire to aid in the war effort.

<sup>66</sup> Annual Report, 1918, 31, 33; 1919, 12, 33-35.

The Milwaukee Association of Commerce also sought to encourage colonization. The "Milwaukee Idea" of land colonization seems to have grown partly out of the fear that unless land settlement became possible for the unemployed in the cities, violence might result. John P. Hume, a Milwaukee land promoter and a former manager of the Wisconsin Advancement Association, received most of the credit for the "Milwaukee Idea." This called for state and federal supervision of land colonizing companies so that these concerns would provide long term credit and expert guidance to settlers. State aids and even state operated colonization projects, to serve as "yardsticks" for private companies, were envisioned in the plan. Cities like Milwaukee were to be the sources of capital for the colonizing companies. A little carried away with zeal for the plan, the Association offered to do the work of supervising colonization, "pending action by the state." They informed Wisconsin colonization companies of their plans and created a land commission to endorse companies whose methods met their standards.<sup>67</sup> Members of the Association envisioned a huge demand for land among returning soldiers in the post war years. Thus they advocated special aids to soldiers

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<sup>67</sup> F. W. Luening, comp., Land: Its Colonization--The Milwaukee Idea (Milwaukee, 1918), 2-4, 5-16; Milwaukee Association of Commerce, Annual Report, 1918, 15; Bruno Lasker, "Wisconsin Plans for Land Settlement," Survey, 42:11 (June 14, 1919), 432.

by state and federal governments. But they opposed the plan of Secretary of the Interior Lane to create government land colonization projects. Instead they insisted that private companies ought to do the work under government supervision.<sup>68</sup>

Following the agricultural depression of the early twenties, the Milwaukee Association of Commerce devoted less time to the promotion of settlement on cut-over lands. Yet they continued their efforts to aid the northern counties by advertising the northern part of the state as a recreational area. They hoped to aid settlement indirectly in this way, as well as to promote a new use of northern lands.<sup>69</sup>

From 1900 to 1920, then, a great number of voluntary associations attempted to aid in promoting settlement of the stump lands. They were ably assisted by the newspapers of the Cutover, and elsewhere. The work of the older advertising and promotional organizations may be said to have reached its peak about 1910, with the founding of the largest of them all, the Wisconsin Advancement Association. Significantly, while this association was declining, certain organizations of a different type were coming to the fore. These

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<sup>68</sup> Luening, The Milwaukee Idea, 8, 9; Lasker, "Wisconsin Plans For Land Settlement," 432. See also, F. W. Luening to H. L. Russell, February 24, 1919, College of Agriculture Files, Soldier Settlement.

<sup>69</sup> Milwaukee Association of Commerce, Milwaukee (Official bulletin, December 20, 1923), unpagēd.

were the groups who sought to advance agriculture in the stump lands by providing some special service to the settler. Their prominence in northern counties after 1910 indicates the change which had taken place in the minds of the promoters of the Cutover. Like the colonization companies, promotional organizations reflected the conviction that special aids were necessary to insure a successful agricultural settlement of the northern waste lands. These convictions were even more pointedly born out by the actions of several agencies of the state of Wisconsin, whose efforts to settle the stump lands are discussed in the following chapters.

## VIII

### COUNTY AND STATE PROMOTION OF THE CUTOVER

1900-1925

State promotion of cut-over lands continued after 1900 to be characterized by the maintenance of immigration agencies whose duty it was to advertise northern Wisconsin and to further its settlement by farmers. Northern counties likewise followed the same general pattern. Boards of supervisors sporadically appropriated funds for one kind of promotional activity or another. Nevertheless, state and county officials, following the lead of land sellers and acting in what they conceived to be the public interest, modified their methods considerably. In addition to advertising the stump lands they sought to provide aids of one sort or another to assist the settler and assure his success in the new venture. By the mid-twenties the state Division of Immigration had so changed its activities that it almost belied its title. The shift from purely promotional activities was revealed in state legislation, as it was reflected in the action of state agencies. The College of Agriculture, which will be considered in a separate chapter below, reflected the new official attitude more than any other state institution. The desire to help the settler was a part of a growing public concern over the stump lands as a problem area. There was a great deal of theorizing over what the

role of the state should be in aiding the development of submarginal regions or, more properly, areas that needed reclamation work before they could become suitable for farming. This was stimulated by optimistic hopes that American soldiers would flock to the land when they returned from Europe after the Great War. Eventually officials turned to encouragement of forestry as the solution to the problem of the stump lands. In the following pages the forestry movement will be traced briefly to the mid-twenties, where it emerges triumphant by default over the efforts to settle northern Wisconsin with farmers.

The following chapter then, treats mainly of modifications in the policies of the state and county agencies charged with the responsibility of bringing settlers to northern Wisconsin. The state and county legislation in this period concerned with the College of Agriculture will be dealt with more fully in a later chapter on the College. Hence it will be only briefly mentioned here.

Northern counties continued to appropriate money for advertising their stump lands. They used other old methods also to persuade settlers to move north. Thus in 1900 Oneida County supervisors adopted a familiar plan whereby they offered tax delinquent lands to actual settlers for a small fee in return for certain pledges to occupy and clear

the lands.<sup>1</sup> Appropriations for promotional articles in newspapers or periodicals were common. The Douglas County Board of Supervisors paid \$500 to the Chicago Livestock World for 5,000 copies of a special edition on Superior and Douglas County and some additional advertising in that paper. Then they authorized the hiring of an agent to travel through the Middle West and the Northwest, distributing the publication.<sup>2</sup> Advertising work of this sort by one county often prompted another to do the same thing. Thus, in 1914, Vilas County Supervisors moved to spend \$450 for a publicity article in the Wisconsin Municipality magazine because Bayfield and Ahsland counties had done so.<sup>3</sup>

Burnett County Supervisors had little choice as to whether their county was to be advertised for settlement. Ed L. Peet, editor of the Journal of Burnett County, planned and carried out with his usual energy, an immigration pamphlet which cost over \$1,000 to publish. He did this largely on his own initiative, depending upon county appropriations, private subscriptions, and sales of the pamphlet to reimburse him for the costs.<sup>4</sup>

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1 The Tomahawk, February 17, 1900

2 Douglas County Board of Supervisors, Proceedings, 1903, 16.

3 Vilas County Board Proceedings, May 1, 1914, a single newspaper page, unidentified, in the documents collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

4 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, December 5, June 13, 1902.

In 1905 the state legislature settled the question of the legality of county appropriations for immigration work by passing an act authorizing county boards to spend up to \$1,000 annually for this work.<sup>5</sup> Numerous appropriations were made under the provisions of this act, especially after the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association began its campaign in 1907 to form immigration agencies in all northern counties. The allotment of a sum of money for an agricultural exhibit at state and local fairs became popular among county officials. The Rusk County Board appropriated \$200 to \$300 annually, from 1907 through 1911, for sending an exhibit of farm produce to the State Fair at Milwaukee, and other points.<sup>6</sup> This procedure was typical. Sometimes such appropriations included the cost of preparing booklets to be distributed at fairs, as well as the cost of sending exhibits.<sup>7</sup> Infrequently, a county board reached the legal limit and spent \$1,000 to advertise its agricultural possibilities. Lincoln County supervisors did just this in 1917.<sup>8</sup>

If county supervisors sometimes imitated neighboring

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<sup>5</sup> Wisconsin Session Laws, 1905, Chapter 458.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce News Letter, January 2, 1913.

<sup>7</sup> Official Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of Marathon County, Session for 1911-1912, 40, 41; 1915-16, 76; Proceedings...Barron County...1912, 58; Rhinelander News, September 11, 1914.

<sup>8</sup> Proceedings...Lincoln County...1917, 47.

boards in their appropriations for advertising, they were also capable of failing to make appropriations for a joint county promotion scheme because some other county did not act first. In 1908 Bayfield County officials withheld their contribution of \$250 to the Northern Wisconsin Development Association, pending similar contributions by other counties. Ashland supervisors put the same conditions on their contribution. Eventually, because other counties failed to make similar appropriations, they gave no money to the organization at all, and the Development Association collapsed for want of funds.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, county boards vied with one another in offering appropriations for obtaining branch experiment stations in cooperation with the College of Agriculture.<sup>10</sup>

In many counties settlers did not possess sufficient capital to devote their time to clearing their farms. Credit was difficult to obtain in northern Wisconsin and farmers often had to work off their farms to obtain money. This made for little progress in clearing the land. Therefore between 1911 and 1917 the state legislature passed a number of laws to enable county governments to raise funds for land clearing loans to settlers. The last word in such legislation

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<sup>9</sup> Bayfield County Press, January 17, February 17, 1908; Ashland News, January 31, 1908.

<sup>10</sup> These appropriations are discussed in some detail in the following chapter.

was the "settlers' Reclamation Act" of 1917. According to this law, if twenty-five petitioners requested aid in clearing their lands the county board of supervisors might raise funds through a bond issue or taxation and deposit them with the State Treasurer in a settlers reclamation fund. From this fund settlers could borrow up to forty dollars an acre if their requests for loans were approved by the State Department of Agriculture. But county boards were apparently not anxious to go to such limits in aiding actual settlers. No record exists of any such reclamation projects in any northern counties.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the outstanding efforts of county governments to bring settlers to northern Wisconsin were limited largely to the field of advertising. Even when state agencies began to be affected by the trend toward reforestation in the stump lands, a number of counties continued their propaganda efforts to obtain settlers. In 1927 county boards were authorized by a new law to create immigration committees and to spend up to \$5,000 annually in advertising their vacant agricultural lands. Washburn County created such a committee and appropriated more than \$1,700 in 1928 for promotional work, thus continuing, in the face of adversity, the type of

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<sup>11</sup> Wisconsin Sessions Laws, 1911, Chapter 656, 1917, Chapters 288, 503. Examination of a number of county board proceedings throughout this period, as well as the Reports of the State Treasurer, 1911-1924, reveals no such reclamation funds.

promotion of stump lands which county boards had carried on for nearly half a century.<sup>12</sup>

State officials also followed common practice in encouraging the agricultural settlement of northern Wisconsin. Between 1901 and 1907, when there was no board of Immigration, other agencies made some effort to promote the stump lands. In 1906, for instance, the State Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics issued a 500 page report on Wisconsin's Resources, Industries and Opportunities, in which considerable space was devoted to counties and villages in the Cut-over.<sup>13</sup>

A new State Board of Immigration was created in 1907, largely through the efforts of the Wisconsin Immigration and Development Association. When it was established in July, 1907, the Board consisted of the Secretary of State, the Commissioner of Labor and Industrial Statistics, and the Chief Clerk of the State Land Office.<sup>14</sup> A. D. Campbell, its

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<sup>12</sup> Milwaukee Journal, August 21, 1927; Wisconsin Session Laws, 1927, Chapter 106; Proceedings of the Board... Washburn County...1928, 8, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Twelfth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics, State of Wisconsin, 1905-1906, Part V (Madison, 1906), 355-877.

<sup>14</sup> The annual appropriation for the Board was \$7,000. Wisconsin Session Laws, 1907, Chapter 407. In 1909 the Board was reorganized to consist of the Secretary of State, the Dean of the College of Agriculture, and the President of the State Board of Agriculture. Ibid., 1909, Chapter 444.

secretary, proceeded to issue a number of leaflets and pamphlets in several languages. These publications could hardly be distinguished from those issued by similar bodies in the 1880's and 1890's.<sup>15</sup> In addition to distributing a prodigious amount of printed material, Campbell took the lead in forming a number of organizations to advertise the stump lands. The most successful of these was the Wisconsin Advancement Association, formed in 1900. Campbell became the manager of this body after he left his post with the Board of Immigration in 1911.<sup>16</sup>

The State Board of Immigration took a new tack when B. G. Packer became its secretary in 1911. Packer was an experienced hand at agricultural promotion. A young lawyer just beginning practice, he had become the secretary of a local advancement association at Withee, in Clark County. The association had attempted with indifferent success to bring factories and new industries to their community. Then they turned to agricultural advancement work. Packer became the secretary of the Farmers' Institute and Festival As-

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<sup>15</sup> Examples are Neglected Lands Lure Settlers (n.p., August 23, 1908); Nord= Wisconsin und seine Vordrüge für den Ansiedler (Madison, 1909); Anledning Til At finde sig et Hjem i Wisconsin, U. S. A. (Madison, 1908). See also, A. D. Campbell, Wisconsin the Premier Commonwealth, An Address Before the Chicago Country Homes Club...February 26, 1911, James A. Frear, Agricultural Opportunities in Wisconsin... (Madison, 1911).

<sup>16</sup> Campbell's work in founding and managing this association is discussed in the previous chapter.

sociation. Here he was more successful. He was involved in movements to persuade farmers to improve their dairy herds. He attracted the attention of Dean Russell of the College of Agriculture by his attempts to get farmers to raise special types of corn developed in the College experiment stations. This was undoubtedly a step toward his appointment as Commissioner of Immigration in April, 1911.<sup>17</sup>

The character of the state immigration publications began to change almost immediately upon Packer's appointment. After 1911 there were few, if any, foreign language publications. Also, the pamphlets of the Board now dealt with specific aspects of farming in northern Wisconsin, rather than with rosy sketches of the "land of opportunity." Prospective settlers now received pamphlets entitled Wisconsin The Great Dairy State (1914), or Beef Production In Wisconsin (1914).<sup>18</sup> They received soil survey maps and University bulletins, so that they might judge for themselves what part of northern Wisconsin was most suitable for the type of farming they wished to engage in. Data on rainfall, yield per

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17 P. S. Lovejoy, "The Promised Land; The Wisconsin Idea in the Cut-Overs," Country Gentleman, 86:1 (January 1, 1921), 4, 5; A. R. Whitson to Dean Russell, October 30, 1911, College of Agriculture Files, Branch Stations. The College of Agriculture Files here referred to are located on the fourth floor of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin.

18 Other typical publications, Wisconsin Compared (Madison, 1913); Wisconsin Endorsed by the Homeseeker, Part I (Madison, 1914); and Making Good on New Soil (Madison, 1914).

acre and production costs all figured prominently in the new immigration propaganda. The new approach testified first to Packer's great ability as a promoter and second, to the growing realization among officials that not everybody could succeed in farming the stump lands. It was in the public interest to obtain the right settler and see to it that he knew his business once he got on the land. This could not be accomplished by the earlier shotgun advertising methods. The complete reorganization of the state agency of immigration into a bureau in the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture also attested to the new attitude among state officials. Packer continued as Director of the Immigration Division. Here he refined still further his techniques for finding the right settlers and helping them make a success of farming cut-over lands.

Packer's conception of the role of an immigration agent would have seemed strange to his nineteenth century predecessors in state immigration work. He began with the general premise that the state's interest in immigration to northern Wisconsin extended far beyond merely encouraging people to buy land. Settlers must be protected from fraudulent land dealers. They must also be warned of the difficulties ahead of them, and many must be persuaded not to move to the Cutover because they lacked the necessary capital, knowledge, or physical endurance to make a success of farming

there. Further, the approach to the settler must be personal, for one man's success did not necessarily mean that another could succeed at the same type of farming. In short, the state immigration agency was no longer to be a mere go-between for buyers and sellers of land, as earlier Boards of Immigration had frankly conceived themselves to be.<sup>19</sup> Packer expressed disdain for the traditional type of immigration propaganda:

Is it not more helpful that the intending settler should know how much hay is required to carry his cows through the winter, or how to store his roots so they won't spoil, than to argue proximity to markets, which he concedes?<sup>20</sup>

This paternal approach did not mean that Packer was not a first class publicity man. He greatly enlarged the publicity work of the Division of Immigration and advertised for potential settlers in nearly seventy newspapers and periodicals. Names of prospective land purchasers were also obtained at display booths at fairs and in numerous other ways. Once Packer obtained the name of someone interested in northern Wisconsin lands, he wrote a personal letter to the individual comparing crop production in northern Wisconsin with that in the prospective settler's locality. He warned

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<sup>19</sup> Lovejoy, "Promised Land," 4; Wisconsin State Board of Immigration, Fourth Biennial Report (1914), 15; Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, 1916, 59-82; 1918, 142-144.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1918, 144.

him of fraudulent dealers in certain parts of the state and presented him with a certificate which warned dealers that the Division of Immigration was interested in the bearer and intended to keep a protective eye on his deal for land. Packer saw to it that as many as ten letters from other state agencies followed this opening exchange between himself and the prospective settler. The College of Agriculture offered advice on land clearing. One of the state experiment stations offered information on suitable crops for the Cut-over. The State Board of Health, the State Superintendent of Schools and several other agencies offered their services.<sup>21</sup>

In many cases this represented only the beginning. The next step was to interview the prospective settler. Packer and other representatives of the Division of Immigration made regular trips to Chicago and, less frequently, to St. Paul, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and other cities for this purpose. From 1915 on Packer worked with the United States Department of Labor. He often met as many as 120 people a week in the Chicago offices of the Department. At these meetings Packer

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<sup>21</sup> B. G. Packer, "Helping the Homeseeker," 8ff, typewritten, undated, in the records of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Division of Immigration, Archives Division, Wisconsin State Historical Society. See also the many copies of form letters from Packer to inquirers, in this collection of records, hereafter referred to as Records of the Division of Immigration. See also, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Biennial Report, 1916, 62-64.

and his associates tried to advise individuals according to whether they seemed likely to succeed on a farm in the stump lands. Packer usually told settlers that they needed at least \$1,200, after making their first payment on the land, to carry their families through the first two years on the land. He warned against paying too much for land or buying too large a tract.<sup>22</sup> Even after a settler had bought land, the interest of the Division of Immigration continued. Purchasers were recorded on a "follow up" list to which various bulletins were mailed from time to time.<sup>23</sup>

Interviews and personal letters still did not complete the advertising work of the Division of Immigration. Packer made use of exhibits at fairs, encouraged school children to write orations on "Wisconsin, Her Agricultural Rank and Development," and used stereoptican lectures and free movies to advertise the Cutover. In 1916 the Division equipped a railroad car, the "Wisconsin Products Special," to carry an exhibit of agricultural produce through Minnesota, Iowa,

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22 B. G. Packer, "Helping the Homeseeker," 8-10; Peter A. Speek, A Stake In The Land (New York, 1921), 20-22; Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Biennial Report, 1918, 146; Richard T. Ely, "Private Colonization of the Land," American Economic Review, 8:3 (September, 1918), 537, 538. See the numbers of form letters inviting people to meet Packer in Chicago and elsewhere, in the Records of the Division of Immigration.

23 In July, 1924, there were 2300 names on this list, according to a penned note on one of the follow up letters, a form letter from B. G. Packer, Records of the Division of Immigration.

Illinois and southern Wisconsin, much as the "Grasslands Car" of the North Wisconsin Farmer's Association had done a decade earlier.<sup>24</sup> In interviewing and corresponding with prospective settlers the Division of Immigration dealt with a huge number of people. But those who purchased land were considerably smaller in number. From 1916 to 1922 the Division received inquiries from about 8,000 people annually. But only from five to eleven per cent of this number purchased land. According to Packer, more than eighty per cent of the inquiries received by the Division came from people in rural communities as a result of newspaper advertisements. Nearly all letters asked about the same three subjects; soil, climate and crops.<sup>25</sup>

The change in emphasis from generalized advertising of the stump lands as a region of great opportunity to a guarded delimitation of their possibilities was ample evidence that Wisconsin officialdom was aware of the many problems that faced it in the northern Cutover. After 1920 the Division of Immigration shifted ground even further. In fact it ceased to operate as an immigration agency and might just-

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<sup>24</sup> Wisconsin State Board of Immigration, Third Biennial Report (1912), 9, 11; Fourth Biennial Report, 21; Fifth Biennial Report, 69, 71. See the form letter, undated, announcing free movies, Records of the Division of Immigration.

<sup>25</sup> Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Biennial Report, 1916, 59; 1920, 14; 1922, 177. B. G. Packer, "Helping The Homeseeker," 9, 10.

fiably had been accused of preventing settlement in the north, rather than encouraging it, since that was often exactly what it did. State officials were concerned with the numbers of failures among settlers in northern Wisconsin before 1918. By 1922 the State Commissioner of Agriculture was moved to state:

the plain truth of the matter...is that Wisconsin has on the market a considerable amount of mighty poor land for farming, but upon which it levies taxes with owners constantly trying to get out from under.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly, reports of the Division of Immigration were now concerned with the shortage of timber in northern Wisconsin. They cited lumbermen who favored reforesting cut-over lands. By 1924 the Division declared that the present demand for agricultural produce did not justify continued pressure to settle the stump lands.<sup>27</sup> The work of the Division in discouraging settlement was now highlighted over and above any work of a promotional sort. One could hardly recognize this descendant of the old Board of Immigration from the description of its activities in 1926:

The division collects, publishes and distributes data regarding the resources and industries of Wisconsin. It is not an agency for the stimulation of land sales; it does not and never did, directly, or indirectly place inquiries in touch with real estate operators

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<sup>26</sup> Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Biennial Report, 1922, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Biennial Report, 31-51.

or the owners of cut-over, or other lands, it endeavors to furnish unbiased and useful information...."<sup>28</sup>

As the Division of Immigration modified its activities to suit changing concepts of the role that agriculture was to play in the stump lands, so other state agencies reflected the growing recognition that the Cutover was a problem area. The Wisconsin legislature passed a number of acts designed to deal with problems which prevented the transition to agriculture in the north. They attempted, as has been shown, to solve the problem of the farmer who did not have the necessary capital for clearing land by authorizing county boards to create special loan funds for that purpose.<sup>29</sup> In 1913 they made the state school funds available for investments in mortgages on agricultural lands.<sup>30</sup> In the same year the land mortgage association law was passed. This act provided that capitalists could organize associations to make loans on farm mortgages and then issue bonds on these mortgages as a means of raising capital. The associations purchased mortgages from banks and particularly from colonization companies. The state Commissioner of Agriculture was assigned the task of supervising the individual loans and making sure that the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1926, 40. See also the reports for 1924, 31, and 1928, 40-43.

<sup>29</sup> Wisconsin Session Laws, 1911, Chapter 656, 1913, Chapter 774; 1917, Chapter 228.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1913, Chapter 647.

colonization plans were acceptable under terms of the act. Among other things the act required that companies selling mortgages must allow their settlers at least twenty years in which to complete payments. All mortgages also had to contain general provisions for soil conservation.

Two state mortgage associations were formed under the provisions of the land mortgage association law. Neither was active after 1925. The first loaned \$760,280 on 356 farms, involving mainly the mortgages issued by Benjamin Faast and his associates in the Wisconsin Colonization Company and other concerns. This association went into receivership in 1928. The second, a smaller organization, was also forced to liquidate. An important factor in the failure of both associations was that they were dominated by the land selling companies which sold them mortgages and that farms were often very highly appraised in order to make them mortgageable.<sup>31</sup>

State legislators attempted to ease the financial problems of stump land settlers in other ways. For instance,

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<sup>31</sup> Wisconsin Session Laws, 1913, Chapter 666; Henry C. Taylor, "Farm Credit in Wisconsin," Hoard's Dairyman, 57:18 (May 23, 1919), 908; Richard T. Ely, "Private Colonization of the Land," 534, 535; Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Biennial Report, 1920, 210; G. M. Householder, "Wisconsin Land Mortgage Association as a means of financing newly arrived settlers," Minutes and Papers of the Third Annual Tri-State Development Congress, 45, 46; W. A. Hartman, State Land-Settlement Problems and Policies in the United States, United States Department of Agriculture (Technical Bulletin 357, May 1933), 51.

in 1921 they exempted twenty to forty acre tracts of un-cleared land from taxation for three years, providing they were settled for agricultural purposes.<sup>32</sup>

Financial aids for settlers in northern Wisconsin was only one aspect of legislation for the problem area. In 1911 the legislature passed an act permitting railroads to reduce fares for land sellers, thus reviving the attempts to get railroads to give land agents the advantages they had given them before the anti pass laws of the La Follette administration. University experiments and demonstrations in land clearing were given frequent legislative appropriations. The State Department of Agriculture was authorized to buy and sell dynamite to settlers at cost. The legislature appropriated funds for soil surveys. No efforts were spared to make the Cutover a land of farms.<sup>33</sup> In 1919 the legislature passed a real estate licensing law in an attempt to curb disreputable practices by land agents. Under the provisions of this act a real estate licensing board investigated approximately 600 complaints against dealers from 1920 to 1923. They denied nearly one hundred applications for licenses and revoked another fifty. But in 1923 the State Supreme Court held that the licensing board had no authority to rule upon

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32 Wisconsin Session Laws, 1921, Chapter 374.

33 Wisconsin Session Laws, 1911, Chapter 150, 1917, Chapters 658, 467, 267.

the soundness of investments offered by land promoters, and this greatly limited the actions which the board could take against certain types of promoters.<sup>34</sup>

Proposals for state aid in settling the Cutover often went further than the legislature cared to go. In 1911 a proposed act would have placed the state in the real estate business, buying and selling land to actual settlers.<sup>35</sup> The use of prisoners for developing the stump lands was a pet project of some theorists. James T. Barber of the Northwestern Lumber Company at Eau Claire advocated a branch penitentiary in the north, so that state prisoners could be used to quarry rock for acid cut-over soils. W. H. Webb, a well known Superior promoter of land settlement, suggested that county boards be permitted to use petty criminals in land clearing projects.<sup>36</sup>

Nowhere was there more theorizing on the subject of state legislation for the stump lands than in regard to colonization, especially of returning soldiers. This was part of a nation wide movement which came to full bloom in

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34 Wisconsin Session Laws, 1919, Chapter 656; Elmer Grimmer, "State Supervision of Land Sales," Third Tri-State Development Congress, Minutes and Papers, 25-27; State ex Rel. Progreso Development Company v. Wisconsin Real Estate Broker's Board, 202, Wisconsin Reports, 155.

35 Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1911, 247, 1230.

36 Cut-Over Land Conference, Land Clearing In Upper Wisconsin (Eau Claire, 1917), 41, 44.

the period just after the first World War. Secretary of the Interior Lane greatly encouraged the schemes for making farmers of returning veterans when he proposed what became known as the "Lane Plan." Under this scheme the federal government would have purchased large tracts for the purpose of reclamation and colonization. Ex-soldiers would do the labor and settle on the finished projects. Countless proposals for soldier settlement in one form or another were heard in the halls of Congress and throughout the nation. There was much talk now of the need for planned rural development, of avoiding revolution through agricultural reorganization, of the need for government aid if modern settlement projects were to be successful. Numbers of states passed legislation to supervise colonization. California undertook a state owned colonization project. The American Legion, the Milwaukee Association of Commerce, and any number of organizations touted plans for state aid and supervision of colonization projects.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Lane's plan is summarized in his Work and Homes For Our Fighting Men, Department of the Interior (Washington, 1919). Lane's plans were not new in government circles. See the talk of government settlement to take care of surplus labor, in Department of Labor, Annual Reports, 1914, 129; 1915, 44, 45; 1918, 221-225. In the latter report a soldier settlement project is outlined. See also the Department's Monthly Review, 1:4 (October, 1915), 12. There is a wealth of material on theories and plans for colonization in this period. See for example, Elwood Mead, "Government Aid and Direction in Land Settlement," American Economic Review, 8:Supplement (March, 1918), 72-98; "The Advantages of Planned Rural Development," Reclamation Record, February, 1919, 58-62; Alvin Johnson, "Land Settlement Community," New Republic, 17:209 (November 2, 1918), 11-13; Frederick C. Howe, "Land Settlements and the Soldier," Nation, 108:2803 (March 22, 1919), 426, 427.

Rumors of colonization plans spread widely among American soldiers. Wisconsin immigration officials were swamped with inquiries from soldiers desiring information about lands to be made available for veterans in northern Wisconsin.<sup>38</sup> In 1918 Governor Philip responded to public pressure for plans to colonize soldiers by appointing a Land Settlement Commission to study the problem. This commission, headed by Dean Russell of the College of Agriculture, advocated the establishment of a State Farm Development Board to coordinate and supervise all colonization activity in the state. For the most part, the suggested board was to carry out no new functions, but to enhance the efforts already being made to obtain better credit facilities, control dishonest land sellers, and encourage private colonization companies. No state colonization projects were advocated; state supervision of private enterprise was to be the order for Wisconsin. The Land Settlement Commission opposed the Lane plan. They especially criticized Lane's idea of keeping title to colonized lands in the hands of the federal government, so that veterans would be leaseholders rather than landowners in the traditional American way. They also objected to confining government aid to wholly new colonization

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<sup>38</sup> See the copies of 108 letters, bound under the title, Requests From Soldiers in Re. Wisconsin Lands, 1919, in the College of Agriculture Files, Soldier Settlement.

projects, instead of aiding veterans who wished to settle in older farming areas.<sup>39</sup>

The legislature of 1919 enacted part of the recommendations of the Land Settlement Commission when they created a Land Settlement Board, consisting of the Dean of the College of Agriculture, the Commissioner of Immigration and a soldier to be appointed by the governor. This board was to work with the federal government in soldier settlement.<sup>40</sup> But the hopes for soldier settlement were founded on little more than wishful thinking and loud expectations. Soldiers did not flock to the land in any significant numbers. Indeed, neither did anyone else.

The failure of the colonization movement in Wisconsin was mirrored in a number of changes in official policy toward the stump lands. As has been shown, one of the indications of a change in attitude was the shift in the activities of the Division of Immigration. State forestry legislation also reflected the new approach to the stump lands in the minds of many officials. The growth of interest in reforestation in the state evoked bitter protests from those who wished to promote agricultural settlement. Nevertheless forestry had won a distinct victory by the mid-twenties.

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<sup>39</sup> Report of the Land Settlement Commission (Madison, January 27, 1919), 1-7.

<sup>40</sup> Wisconsin Session Laws, 1919, Chapter 596.

Before 1900 official interest in forestry had prompted several investigations and the creation of a state park. The study of northern Wisconsin forest lands by Filibert Roth in 1897 resulted in a publication that might well have put fear into the hearts of many advocates of farming the stump lands. In his Forestry Conditions and Interests of Wisconsin Roth predicted that only twenty per cent of the land in the northern counties would be found really good for farming.<sup>41</sup> However, it was not until 1903 that forestry aroused any great fears among the promoters of settlements. In that year a State Department of Forestry was established and a 40,000 acre forest reserve created in the north. Fear that western counties would be included in this and future reserves led to a strong anti-forestry campaign in the Journal of Burnett County. Ed L. Peet, long a leader of settlement promotion declared:

A commissioner of agriculture who could make a clover plant grow where jack pine brush now stands would be worth a thousand times more to our business than a forestry commissioner who would perpetuate the jack pine and furnish a breeding place for gnats, flies, and mosquitoes that annoy the stock of our subscribers.<sup>42</sup>

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41 Filibert Roth, Forestry Conditions and Interests of Wisconsin, United States Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry, Bulletin 16 (Washington, 1898), 24. For early forestry legislation see Wisconsin Session Laws, 1878, Chapter 324; 1897, Chapter 367.

42 Grantsburg Journal of Burnett County, January 23, August 7, September 18, 1903.

As forestry reserves increased in size the protests from promoters of settlement grew louder. They induced legislative committee hearings on forestry in 1909 and again in 1913. The pro-settlement forces were especially well organized by the latter date. In Oneida, Forest, Vilas, Iron and Price counties, where 168,000 acres had been reserved for forests, the protests were especially vehement following the announcement in 1911 of plans for further reservations. In 1912 the Oneida County Board attacked the state forestry policy for driving out settlers. These sentiments were echoed in nearly every issue of the Rhineland News. A. W. Brown, of the prominent Oneida County lumbering family, declared that reforesting additional parts of Vilas, Iron and Ashland counties would ruin the farms and industries of these counties and make them a "home for wild animals and a playground for the idle rich of the cities."<sup>43</sup> Oneida County Agricultural Agent E. L. Luther complained that the State Forestry Commission not only reserved the best agricultural lands but isolated settlers by surrounding them with reserved forest areas.<sup>44</sup> Even the forest fire fighting plans of State Forester Griffith came under attack. One assemblyman contended that forest fires brought settlers to the burned over

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<sup>43</sup> Rhineland News, March 22, May 16, 1912; Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin, May 24, 1912.

<sup>44</sup> Wisconsin Agriculturist, 36:22(May 30, 1912), 2.

areas and hence constituted a boon to the upper counties.<sup>45</sup>

One George Dawes of Tomahawk Lake declared that

It appears that the State Board of Forestry thinks a few idlers about these Lakes for two or three months in the summer is worth more than a settlement of farmers who would make permanent homes and remain with us throughout the year.<sup>46</sup>

In the fall of 1913 representatives of the five counties most affected by forestry reservations formed an association to oppose further state forestry work. They adopted resolutions urging "rational forestry" on lands unfit for agriculture, and planned a campaign to present their views to the people of the state.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile in 1913 the county boards of Vilas, Forest and Oneida counties had taken the lead in introducing legislation asking for a special investigation by a legislative committee as to the agricultural possibilities of those stump lands included in the reserves. The special legislative committee which toured the five northern counties in an effort to settle the question could only conclude that a new soil survey was necessary in order to determine whether forest or farms should occupy the land. They gave little satisfaction to the proponents of settlement. Although they suggested that reserved lands found suitable for farming

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45 Milwaukee Journal, February 16, 1911.

46 Wisconsin Agriculturist, 37:2(January 9, 1913), 13.

47 Rhineland News, November 28, 1913.

should be sold to actual settlers, they urged the retention of the bulk of the forest reserves and stated that much of the land they had seen was more properly devoted to forestry than to farming. They were severely critical of high land prices in northern Wisconsin. They suggested that the State Board of Forestry cooperate with the Division of Immigration to sell agricultural lands which might be included in any future forest land purchases, so that settlers could purchase lands at fair prices.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile in 1915 the State Supreme Court had held that no further state funds could be spent for forestry, on the grounds that such expenditures involved unconstitutional appropriations for internal improvements.<sup>49</sup> Thus the forestry versus farming argument subsided for a time.

But sentiment for forestry in the northern counties increased with the lengthening delinquent tax lists and the diminishing flow of settlers. There was little else to do with the land. Once authorities had solved the problems connected with taxing private forest reserves and assisting county governments through the difficult period when reserved

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<sup>48</sup> George E. O'Connor, Circular Letter of the County Boards of Vilas, Forest and Oneida Counties, March 11, 1913, in the pamphlet box marked Forestry in Wisconsin, Wisconsin State Legislative Reference Library; Wisconsin Session Laws, 1913, Chapter 670; Report of the Wisconsin Special Legislative Committee on Forestry...Made to the Members of the 1915 Session of the Wisconsin Legislature...., 40, 44-50, 53, 54.

<sup>49</sup> State ex Rel. Owen v. Donald, 160 Wisconsin Reports, 21.

lands would be non-productive, reforestation went ahead.

Another indication of the shift in official attitude toward settlement of the Cutover was the changes in the programs of the Tri-State Development Congress and its eventual discontinuance. These meetings between public officials and leaders in land settlement promotion in three states were called annually, from 1921 to 1924, by the governors of Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota. Delegates concerned themselves with the problem of developing the Great Lakes Cutover, but they shifted their emphasis from colonization and land clearing in the conference of 1921, to forestry in 1924. The meetings revealed an increasing uneasiness among leaders in the promotion of settlement. At the first meeting held at St. Paul, they took cognizance of the possibilities of forestry and the tourist trade in the Cutover, but they were mainly absorbed in solving the problems connected with establishing a successful agriculture in the stump lands.<sup>50</sup> Similarly in 1922 Dean Russell assured leaders who met at Milwaukee that they should not discontinue land clearing operations. Northern Wisconsin, he said, did not have enough cleared acres to support her livestock herds. Stump land farmers had to import their feeds. Thus they were not contributing to the agricultural surplus troubling the

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<sup>50</sup> Tri-State Development Congress, Report of the Proceedings of the First Convention, 5, 6.

nation, but were helping to absorb it instead. Further, the stump lands were closer to markets than a number of western reclamation areas; hence they possessed great advantages which would see them through the difficulties of the day.<sup>51</sup>

But in 1923 the leading speaker at the Tri-State Congress was P. S. Lovejoy, a well known critic of the settlement policies of the Lake States. His articles in the Country Gentleman had been a thorn in the side of a number of advocates of farming the cut-over lands. In his speech he continued to attack their hopes that the Cutover would one day be a farming region. He declared that the only solution for much of the land problems of the three states was reforestation. The amount of planning being done for the stump lands was totally inadequate:

A tenth of the money which will be spent this year in trying to sell cut-over land, invested in competent investigations, would get us basic facts upon which we might plan intelligently, and for lack of which we fuddle along and fuddle along, year after year, with more cut-over, burned-over, idle and unproductive

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<sup>51</sup> Third Tri-State Development Congress, Minutes and Papers, 96-98. The papers for the second meeting were printed with those for the third, in 1923.

land every time the sun goes down.<sup>52</sup>

In 1924 the last meeting of the Tri-State Congress was almost completely taken up with proposals for reforestation of the stump lands, a further indication of the abandonment of agriculture as the great hope for the Cut-over.<sup>53</sup>

Thus the official policy of the state of Wisconsin, which had for half a century been dedicated to bringing farmers to the northern part of the state, now turned to a new hope for the economic salvation of the cut-over lands. The shift to reforestation brought to an end the promotion of immigration by the state government. In addition, it had an important effect on the College of Agriculture, whose role in promoting settlement in the north is discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>52</sup> P. S. Lovejoy, "Farm and Forest Development in the Cutover," Ibid., 9-13. Lovejoy's critical articles on settlement promotion in the Cutover are found in "Cloverland-- Watch Its Smoke," Country Gentleman, 85:1 (March 27, 1920), 10, 11, 48, 49, 50, and a series entitled "The Promised Land," in Country Gentleman, 85:51 (December 18, 1920), 3, 4, 32; 85:52 (December 25, 1920), 10, 11, 34, 35; 86:1 (January 1, 1921), 4, 5, 30, 32; 86:2 (January 8, 1921), 6, 7, 34, 36; 86:3 (January 15, 1921), 5, 48, 49; 86:4 (January 22, 1921), 5, 28, 29; and 86:5 (January 29, 1921), 6, 26, 28. See also his "Is Uncle Sam Rich Enough to Give Us All a Farm?" Country Gentleman, 88:46 (November 17, 1923), 3, 4, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Fourth Tri-State Development Congress, Minutes and Papers, 19, 29, 32, 36, 40.

## IX

### THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND THE STUMP LANDS

"The live wire methods of our College of Agriculture the last few years," remarked a head of a colonization company in 1923, "have been the means of opening up thousands and thousands of acres in Northern Wisconsin that otherwise would have remained in an unproductive state."<sup>1</sup> He thus paid tribute to a state agency which had probably been more effective than any other, even the State Board of Immigration, in furthering the agricultural development of northern Wisconsin. Agricultural extension has generally been developed to deal with specific problems. In the cut-over lands of northern Wisconsin the staff of the College of Agriculture found problems in abundance. They had to find crops suitable for the soils and climate of the Cutover. They attacked the task of getting rid of the stumps and brush. College economists sought to find the ways and means of getting credit for the northern settler. They studied the delinquent tax problem in the northern counties and contributed studies on tax problems in sub-marginal areas. These and many other difficulties faced the staff of the College of Agriculture. Not the least of their problems was to find effective ways in which to demonstrate what they had learned. They developed

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1 A. J. Edminster, "Reclamation of Cut-Over Lands In Northern Wisconsin," Minutes and Papers of the Third Tri-State Development Congress, 81.

a number of novel devices for bringing their lessons to the settler in a practical and plain-spoken manner.

All these activities, it must be remembered, took place in a period of glowing optimism, as far as the future of agriculture on cut-over lands was concerned. Agricultural prices were high. The World War accelerated the demand for greater production, and the College lent a willing hand. Some scholars began to have their doubts about the possibilities of farming the stump lands, but they constituted a decided minority for most of the period between 1900 and 1925. Professors studied the yield of potatoes from the rich, newly cultivated soils. They were impressed by the lush growths of grasses, the abundant supply of water, the nearness of markets. They were not oblivious to the immense problems involved in converting the stump lands into farms, but their point of view was essentially optimistic. They confidently expected northern Wisconsin to bloom, once the brush and stumps were cleared away. Dean Russell personified this point of view, as the following pages will show. This chapter will begin with some comments on Russell's attitude toward and interests in the Cutover. Then it will deal with several of the major efforts at the College to bring about the successful agricultural settlement of the stump lands, namely, the work of the Branch Experiment stations, the County Agricultural Agents' contribution, and the attempts

to solve the land clearing problem. The development of the critical studies by the land economists will be discussed briefly in the closing pages as an indication of the changing viewpoint at the College.

H. L. Russell, like Henry before him, devoted much of his abundant energy to forwarding northern settlement, when he became Dean in 1907.<sup>2</sup> The elements in Russell's faith that the stump lands could be turned into good farms were much the same as Henry's. Settlers, he felt, had unwisely ignored northern Wisconsin lands. They had been lured by the plains, where they could escape the arduous toil of grubbing and clearing land. However, they had injudiciously chosen to gamble with poor soils and inadequate rainfall. Northern Wisconsin offered rich soil and plenty of rainfall to those who were willing to clear the land. Russell said that more than eight million acres of cu-over land could be converted to farms in northern Wisconsin. To him this task was the greatest single development problem in the state. All the resources of the state, he held, should be thrown into the battle to convert these lands into farms. He

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<sup>2</sup> In passing it is worthy of note that by 1907 Henry had occasional doubts about the agricultural future of the stump lands. See, for instance, his letter to Davison and Smith, October 17, 1907, in the College of Agriculture Files, on the fourth floor of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin. But see also his letter in the same collection to W. L. Martin, October 7, 1908, in which he expresses his customary optimism concerning the agricultural possibilities of the north.

brought the College of Agriculture into the fight wholeheartedly.<sup>3</sup>

Russell maintained that in northern Wisconsin individual settlers could not solve their problems alone; the state must take a hand. It was proper that the state should aid in developing northern Wisconsin because it was in the public interest to provide farm homes for those who demanded them. The "basic stability" of the country lay in its home owners.

You cannot start a revolution or a rebellion where the white cottage and green blinds are found nestling under the family roof tree. The most dependable element in the community is that which is anchored to the soil through home ownership.<sup>4</sup>

But this did not mean that the principles of free enterprise should be abandoned. Russell, as we have seen, was no advocate of state colonization. He urged that the state's role in colonization should be a coordinating and supervising one. The state should furnish those aids which it could supply more efficiently than private companies. It should furnish information to the settler about types of soil, because it could best undertake the necessary soil surveys. Similarly the College of Agriculture could experiment and discover the

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<sup>3</sup> H. L. Russell, The Cut-Over Section An Undeveloped Empire (1921), duplicated, in the College of Agriculture Files, pp. 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> H. L. Russell, "Should Reclamation of Idle Acres Now Be Curtailed?" Minutes and Papers of the Third Annual Tri-State Development Congress, 1923, 98.

best techniques in clearing land. Demonstration farms and experiment stations could discover the best crops for the stump lands. The state should also prevent dishonest practices among land sellers. It should act as a "clearing house" for information. But the actual business of selling the land and locating settlers should be done by private companies because they were more "progressive" than government agencies. Further, government supervision should be on a state or possibly a regional level, not federal. The federal government was too remote from the local problems connected with colonization to administer or supervise such projects. At best the federal government should furnish credit, and this should be administered by local bodies. Thus Russell opposed Secretary of the Interior Lane's soldier settlement plans as "too paternalistic" and destructive of individual initiative.<sup>5</sup>

Russell's faith in the future of the stump lands induced him to invest his own money in northern lands at least as early as 1905. He was a leading stockholder in two colonization companies, as a previous chapter has shown.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> H. L. Russell, "How Shall The State Control Colonization Activities?" Tri-State Development Congress, Report of Proceedings of the First Convention (1921), 21-30. H. L. Russell to E. E. Brown, January 25, 1919, College of Agriculture Files, Soldier Settlement. Ashland Press, February 24, 1919.

<sup>6</sup> His early investments are discussed in a letter to W. D. Hoard, March 29, 1915, College of Agriculture Files, Northern Wisconsin. For his colonization company investments, which amounted to at least \$40,000, see the statements of the Wisconsin Colonization Company and the Chippewa Valley Colonization Company, both dated June 25, 1921, in the Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers, manuscript collection, Wisconsin State Historical Society.

This was typical of many of the staff at the College, Dean Henry having also invested in northern lands. A number of the faculty were associated in the National Land Colonizing Company which was founded in 1920.<sup>7</sup>

Russell was slow to relinquish his belief that the stump lands would one day be settled with farmers. When depression struck in the early nineteen twenties he assured listeners again and again that northern Wisconsin was different from other areas of the nation, which were being troubled by agricultural surpluses. The grain and wheat regions could not be enlarged. The same was true of the irrigated areas and those being drained for farming. However, the Cutover was essentially unlike these sub-marginal areas. The cut-over lands were the most accessible to the high rent farm regions where tenants were anxious to obtain their own lands. The cut-over lands were fertile, well watered, and they could be developed at a low enough cost so as to be retained by individual settlers, rather than being occupied by tenants. Moreover, the stump lands were closer to markets than any other reclamation lands. This gave them an additional advantage during depression. But the main reason for urging

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<sup>7</sup> H. L. Russell to W. D. Hoard, March 29, 1915; Russell to Mrs. William Albresch, July 21, 1914; College of Agriculture Files, Northern Wisconsin; National Land Colonizing Company, How You Can Get a Wisconsin Farm, Bulletin I (Madison, n. d.), 2. In this publication nine members of the College of Agriculture faculty are listed as being connected with the company.

continued clearing and settlement in northern Wisconsin, Russell declared, was that the northern waste lands did not contribute to the surplus. Hence further settlement in the north would not affect the present depressed state of agriculture. In addition it would not be wise to limit planning because of conditions created by a temporary agricultural surplus, for the need for food in the future might be much greater.<sup>8</sup>

These were the optimistic views which directed and inspired the members of the staff in their efforts to make northern Wisconsin a land of farms. In their activities they sought to implement the theories held by Russell.

The University of Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station and its branches furnished some of the earliest and most effective means of aiding the development of agriculture in the north. The branch stations were established purely as testing grounds rather than as elaborate demonstration farms, their purpose being to discover crops and farming methods suited to the Cutover. In 1895 an attempt had been made to obtain a branch experiment station for the northern part of the state.<sup>9</sup> Ten years later the College established three temporary substations in the Cutover country. Dean

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<sup>8</sup> Russell, "Should Reclamation of Idle Acres Now Be Curtailed?" 96-98. See also Russell's memoranda on the Lane plan, in the College of Agriculture Files, Soldier Settlement.

<sup>9</sup> Assembly Journal, 1895, 379, 544.

Henry planned two stations at first, one for typical clay lands, and another for sandy pine lands. But as it developed, three sites were chosen at Superior, Ashland and Iron River. Henry planned to lease land for the stations for five years. From the first he assumed that the work of the stations would influence prospective settlers. The superintendent would, he suggested, live at Iron River, the headquarters of the North Wisconsin Farmers' Association, and would be something of a travelling agricultural advancement worker.<sup>10</sup> Henry approached the new project cautiously, urging those in charge of the new branch stations to maintain a "conservative bearing" toward the press and the public in general. There would be failures, he assured them, for it would take time to perfect the organization.<sup>11</sup> Before Henry's resignation in June, 1907, he had the satisfaction of seeing at least one successful experiment at one of the branch stations. At Iron River experiments with "Number 8" dent corn proved successful. This was the earliest of a number of varieties developed by the University which would mature in the northern Wisconsin climate. In the following two

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<sup>10</sup> W. A. Henry, Informal Preliminary Report on Branch Station in Northern Wisconsin, to President Van Hise, June 24, 1905; Report of the Proposed Establishment of Sub-Station in Northern Wisconsin, October 20, 1905; College of Agriculture Files, Branch Stations.

<sup>11</sup> W. A. Henry to Whitson, Sandsten and Moore, March 12, 1906, College of Agriculture Files, Branch Stations.

years the northern stations did similar work with wheat, barley, oats and peas. They managed to obtain greatly increased yields of some crops through the use of commercial fertilizers.<sup>12</sup>

By 1909 the branch stations had become an accepted part of the experiment work of the University. In that year the legislature appropriated \$2,000 for establishing two permanent branch stations in the north.<sup>13</sup> The University found funds for a third. In 1910 the first was located on sandy soils at Spooner. The next year a second was located at Ashland Junction in the clay soils, and a third was started at Marshfield in the center of the silt loam region. Dean Russell selected the station sites carefully. He was convinced that they afforded good publicity and would bring settlers to northern Wisconsin if they were located along railroad lines where they could easily be seen.

Experience has shown at Ashland that the results secured at the Experiment Station are more potent in inducing settlement than any other factor...wider publicity...would influence materially the settlement of these jack pine barrens.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fifth Annual Report of the Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Association (Madison, 1907), 96, 97; E. J. Delwiche to H. L. Russell, December 29, 1909, College of Agriculture Files, Spooner Station.

<sup>13</sup> Wisconsin Session Laws, 1909, Chapter 507.

<sup>14</sup> H. L. Russell to W. D. Hoard, November 27, 1909, College of Agriculture, Spooner Station. See also his letters to T. W. Andreson, September 22, 1911, and Mayor Robert Connor, October 24, 1911, Ibid., Branch Stations.

A Superior critic was not so sure of the value of the experiment stations in drawing settlers to northern Wisconsin. When Superior citizens talked of giving part of the city for a branch station, John A. Monger countered with the suggestion that the station ought to be stuck out on the county poor farm. All the station would produce, he charged, was "long and short talks from superintendents." There would be no attractive buildings or blooded stock on the station farm. It would merely be a place where the experts would "test things out." The only way to get settlers was to clear the land.<sup>15</sup> Monger was in the minority, however, Counties vied with each other to obtain the stations, and the legislature proved their popularity by removing them from the University budget in 1915 and appropriating \$22,000 yearly for their support.<sup>16</sup> The stations had by this time proved their worth, both in experimenting and in advertising. The Superintendent of the branch stations reported in 1915 that the stations had been instrumental in introducing two varieties of corn for the heavier soils in the north. Station workers had also introduced soy beans in several areas and had found peas to be a successful crop in the Cutover. They had persuaded farmers in several counties to grow clover seed. The Superintendent asserted further that the stations had served

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<sup>15</sup> Superior Telegram, January 2, 7, 1911.

<sup>16</sup> Wisconsin Session Laws, 1915, Chapter 577.

to demonstrate and publicize the agricultural possibilities of the stump lands. As proof he cited the fact that he had answered 4,000 inquiries from farmers and prospective settlers.<sup>17</sup>

As the result of further legislation, provisions were made to establish three demonstration farms in northern counties in 1911. The sites for these sub-stations, as they were sometimes called, were to be chosen by the members of the College subject to the approval of the Board of Regents. In addition the sub-stations were contingent upon a county board's furnishing a tract of land and appropriating at least \$500 annually to help meet expenses. The state would then contribute \$1,000 for each farm.<sup>18</sup> Land companies were quick to recognize the value of such a farm in their locality. The result was that the Board and members of the College who chose the sites were put under rather strong pressure from various interests when it came to locating the demonstration farms. The Skidmore Land Company and other land and lumber companies had put up a staunch campaign for a branch station

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17 E. J. Delwiche to H. L. Russell, May 4, 1915; Digest Presented to Finance Committee, May 26, 1915, In Re Branch Experiment Station Bill 534A; College of Agriculture Files, Spooner Station.

18 Wisconsin Session Laws, 1911, Chapter 624.

in 1909.<sup>19</sup> Failing in this attempt, they had apparently arranged to sponsor a demonstration farm in cooperation with the College of Agriculture by 1910, and this was made one of the permanent demonstration stations under the new law.<sup>20</sup> A second demonstration farm was located at Superior. A veritable storm developed over the location of the third at Conrath in Rusk County. Three groups within the county fought for the demonstration farm. The County Board of Supervisors suggested that it be placed on the county poor farm at Glen Flora. A second group sought to have it located next to the Ladysmith fairgrounds. This complicated matters since the Rusk County Agricultural Society had its fairgrounds at Bruce, and the members opposed the Ladysmith location because it seemed to give an advantage to a competing fair. The victorious contender was Benjamin Faast of the Faast Land Company, who donated a tract for the farm at Conrath. Faast staged a vigorous campaign to get the demonstration farm. He had the support of some land owners in the county, such as the John S. Owen Lumber Company. On the

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<sup>19</sup> See the copies of the letters from Ralph Skidmore to Isaac Stephenson, June 8, 1909 and from Stephenson to W. D. Hoard, June 12, 1909; and the letter from H. P. Bird to H. L. Russell, May 4, 1909, including a petition from land and lumbermen in Marinette County; College of Agriculture Files, Spooner Station.

<sup>20</sup> See the copy of the Contract Between the Regents of the University of Wisconsin...and the Skidmore Land Company... In the Matter of a Sub-Station Demonstration Farm, April, 1910, College of Agriculture Files, Branch Stations.

other hand, the Ellingson Land and Lumber Company favored the Glen Flora location. The University soils specialists who looked over the sites were about equally divided between Ladysmith and Conrath. Faast received favorable consideration because he had worked with College authorities in conducting crop experiments on his lands. Howls of rage arose when the Board of Regents announced that Conrath had been chosen as the site for the farm. There were charges that the choice had been made to benefit land speculators. Some claimed that Dean Russell and other professors at the Agricultural College were financially interested in Faast's company, and had favored the Conrath location for this reason. The Board of Regents reopened the matter. But Faast had several strong defenders on the Board itself, among them G. D. Jones of Wausau, who was also in the land business. The Board decided to keep the farm at Conrath, but the regents were not entirely united in the decision. Thus the president of the Board stated in March, 1913, that he considered Ladysmith to have been the logical site for the farm, and that Conrath

was chosen as the result of "special advocacy."<sup>21</sup> The work of the branch experiment stations and the demonstration farms went forward, unimpeded for long by the charges and recriminations of disappointed contenders.

The publication of a number of immigration type bulletins by the Experiment Station was further evidence that the northern extension work was aimed at potential settlers, not just those already on the land.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the Experiment Station and its branches acted as coordinators for a number of extension activities aimed at furthering agricultural settlement in the northern counties. By far the

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<sup>21</sup> The contest is briefly summarized in the Eau Claire Leader, December 28, 1912. See also the Bruce News Letter, December 26, 1912; January 2, 1913. For the advocacy of Faast and his friends, see Ben. F. Faast to G. D. Jones, May 31, 1912; Faast to H. L. Russell, July 8, 13, November 9, 1912; John S. Owen to H. L. Russell, October 4, 1912; G. D. Jones to H. L. Russell, December 4, 1912. For criticisms and charges concerning the choice of Conrath see, copy, C. K. Ellingson to G. D. Jones, November 29, 1912; C. D. Swaim to Dr. Edward Evans, December 16, 1912; telegram, D. H. Richards to Dean Russell, December 16, 1912; A. C. Thompson to H. L. Russell, December 17, 1912. President of the Board of Regents James F. Trottman comments on the incident in a letter to Dr. H. C. Bumpus, March 1, 1913. All the above letters are in the College of Agriculture Files, Rusk County Demonstration Station.

<sup>22</sup> E. J. Delwiche, Opportunities For Profitable Farming in Northern Wisconsin, Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin (Bulletin 196, July, 1910); First Aid To The Settler (Bulletin 260, October, 1915); B. G. Packer and E. J. Delwiche, Farm Making in Upper Wisconsin, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin (Bulletin 290, March, 1918). Russell changed the title of the first bulletin to make it appealing to potential settlers.

greater part of the special activities sponsored by the Agricultural Experiment Station were in northern Wisconsin. Many of these activities were jointly sponsored by other promotional groups. Thus Wisconsin bankers joined the Experiment Stations in sending a "Seed Train" into northern counties. Other groups backed educational trains for northern settlers. Bankers teamed up with farmers in a "Farmer-Banker Excursion" to the College of Agriculture in 1916. They spent two days on the campus, getting acquainted with various services offered by the College.<sup>23</sup> Meetings at the various stations in the north proved popular among farmers. Sometimes the attendance far exceeded the expectations of officials. In 1918, for instance, the director of the Marshfield Branch Station expected thirty or forty farmers to respond to an invitation to visit the station and had to arrange hurriedly for more than 200.<sup>24</sup>

The office of county agricultural agent was also created in an attempt to advance northern Wisconsin agriculture. This new form of extension work, begun as an experiment in 1912, was limited mainly to northern Wisconsin for a

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<sup>23</sup> H. L. Russell, The Year's Progress of the Experiment Station; Report of the Director, Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin (Bulletin 250, April, 1915), 92, 95; The Work of the Experiment Station and Agricultural Extension Service For 1916, (Bulletin 275, January, 1917), 82.

<sup>24</sup> F. L. Musbach to E. J. Delwiche, July 22, 1918, College of Agriculture Files, Branch Stations.

number of years. The first Agricultural Representative, as he was called, was employed jointly by the University and Oneida County in 1912. The idea of employing an agricultural expert as an extension agent was not new at this time, although this was the first official experiment in such a direction in Wisconsin. As early as 1905 a University graduate had been employed in Athens, Wisconsin, to establish a milk testing service and give lectures to local farmers.<sup>25</sup> In Oneida County the Agricultural Representative, E. L. Luther, was employed to teach a farmers' course in the county training school and to engage in some demonstration work for county farmers. By 1913 three northern counties had installed such agents. The state legislature passed the Potts Bill during that year, authorizing ten counties to employ agricultural representatives in 1914. Another six were added in 1915. County Boards appropriated from \$1,000 to \$1,300 a year for the agents, who were appointed by the Board of Regents of the University. The state furnished an additional \$1,000 for the work, once the appointment had

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<sup>25</sup> D. O. Thompson and Wilbur Glover, "A Pioneer Adventure in Agricultural Extension," Agricultural History, 22:2 (April, 1946), 124-128; Arlan C. Helgeson, Athens, Wisconsin: The Economic Development of a Northern Village, Master's Thesis, 1948, on microcard in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, 54-58.

been made.<sup>26</sup> Dean Russell conceived of the representatives as "agricultural middlemen who represent the Agricultural College." As such their work consisted mainly of bringing the technical knowledge furnished by the College to the practical problems which they encountered among the farms in the stump lands. Thus they encouraged the use of better potato seed and sought to aid farmers in improving their dairy herds through better breeding and through the removal of tubercular cattle. They instructed farmers in silo building or in the use of lime and fertilizer. The work of individual agents varied according to local problems. John Swenehart devoted his time in Forest County mainly to instructing farmers in the use of dynamite and in making large purchases of the explosive to reduce its cost. In Barron County, R. L. Cuff attempted to organize a potato growers' association and improve the seed used by local growers. A. H. Cole in Lincoln County did everything from experimenting with sugar beets to organizing cheese factories and giving physical examinations for the draft during the World War. He also worked with the Tomahawk Land Company, for whom he

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<sup>26</sup> Rhineland News, March 22, 1912; Proceedings of the County Board of Supervisors of Oneida County...1912-1913, 38, 39; Proceedings...1913-1914, 41, 42; H. L. Russell, Report of the Director, Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin (Bulletin 240, June, 1914), 76. Wisconsin Session Laws, 1913, Chapter 611.

produced a number of bulletins and acted as a consultant.<sup>27</sup>

Thus the county agricultural agent also developed as an aid to northern Wisconsin agriculture. The number of northern counties which adopted the county agent plan indicated its helpfulness to the north. While twelve northern counties had agricultural representatives in 1915, Walworth County was the only southern one employing a representative at that time. By January, 1917, six more northern counties had made provisions for hiring agents.<sup>28</sup> The movement was very clearly an effort to stimulate the growth of agriculture in the stump lands. Not until a later day did the "agricultural middlemen" represent the College of Agriculture in other Wisconsin counties.

Of all the activities of the College which were designed to bring about the rapid transition from stump lands to farms, none were so dramatic and spectacular as the efforts

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27 H. L. Russell, The Year's Progress of the Experiment Station (1915), 83-87; reports of the agents can be found in Board Proceedings; Forest County, November 13, 1917, 1-3; Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of Barron County Wisconsin, 1912, 51; 1913, 34-40; 1915, 27-30; Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, Lincoln County, Wisconsin, 1918-1919, 31, 32. See Cole's description of his work with the Tomahawk Land Company in his letter to A. W. Hopkins, June 25, 1919, and a number of bulletins which he prepared in Tomahawk Land Settlement, College of Agriculture Files.

28 E. J. Delwiche, First Aid to the Settler, 41; H. L. Russell, The Work of the Experiment Station and Agricultural Extension Service For 1916, Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin, Bulletin 275, (January, 1917), 84.

to get rid of the stumps. The College staff could well tackle the stumps with determination. Many, including Dean Russell, considered them the greatest obstacle to settlement in the north.<sup>29</sup> Settlers had to wait for the slow process of rotting to make the hardwood stumps removable, or go through the laborious process of grubbing and burning them out. Time was not even of much avail when it came to the cut-over pinelands. Pine stumps did not rot. They had to be burned or pulled out. Their tough roots fanned out for yards in all directions, clinging tenaciously to the soil and tearing it out in large chunks when the stumps were pulled. Here was a problem to challenge the ingenuity of the people seriously concerned with settling the Cutover.

In 1908 there was much talk of a new method of injecting acid into stumps, causing an accelerated decay to take place. Dean Russell denounced the story for what it was, a newspaper fake. Still it kept bobbing up, along with more pressing questions as to what should be done with the stumps.<sup>30</sup> Huge stump pulling machines came into vogue among those who could afford them. In 1910 a steam driven puller was tested in Rusk County. According to reports the machine,

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29 Ibid., 54.

30 G. F. Grassie to Dean of College of Agriculture, December 3, 1908; Russell to Grassie, December 5, 1908; George Paddock to Department of Agriculture, January 10, 1909; E. Worthing to Department of Agriculture, November 29, 1909; College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1916-1917.

which pulled stumps by means of a heavy steel cable wound around a drum, could clear one or two acres a day. The Wisconsin Farmer envisaged the day when

...the northern portions of our state will be traversed with steam stump pulling machines which will travel from farm to farm and clear land at a certain rate per acre with the same frequency that the thrashing [sic] machine moves about in settled farming communities.<sup>31</sup>

Pullers of this type were used with some success, but they had their obvious difficulties. Weight and lack of maneuverability were among their faults.<sup>32</sup> Simpler devices were developed, more within the financial reach of the average northern settler. Some employed horse power to turn winches of one sort or another. Some machines could be operated by man power. The first task of the College of Agriculture in the land clearing field was to test such contrivances and to experiment with the use of dynamite in stump removal. In 1911 the College was authorized to purchase two stump pullers for experimental work. The University Experiment Station also joined in cooperative experiments on the use of explosives with the United States Department of Agriculture and the Minnesota Experiment Station. J. F. Kadonsky, principal of the Marathon County School of Agriculture and

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<sup>31</sup> Wisconsin Farmer, 39:33(August 18, 1910), 1, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Beaudoin tells of an experimental puller built by the Hines Lumber Company in a tape recorded interview with Wilbur Glover at Park Falls, November 29, 1950, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

Domestic Economy did the experimental work and wrote the first bulletin on The Use of Explosives in Clearing Land (1911).<sup>33</sup>

It was not until 1915, however, that the College employed Carl Livingston to head a new land clearing branch in the Department of Agricultural Engineering. Livingston began at once to gather land clearing appliances from all over the country, among them a stump piler from Georgia. But his big interest was in dynamite. He wrote to the Du Ponts and obtained the services of Alfred Mathewson, who had been using dynamite to blast stumps in Virginia. Between them Livingston and Mathewson worked out the plans for a new educational program. They adopted a method by then familiar to the stump lands, a demonstration train. In May, 1916, the first "Land Claring Special" made its run in the Cutover. It was eight cars in all. The Du Ponts furnished Mathewson and the dynamite, while several manufacturers furnished stump pullers and pilers, and the men to demonstrate their use. The railroads provided the transportation. Livingston and other members of the College supervised the venture. The Journalism Department of the College took care of the advertising. The train travelled for two weeks and made eighteen demonstrations.

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<sup>33</sup> Wisconsin Session Laws, 1911, Chapter 478; H. L. Russell to L. Rowells, January 25, 1911; Frank Kadonsky, The Use of Explosives in Clearing Land, University of Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 216 (Madison, 1911).

Like a circus train it moved to each new location during the night. At each stop local farmers met the train early in the morning with teams and wagons. They hauled the equipment to the demonstration plots and the demonstration crews dynamited and pulled stumps all day, each company representative working in a separate patch. Settlers came in droves to see the work. More than 8,000 attended, some of them walking twenty-five miles to see the demonstration. From the standpoint of publicity the Land Clearing Special was a huge success. The College of Agriculture received inquiries from all over the country concerning the work. Films of the demonstrations were shown in Arizona.<sup>34</sup>

A second Land Clearing Special toured the stump lands in the fall of 1916. This time it gave rise to a series of meetings at which farmers were urged to start land clearing associations wherein they could pool their orders for machinery and dynamite and thus make possible a substantial

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34 Marion C. Calkins, "The Cutover Country," Survey, 45:9 (November 27, 1920), 302-303; Carl D. Livingston, "Stumps and Their Practical Removal," Cut-Over Land Conference of the South, The Dawn of a New Constructive Era (New Orleans, 1917), 188-195. Part One: A Report of the First Land Clearing Special Conducted by the Wisconsin College of Agriculture...May and June, 1916, duplicated, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1916-1917.

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Dean Russell now initiated a campaign to get an appropriation from the legislature for the stump pulling experiments and demonstrations. This began with a public conference on land clearing sponsored by the College and held at Eau Claire in February, 1917.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, he consulted land owners and members of his staff as to the proper man to sponsor a bill in the legislature. Senator A. H. Wilkinson, of Bayfield, was suggested to lead the movement, and Russell approached him concerning the task. In May Wilkinson presented to the State Senate a bill appropriating \$37,250 for land clearing and demonstration work by the College of Agriculture. The Assembly killed the bill two times, but they were fighting expert lobbyists in Dean Russell and his friends. Russell kept a careful check of the voting on the measure and brought as much pressure as he could muster on those who voted against it. He wrote to the local Councils of Defense and urged them to support the bill as a means of helping to increase food production. County agricultural representatives and land owners joined him in publicizing the measure. W. H. Webb, the Superior promoter,

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35 Part Two; A Report of the Second Land Clearing Special Conducted by the Wisconsin College of Agriculture... September and October, 1916, 7, 8, duplicated, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1916-1917.

36 Cut-Over Land Conference, Land Clearing in Upper Wisconsin (Eau Claire, 1917).

spent an entire Sunday searching for his local assemblyman and finally had a friend drive to a remote farm home to ferret out the legislator.<sup>37</sup>

The land clearing bill aroused much antagonism. One assemblyman charged that the University professors were in no position to tell Wisconsin farmers how to pull stumps economically. He claimed that every stump pulled by the University demonstrators would cost the state \$422. Assemblyman V. Miller of Rusk County implied that the bill was part of a scheme to aid large land holders and declared that both Russell and President Van Hise were financially interested in northern Wisconsin lands.<sup>38</sup> But their efforts were of no avail. The Wilkinson bill became law, and the stump pulling demonstrations continued.<sup>39</sup>

Through 1917, 1918 and 1919 the Land Clearing Specials toured the northern counties. Livingston died in 1917 from

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37 For letters concerning Wilkinson and the fight for the appropriations see, G. D. Jones to H. L. Russell, December 22, 1916; E. J. Delwiche to H. L. Russell, December 27, 1916; H. L. Russell to A. H. Wilkinson, December 28, 1916. See also the map on which Russell recorded legislators who voted for and against the bill, and his letters to Joseph Frank, June 17, 1917; to W. D. Juday, March 13, 1917, March 24, 1917; and to many others. Webb tells of his work in a letter to Russell, June 21, 1917. All the above are in the College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1916-1917.

38 Madison Democrat, May 24, 1917; F. A. Cannon to F. M. White, June 16, 1917, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1916-1917.

39 Wisconsin Session Laws, 1917, Chapter 658.

typhoid fever, contracted when he attended a land clearing conference in New Orleans. By this time the College had a number of men trained in handling explosives and clearing machinery. A number of land clearing associations were organized in northern counties. These groups were able to combine orders for dynamite or machinery and thus cut costs of clearing for individual settlers. Bankers joined the movement by making credit available for huge purchases. Men from the College went out to give a number of courses on land clearing in northern counties. After 1919, when the demonstration trains were discontinued, land clearing schools were held regularly in the north. Farmers attended two day sessions at these schools, receiving much the same instruction as they had from the Land Clearing Specials.<sup>40</sup>

Land clearing work at the College of Agriculture took a new turn in the spring of 1919, when it was suggested that war surplus explosives might be utilized for land clearing. This twentieth century version of the swords into plowshares story did not strike College experts favorably at first. In the beginning John Swenehart, in charge of demonstration work

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<sup>40</sup> Calkins, "Cutover Country," 303, 304. Plans for Clearing and Stumping Work for 1918, typewritten, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1920. Special permission was received from the Railroad Administration to run the demonstration train in 1918 and 1919. H. L. Russell to Edward Chambers, June 22, 1918; Russell to U. S. Railroad Administration, March 29, April 16, 1919; College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1920.

with explosives, accepted the word of Du Pont Company officials and announced that trinitrotoluene, commonly called TNT, was no good for stump removal. According to the Du Ponts, the explosive was extremely dangerous to handle, its dust and fumes could cause injuries, and its explosions had a shattering effect undesirable for stump removal.<sup>41</sup> But there was strong pressure in northern counties for a cheaper explosive than dynamite, which had become more expensive during the War. A legislative resolution called upon the governor to appoint a committee to work with federal authorities in obtaining explosives for land clearing. Moreover, an official in the Bureau of Mines stated that, contrary to the Du Pont claims, TNT was usable for stumps.<sup>42</sup>

In April Governor Phillip sent Dean Russell to Washington to sound out the possibilities of procuring surplus explosives. Russell apparently had in mind getting the ingredients from which dynamite could be made. He learned, however, that the Du Pont Company's rejection of TNT for land clearing work was based mainly on the fact that it was less profitable to manufacture than dynamite, since there

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41 See Swenehart's comments in the Eau Claire Telegram, February 20, 1919, and the letter to Swenehart from A. Mathewson of the Du Pont Company, March 10, 1919, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1919.

42 Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1919, 28-, 360; copy, Van H. Manning to Irvine L. Lenroot, January 16, 1919, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1919.

were no by products. He also discovered that a large supply of TNT had been turned over to the Department of the Interior, and he and Congressman A. P. Nelson began a campaign to obtain a large quantity of the explosive. Meanwhile Swenehart obtained 200 pounds of TNT from the Du Ponts and began making tests in the middle of a corn field on the University farm. Next he took it into several northern counties for tests. He found that TNT was suitable for stumps.<sup>43</sup>

Congressman Nelson managed to obtain 200,000 pounds of TNT from the Bureau of Mines. The problem now was what to do with it. It had to be packaged in cartridges before it could be used. Government officials claimed that this could be done for one or two cents a pound. The Du Pont Company wanted five cents a pound for cartridging the explosive. Swenehart was willing to attempt the work and Dean Russell winked at the extra-legal implications. And so the College of Agriculture went into the business of manufacturing explosives in a tar paper shack near Bayfield. Swenehart had thirty-five men at the plant pouring the powder into newspaper cartridges which were formed in wooden molds, then dipped in paraffin. The workers wore rubber suits and were

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<sup>43</sup> H. L. Russell to G. D. Jones, April 5, 1919; see also Russell's notes made in Washington, undated; College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1919. John Swenehart, "Land Clearance and War Surplus Explosives," tape recorded, in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Hereafter cited as the Swenehart Recording.

carefully watched to see that no ill effects resulted from handling the powder. Cartridging the explosive proved to be a successful venture. Swenehart produced a cartridge equal in power to the usual stick of dynamite. It cost the settler slightly over eight cents a pound, a saving of about fifteen cents per pound.<sup>44</sup>

But Swenehart could not sell his TNT without demonstrating its safety to stump land settlers. The explosive had a bad reputation, created mostly by exaggerated war-time stories of its effects.<sup>45</sup> Travelling north with his first samples of the explosive, he had picked up a settler who was headed for a point some miles ahead. When the hitchhiker discovered that he was riding with a load of TNT he got out at the first cross road.<sup>46</sup> At the first demonstrations Swenehart could not persuade the settlers to come near him. But he knew how to dramatize the product, and he knew that it was safe. In fact, TNT was safer than dynamite. Swenehart placed it in the "bore hole" of a stump and tamped it in so loudly that onlookers could hear the impact of the wooden

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44 A. P. Nelson to H. L. Russell, August 4, 1919; Major M. J. Connally to A. P. Nelson, July 30, 1919; Distribution of T.N.T. by the College of Agriculture, typewritten, 1919; College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1919. Swenehart Recording.

45 According to Swenehart a Madison minister told his congregation that a pinch of TNT would blow up a city block; Swenehart Recording.

46 Swenehart Recording.

stick ramming the charge in place. This could not be done with dynamite without causing an explosion. Sometimes the demonstration crews set off a charge near a stick of TNT, or fired rifle bullets into it, to prove that it would not explode from impacts, as dynamite did.

By the fall of 1919 they had won their case. Testimonials, questions, and orders for TNT began pouring in to the College of Agriculture. Movies had been made of the demonstrations and these were widely circulated throughout the country. They played an important part in winning the support of congressmen in the efforts to obtain more TNT. Probably even more important were the orders for four million pounds of TNT from northern Wisconsin farmers. Russell, Senator Wilkinson and Swenehart went to Washington armed with reports and requests from farmers for TNT.<sup>47</sup>

The College was successful in obtaining TNT for stump removal. During 1919 and 1920 they purchased two million pounds and distributed it among Wisconsin farmers. Next, Swenehart turned to picric acid, where again he had to experiment and prove that the explosive was safe to manufacture and use. He experimented in turn with sodium nitrate, mixing it

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<sup>47</sup> Swenehart Recording; TNT Letters from County Agents, bound; TNT Letters from Farmers and Others; Report of Users; Report of Demand; bound reports and questionnaires giving estimates of TNT needed in their counties by county agents; all in the College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1919. See also Superior Telegram, October 7, 1919, and Rusk County Journal, October 24, 1919.

with TNT to produce an explosive called sodatol. Next came smokeless powder, which had to be ground under water to produce a powder that could be detonated. This was mixed with nitroglycerin and sodium nitrate to produce "pyrotol." While the University took the lead in developing these new explosives, they discontinued manufacturing them after 1920. They now contracted with private manufacturers to do the work, but continued to act as distributors of the explosives. From 1919 to 1928 a total of nearly 19,000 pounds of explosives were distributed among Wisconsin farmers for land clearing purposes. This was almost double the amount of war surplus explosives used in any other state in the union. Wisconsin farmers paid the College of Agriculture more than a million dollars for preparing and distributing the various explosives. Swenehart estimated that the College of Agriculture saved them three and one-half million dollars, considering what a similar amount of dynamite would have cost them. Land clearing activity increased accordingly. From 1910 to 1920 Wisconsin farmers had cleared an average of 50,000 acres yearly. In 1920 they cleared nearly 90,000 acres. By 1921 the rate of clearing had moved from one acre yearly per farm to nearly two and one-half acres a year. From the beginning of the work with surplus explosives until 1928 Swenehart estimated that 500,000 acres had been entirely cleared and that parts of an additional million acres

had been cleared.<sup>48</sup>

The land clearing program of the College became less popular during the 1920's than it had been when wartime prices and demands for food production had made the program more acceptable. Even in its earlier years the land clearing work had earned some enemies. H. A. Johnson of Superior attacked the College for handling surplus explosives in 1919. He contended that a group in Superior had developed an explosive which included TNT, and that Swenehart and the College authorities had ignored them and gone ahead with plans to cartridge TNT. Apparently he and others in Superior went so far as to wire congressmen in an attempt to stop Russell and

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48 Swenehart Recording; John Swenehart, Ten Years of War Explosives on Wisconsin Farms, 1919-1928; War Explosive Distribution, Leading States; typewritten reports in the College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1919. Distribution of Picric Acid, typewritten, 1921; Report of Investigations of War-Salvage Picric Acid For Use in Agricultural Blasting Work by John Swenehart...Cooperating with Edmund Stein, Bureau of Mines...and G. P. Boyd, Bureau of Public Roads....(n.d., n.p.), duplicated; Memorandum of Agreement (Tentative) Between the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads and the University of Wisconsin Relative to the Distribution of Picric Acid for Use in Land Clearing...., 1921, typewritten; all in the College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1919. John Swenehart and others, Benefits of Sodatol Distribution, Wisconsin 1923-1924, typewritten, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1920. John Swenehart, "Land Clearing Explosives," Tri-State Development Congress, Report of Proceedings of the First Convention, 36.

Swenehart from obtaining TNT, but to no avail.<sup>49</sup>

Sentiment against the College and its clearing program reached new heights in 1923, when a bill was introduced in the state legislature to stop the land clearing work at the College. In part the measure was inspired by a desire to economize and to avoid further production in a period of agricultural surplus. It was also a phase of the more general hostility toward the University among certain legislators. Thus Senator Cashman, who had attempted to legislate pure history into the classrooms of the University and the state, also tried to weaken the land clearing work at the Agricultural College by an amendment stopping experimental work on surplus explosives. William A. Titus reported that there was a large number of assemblymen and senators who

have such a supreme affection for themselves that they do not hesitate to say that they know more about farming than the faculty of the College knows, and some of them say that they have arrived at the point where they cannot learn anything more. With

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<sup>49</sup> Superior Telegram, July 11, 1919; H. L. Russell to A. P. Nelson, July 23, 1919. Apparently the Douglas County Board of Supervisors had toyed with the idea of establishing an explosives plant to utilize TNT, but they decided to cooperate with the College, see the above Telegram article and Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of Douglas County, Wisconsin, For the Year 1919-1920, 8.

this latter idea, I fully concur.<sup>50</sup>

But it was not easy for Russell and his colleagues to meet the charges that the College had not considered the problem of over-production. As one critic put it,

What good does it do to show a farmer how he can raise a thousand bushels of potatoes on a small tract if he loses money on every bushel?<sup>51</sup>

The attacks on the Land Clearing program were the beginning of the end of the College's efforts to develop more agricultural lands in the north. Russell and some of his colleagues believed that the land clearing program should continue.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, by 1926 the Land Clearing Branch was ready to capitulate. Swenehart and his colleagues admitted that further clearing work should be discouraged until population needs seemed to justify putting more land into agricultural production. Now settlement was proceeding very slowly and some districts were losing their settlers. They agreed that it would not be wise to devote further time and money to land clearing.

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<sup>50</sup> W. A. Titus to H. L. Russell, March 31, 1923; Bill 222A, Repealing Land Clearing, typewritten notes on a legislative hearing, March 23, 1923; College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1920. The bill to stop appropriations for demonstration work is found in Wisconsin Assembly Bills, 1923, 222A. Cashman's amendment is attached. The bill was defeated in the Senate, see Wisconsin Assembly Journal, 1923, 222, 1846. Cashman's "pure history" law is found in Wisconsin Session Laws, 1923, Chapter 21.

<sup>51</sup> Madison Capital Times, March 22, 1923.

<sup>52</sup> College of Agriculture, A Plan For 1922 in the Cut-Over Counties, Special Bulletin (April, 1922).

This means that any promotion or continued effort along lines similar to the past would not be a wise use of funds and new ideas and new problems must be attacked.<sup>53</sup>

It was essentially in another part of the College of Agriculture that "new ideas and new problems" concerning the Cutover were attacked most significantly. The Department of Agricultural Economics had grown up along with the movement to promote settlement in northern Wisconsin. Henry C. Taylor, who had transferred to the College of Agriculture from the University's Department of Political Economy in 1909, had turned a critical eye on the efforts to promote the Cutover for farming. Consequently, as early as 1913 he had urged Dean Russell to institute a system of cost accounting on the College's demonstration farms. Since reports from the demonstration farms often concluded that some form of agricultural activity was profitable, he said, let them have their basis in carefully kept cost accounts.<sup>54</sup> Taylor, Richard T. Ely, under whom he had worked in the Department of Political Economy, Benjamin Hibbard and others made a number of studies before 1920 which showed them to be somewhat in sympathy with the movement to settle northern counties. Nevertheless, as economists, they were aware of the economic

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<sup>53</sup> Land Clearing Situation, October 1, 1926, 5, College of Agriculture Files, Land Clearing, 1920.

<sup>54</sup> H. C. Taylor to H. L. Russell, March 10, 1913, College of Agriculture Files, Rusk County Demonstration Station.

problems which the movement posed.<sup>55</sup> By the mid-twenties these men were indicating the "new ideas" for the stump lands. Ely had become an enthusiast for land classification, a movement in which Wisconsin and the cut-over counties were to take the lead within the decade. In 1926 the Agricultural Economics Department worked with Swenehart and the Land Clearing Branch in a study of the "grub stake" method of settlement touted by some colonization companies. They learned that there was little difference between settlers brought to the land under such plans and those who settled independently. Hibbard, George S. Wehrwein and others studied tax delinquency in the northern counties and laid the scholarly groundwork for the zoning and reforestation work which would soon replace the promotion of northern Wisconsin lands for settlement.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See Benjamin H. Hibbard, "The Utilization of Land Not in Farms," American Economic Review, 8:Supplement (March, 1918), 55-64; Richard T. Ely, "Private Colonization of the Land," Ibid., 8:3(September, 1918), 522-548; Henry C. Taylor, "Farm Credit in Wisconsin," Hoard's Dairyman, 57:18 (May 23, 1919), 906-908; Ely, Hibbard and Cox, Credit Needs of Settlers in Upper Wisconsin, Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin, Bulletin 318 (1920).

<sup>56</sup> Land Clearing Situation, 5; P. S. Lovejoy, "Theory and Practice in Land Classification," Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics, 1:2 (April, 1925), 164; Benjamin H. Hibbard, John Swenehart and others, Tax Delinquency in Northern Wisconsin, Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin, Bulletin 399 (June, 1928).

Thus by the mid-twenties another of the state agencies formerly so prominent in promoting the settlement of northern Wisconsin had altered the direction of its activities. It should perhaps be noted that the College staff, its scholars, extension services and county agents, all adapted themselves in a short time to the new work in the Cutover. Their enthusiasm for the new approach to the problems of the Cutover equalled the zeal with which they had formerly sought to convert the stump lands into farms.

## THE PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT TO 1920: CONCLUSIONS

Promoters of stump land settlement had little cause for contentment if they surveyed the results of their work, in 1920. True, viewed strictly within the limits of the Cutover, the progress in settlement and farm making in the past two decades may have seemed impressive. More than 20,000 farms had been made in twenty-four northern counties. They represented over two million acres of land. Nearly a million acres of land had been cleared of stumps and brush and put into cultivation since 1900. Approximately 600,000 acres had been cleared after 1910.<sup>1</sup> But the total amount of land in farms in most northern counties remained low when contrasted to the total amount of land still in stumps and brush.<sup>2</sup> And the great progress in farm making had been confined, as before 1900, to the southern fringe of cut-over counties. There, at least a partially successful transition to agriculture could be said to have taken place. In Shawano, Marathon, Clark, Chippewa, Barron and Polk counties over sixty per cent of the land had been converted to farms by 1920. Significantly, even in these counties less than thirty per cent of the land was actually under cultivation. In

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1 Figures have been totalled from the Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Census Reports.

2 See the maps in Appendix A.

sharp contrast, not more than seven per cent of the land in farms in the bulk of the northern counties was classified as improved or cultivated land.<sup>3</sup>

The variation in settlement is shown by figures of the United States Census on population, number of farms and improved land in farms in several northern counties over the period of thirty years when promotion for land settlement was most intense. A successful agricultural settlement had occurred in Marathon County. In 1890 there had been 30,369 people in the county and 2,789 farms, containing 83,863 acres of improved land. By 1920 the population of the county had more than doubled, while the number of farms had risen to 6,058 and 242,357 acres had been cleared for cultivation. In contrast the settlement in Ashland County had proceeded at a slow pace. There the population was listed as 20,063 in 1890 and it increased by less than 500 people in the next thirty years. In the same pattern, there were 188 farms at the earlier date, and 3,684 acres had been improved, whereas in 1920, there were only 1,131 farms and 36,253 improved acres in the county.

Marinette County, located in the northeastern part of the state, had a population of 20,304 in 1890. There were 614 farms in the county, with a total of 22,591 improved acres. The population rose by 10,000 in the first decade after 1890,

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<sup>3</sup> See the map and chart in Appendix B.

then increased slowly to 34,361 by 1920. There were then 2,531 farms in the county, with a total of 107,444 improved acres. In all three counties there was an urban population of considerable proportion, but, after 1910, the rural population in each county kept pace with or increased at a heavier rate than the urban.<sup>4</sup> The patterns of settlement and land improvement appeared to be fairly well fixed by 1920 in all three counties. During the next ten years Marathon County continued to gain in population while Ashland and Marinette counties lost. Marathon County also made significant gains in land in farms while the gain in Ashland County was slight and Marinette County had less acreage in farms in 1930 than in 1920.

But to dwell long upon the statistics of settlement and farm making in the Cutover would be to obscure the fact that the movement of people to the stump lands during the three decades when promotional activity was most intense was very small indeed. Between 1890 and 1920 the population of the twenty-four cut-over counties increased by slightly over 300,000 people. In the same period Milwaukee gained 252,679 in population. The total population of Milwaukee, La Crosse, Racine and Madison increased by 320,541 in the same period. Much of the population gain in the northern

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<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau, Statistical Atlas of the United States (Washington, 1925), 88.

counties, it must be remembered, was also in cities rather than on the land. Moreover, as Benjamin Hibbard and others pointed out in 1928, hardly a dent had been made in the vast acreage of wasteland in the seventeen northernmost counties. Eighty-two per cent of their eleven million acres remained in stumps and brush. In 1927 nearly one-fourth of the entire area in these seventeen counties was sold for tax delinquency.<sup>5</sup> From this standpoint the promotional efforts both great and small of land owners, newspapers and voluntary associations, county and state agencies, had been of little avail. The bulk of the cut-over lands retained their stumps and brush.

The reasons for the failure to settle northern Wisconsin are not difficult to see from the vantage point of the present. The long sought flow of settlers never materialized, partly because settlers could not maintain as high a standard of living in the Cutover as in the cities. The period from 1890 to 1920 was for many an era of great opportunity in the cities of the nation. Secondly, the promoters were often trying to sell land that was poor if not unfit for agricultural use. This resulted in a high turn-over of land in northern Wisconsin. Few settlers stuck it out. The killing blow to the efforts to convert the stump lands to farms was, of course,

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin H. Hibbard, John Swenehart, W. A. Hartman and B. W. Allin, Tax Delinquency in Northern Wisconsin, Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin, Bulletin 399 (June, 1928), 3-6, 11.

the agricultural depression of the early 1920's. It was then that the futility of urging the reclamation and settlement of submarginal lands for farming really struck the promoters of settlement in the Cutover.

The immediate problems facing the officials in northern counties could not be blamed entirely on the promoters of land settlement. One could not blame them for the vast stretches of deforested lands which had become tax delinquent. Yet they had often fought the reforestation of those lands, thus preventing other economic reconstruction of the region. They were also responsible in part for the scattered settlements which so embarrassed county officials who attempted to provide schools, roads and other services to a thinly scattered population unable to support them by taxation. This is to say nothing of the cost of relief for settlers who simply could not make a living on their lands. As P. S. Lovejoy so aptly put it, a fraction of the money spent in trying to sell cut-over land might have been spent in investigating other possibilities for the stump lands, thus in part avoiding the situation that existed in 1921 and later.

But the might-have-beens are not for the historian to ponder. Nor is the wisdom granted by hindsight anything of which to be vain. The promoters of land settlement in northern Wisconsin learned their lesson the hard way; they got settlers on the land and found out, in time, whether the

land was fit for agriculture or not. It must be said that this was accepted procedure in American land use. The historian is bound to add that such an approach is not confined to the promoters of land settlement. A good many settlers moved on and off some northern stump lands before the promoters became convinced that farming would not work there. It was a costly process. If it were possible, it would be an interesting project, although a somewhat unrewarding and futile investigation, to determine what the average stump land settler cost in terms of promotional expenditures, voluntary and tax supported, and what he cost in terms of personal tragedy and voluntary and official efforts to relieve his distress. It must be said, however, that many people believed that the economic stability and the esthetic values evolving from a large class of land holders, each with his own small farm, more than offset the private and public cost of the efforts to promote the settlement of the stump lands. Back-to-the-land movements are not confined to the past, and they are conditioned by other than purely economic considerations.

But the prevailing opinion in the 1920's came to be that agriculture would not succeed in the Cutover. The stopping point for this study is very properly the time when that opinion came to dominate the thinking among those who had formerly promoted the settlement of the Cutover. One

may review briefly the stages in the promotion of the stump lands for farming which reflected the changing concepts of those who led the efforts, until finally they ceased making any significant attempts to bring in settlers.

The promotion of northern Wisconsin lands began, it has been shown, with the assumption that these lands were destined for agricultural use, much like those in older settled areas of the nation which had been cleared of their timber, then devoted to farms. But this assumption could not hold for long. It became evident that whereas much of the land in the East, as in southern Wisconsin, had been cleared to make way for farms, northern Wisconsin lands were exploited for timber and then lay idle. The reason why this took place was not a pressing matter so long as the timber industry supported the communities in northern Wisconsin, but the promoters of settlement had the answer. Settlement was sweeping past the northern counties to take advantage of prairies and plains in the West where land was easy to till. But the land booms and busts in the West, the blizzards and the droughts, gave the promoters of the stump land their talking points for years. The rich soils, the water, the timber of northern Wisconsin would make this a better area for farming than the West.

This was basically the approach of the land seller when the decline of the northern lumber industry near the end

of the nineteenth century stimulated the movement to make farms of the stump lands. Western lands played another part in fostering this essentially hopeful attitude toward the agricultural possibilities of the stump lands. Popular discussion of the coming end of free lands in the West made it evident to many that the stump lands would soon be in great demand. When Canadian lands turned out to be "The last best West," they were contrasted unfavorably with northern Wisconsin, as the western lands in the United States had been. In keeping with traditional ideas about the West, land settlement was thought to be a necessary outlet for discontented labor in the cities. With the decline of free lands in the West, the Cutover was looked upon by many as a likely area to absorb unemployed laborers from the cities. Thus some Milwaukeeans took a keen interest in the stump lands not only as investors, but because they were concerned over large numbers of immigrants who collected in the city and did not move on to the land. This interest continued in the twentieth century. Milwaukeeans attempted to promote colonization in the period after the First World War as a means of preventing unrest in the cities. Others, including Dean Russell of the College of Agriculture, believed that the basic stability of the nation lay in small land holders.

The climate of opinion in which the first efforts to promote the stump lands for settlement took place was, then,

essentially an optimistic one. This was true despite already long lists of tax delinquent lands in northern counties by the 1890's. The methods of land sellers and promoters reflected this optimism; the period has been called one of "shot gun settlement." Land owners sold on short terms and let the settler shift for himself. They organized sporadically to advertise their lands, but their promotional associations rarely lasted longer than a year. The newspapers carried long and optimistic reports of the agricultural possibilities of the Cutover. County boards of supervisors made appropriations for advertising northern lands and sold tax delinquent lands to speculators like James L. Gates, who typified the optimistic views concerning the stump lands. The state boards of immigration advertised widely in the United States and abroad. They were conceived of largely as a means of bringing the settler to the land seller. They had no protective functions as far as either the settler or the public interest was concerned.

But it became increasingly clear after 1900 that the stump lands were a "problem area," and that the decline of free lands in the West was not going to result in a movement to the cut-over regions any more than the stump lands were going to provide a "safety valve" for Milwaukee. This brought a new approach to promoting the stump lands. A number of panaceas appealed to the newspapers of the northern counties,

indications of their growing uneasiness over the future of the stump lands. They hailed sheep, Angora goats, sugar beets, and a number of other possibilities which might become the means of economic salvation for northern settlers. Land sellers formed large organizations to advertise their lands. They spent huge sums of money in this way, and adopted a number of methods to attract attention to northern Wisconsin, among them the "Grasslands Car," which carried displays of agricultural produce about the Mid-West to interest settlers. The Weyerhaeuser associates pooled all their lands in the American Immigration Company in an attempt to dispose of them.

The most significant attempts among land sellers, however, were those of the later colonizers, like Benjamin Faast, who tried to organize settlement into compact groups, offered long term credit, ready built houses and barns, partially stocked and equipped farms, and supervised their settlers closely. The old pioneer spirit was gone, they said, no doubt with some regret. Landholders would have to accept a new role in promoting the stump lands. They must provide a number of services if they expected to get settlers on their lands. State and voluntary promotional agencies reflected essentially the same attitude. Instead of merely advertising the stump lands as they had formerly done, they sought to insure a successful settlement in a number of ways.

The state immigration agencies turned to protecting the settler and educating him for his work. They discouraged many people from settling. In fact, by the late 1920's this seemed to be almost the sole interest of the Division of Immigration. The College of Agriculture took the lead in trying to bring about a successful conversion of the stump lands to farms. They did this by experimenting with and demonstrating new agricultural methods. They developed special extension devices for bringing their lessons to northern settlers. For a number of years the county agricultural agent was primarily a stump land promoter of agricultural advancement.

Thus, after 1900 promoters modified their methods in attempting to bring about the settlement of the Cutover. Their hopes were sustained, however, by agricultural prosperity and by the war time demands for food production. They realized that they must accelerate their advertising work, that they must offer the settler more appealing terms and conditions of living. In the same way officials now conceived the interest of the public at large in the settlement of the stump lands to be much greater than their predecessors had. Moreover they developed a growing interest in other economic possibilities for the Cutover, among them reforestation. But the optimism as to the agricultural future of the stump lands did not decline appreciably until depression

caused the failure of many colonization and land companies and put the stump land farmers into financial straits.

The approach to settling the stump lands was, then, one of trial and error. The propaganda of the movement was couched in the familiar terms popularly used to describe the role of western lands in American history. It reflected national interest in back to the land movements, in settling the unemployed on the land, and in colonizing veterans. In many ways the movement was similar to that in other areas of the nation. New England faced similar problems as far as obtaining settlers was concerned, although her lands had once been farmed, then vacated by people who went to the cities or to better farming lands. New England too, tried a number of types of agriculture, searching for one that would be profitable.

However, there was a basic difference between the promotion of northern Wisconsin lands for farming and the land settlement promotion carried on in a number of other states. Northern Wisconsin was exploited first for timber, not for farming. The bulk of the great farming areas of the nation had been settled, and cleared if necessary, for farming alone. Moreover, in some of the older cut-over sections of the country the transition to farming had taken place in a period when the national economy may be said to have been relatively less mature, when markets were expanding and the full impact

of the opening of western lands had not yet struck the older sections of the country. In northern Wisconsin communities formerly dependent upon lumbering for their existence sought a means of survival when the timber was gone. Hence there was wider participation in the movement to promote agricultural settlement. Land owners, voluntary groups and public officials joined their efforts to an extent not typical of other regions.

The methods used to promote the stump lands were familiar throughout the United States. Thus James J. Hill's methods of distributing pure bred cattle among settlers were imitated in northern Wisconsin, although they were employed by a greater variety of groups there. The methods of the Illinois Central, the Burlington and the Northern Pacific railroads were greatly similar to those of Wisconsin railroads. They employed the same types of advertising and colonization methods and all worked closely with state governments. Other cut-over areas in the South and West, and in the neighboring Great Lakes states, had problems similar to those of northern Wisconsin. They traded ideas on such subjects as land clearing. They copied promotional techniques from each other and sometimes combined their efforts to solve the problems of the cut-over lands, as did the three Great Lakes states in the Tri-State Development Congress.

The Wisconsin attempts to promote stump land settle-

ment then, are a part of the national experience in land promotion. They are probably not unique in any significant way. Like all promotional efforts they were characterized by great, often brash, optimism. As was customary in American land use, promoters determined whether land was suitable for agriculture by settling it with farmers until they became convinced that farming would not pay. This took a long time and a good many farmers. If any lessons were learned one might have been that such trial and error methods in land settlement are costly in terms of money and human effort. The adoption of soil surveys, land economic inventories, and zoning ordinances in northern counties in later years offers evidence that the promotion of the stump lands for farming left this lesson firmly in mind, for a time at least.

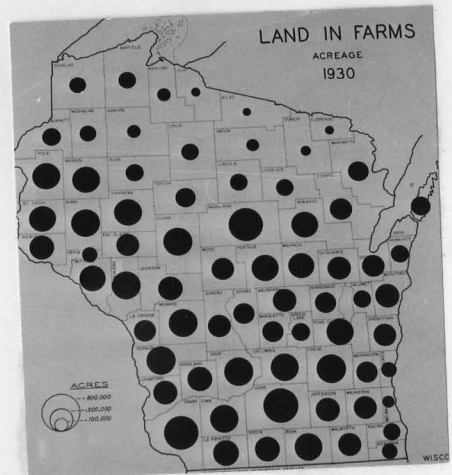
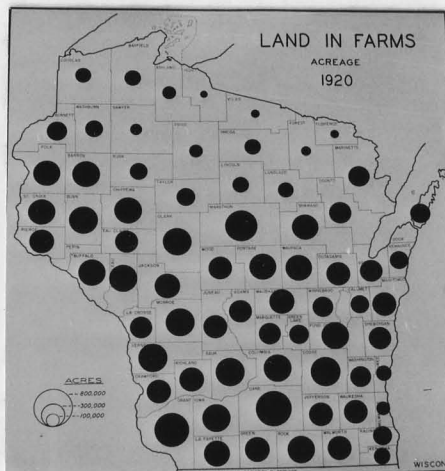
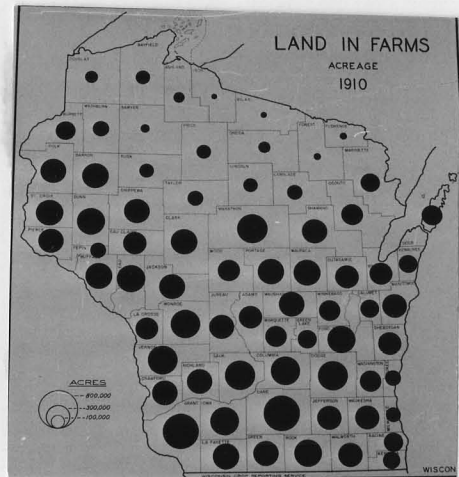
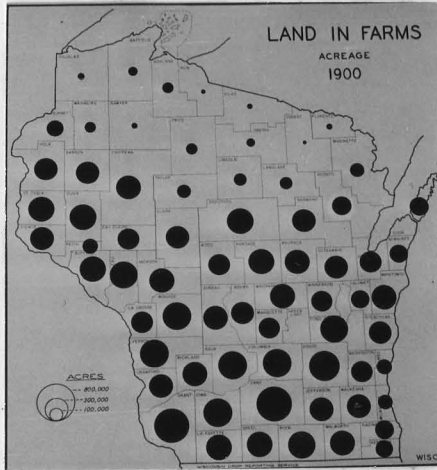
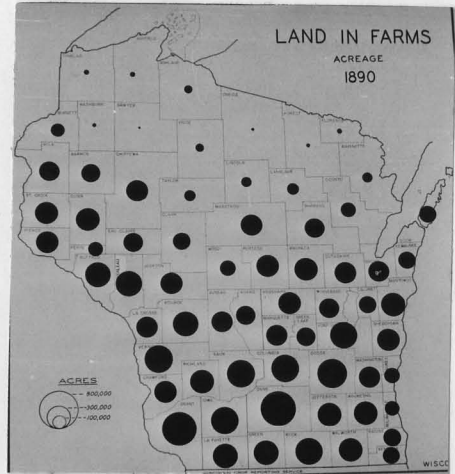
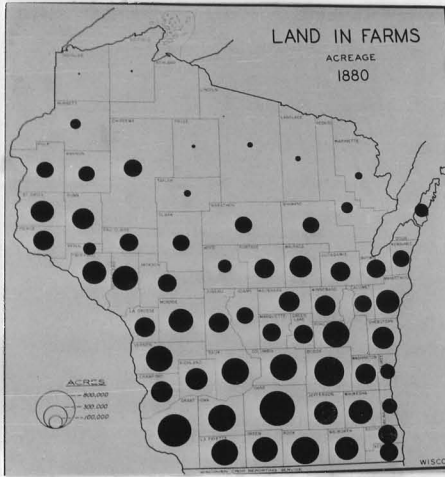
The preceding chapters have described the increasing importance of planning and government supervision in stump land settlement. This foreshadowed government colonization work of a later day when, as in the case of farm colonies sent to Alaska and in the rural rehabilitation work within the United States, government supervision was even more important. While the Wisconsin experience was by no means the greatest factor in this trend toward government control in land colonization, it nevertheless played a prominent part in developing methods of community planning, financing

settlers, supervising and training them, and selecting the lands on which they were to be colonized.

One final conclusion might be drawn from the efforts to settle the Cutover. Those who promoted its settlement were interested primarily in the development of small holdings of a family size. The success of large scale mechanized farming ventures like the Stark Potato farm did not fit into this pattern. Hence promoters made little effort to encourage highly capitalized ventures in the Cutover. Their preoccupation with small farming units, operated by their owners, made possible one of the last great tests of agricultural pioneering, using what might be termed hand methods, in an industrial age. The failure of small holders to make a success of farming the Wisconsin stump lands, even with all the aids that colonization companies, voluntary associations and public officials gave them, may one day be looked upon as an indication that the days of individualized, pioneer farm making, had drawn to a close.

#### APPENDIX A

The originals for the photographs on the following page were loaned to the writer with permission to copy them, by Mr. Emery C. Wilcox, of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture. They were used originally in Walter H. Ebling, Clarence D. Caparoon, Emery C. Wilcox and Cecil W. Estes, A Century of Wisconsin Agriculture. Wisconsin Crop and Livestock Reporting Service. Bulletin 290. Madison, 1948.



APPENDIX B

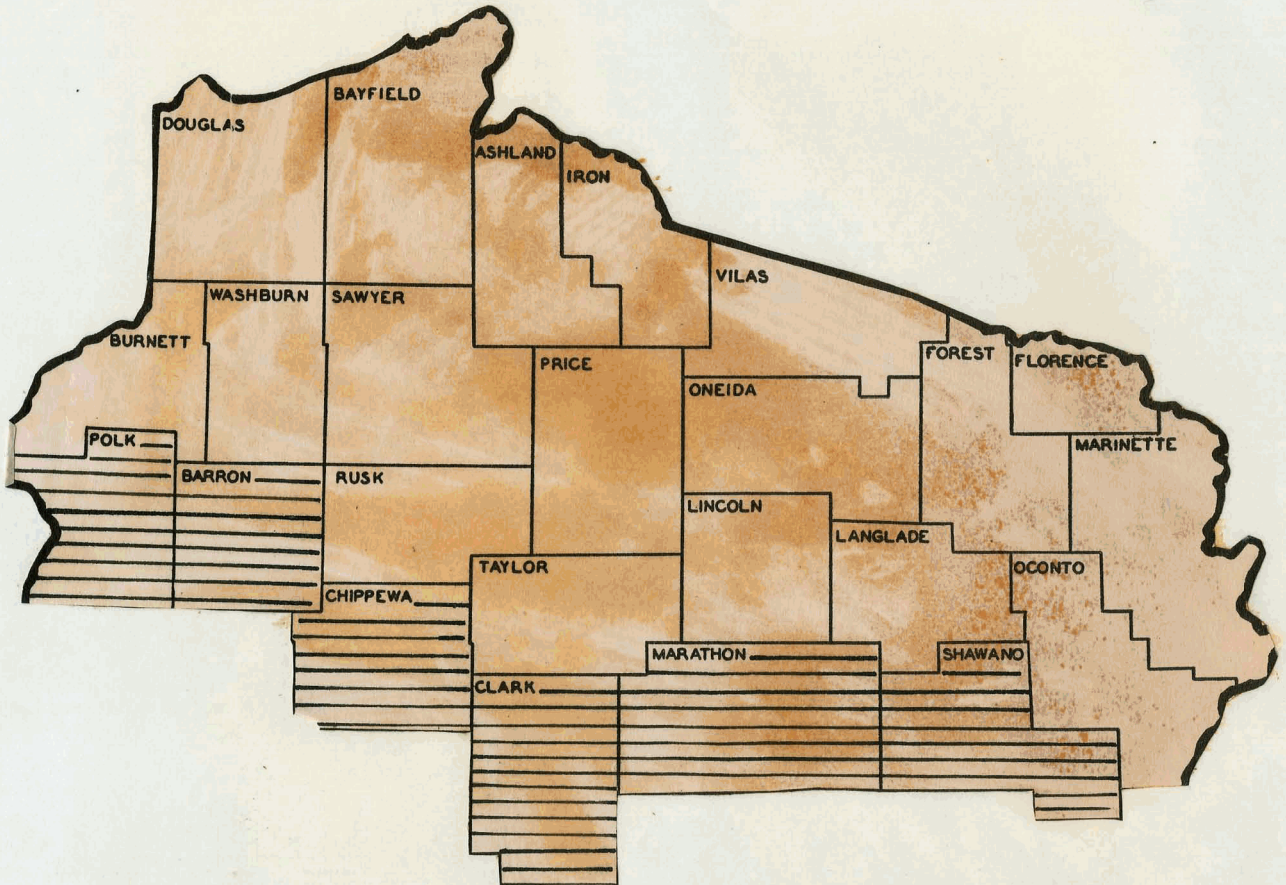


Table Per Cent of the Area of Two Groups of Cutover Counties in Farm Land, Improved Land and Woodland, 1880-1920.\*

	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920
North Central Counties (shaded)					
Land in Farms ..	18.5	29.1	44.2	57.9	67.0
Improved Land ..	5.5	10.2	16.8	23.5	28.9
Woodland .....	10.9	--	--	21.4	21.6
Northern Counties					
Land in Farms ..	2.1	5.6	10.6	16.5	22.0
Improved Land ..	.5	1.2	2.8	4.9	7.2
Woodland .....	1.3	--	--	6.7	8.3

\*Improved land is all land "regularly mowed or tilled, land in pasture which has been tilled or cleared, land lying fallow, in orchards, gardens, vineyards and nurseries and the area occupied by farm buildings." Woodland includes all land with trees which produce or may produce firewood or other forest products. Woodland was not reported by the census of 1890 and 1900.

Map and table are adapted from the Report of the Committee on Land Use and Forestry, Forest Land Use in Wisconsin (Madison, 1932) 22, 23.

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American Immigration Company Records. In the manuscript collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. The collection consists of minute books, business ledgers, journals, cash and bank journals, stockholders' accounts, land records and tax records of the company, dating from 1906 until 1940.

Cushing Papers. Microfilm copy in the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. This collection consists mainly of correspondence and legal documents concerning Caleb Cushing's investments in the St. Croix Valley and the legal struggle over water power rights at St. Croix Falls. However, some correspondence concerning land sales and the affairs of the Great European American Land and Emigration Company is found in this collection. More details of these transactions can be obtained from the Cushing Papers in the Library of Congress. The writer used notes on these papers taken by Alice Smith, of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

Laird Norton Company Papers. Papers for the years before 1900 are in the manuscript collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. Those for the years after 1900 are in the company's vaults in Winona. They consist of correspondence concerning the various aspects of this company's lumber business, including the disposal of cutover lands. There are several boxes of correspondence concerning the American Immigration Company, in which the Laird Norton Company and other Weyerhaeuser associates played an important part.

Shaw Lumber Company Papers. In the Eau Claire Public Library, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Correspondence on lumbering, sale of cut-over lands, and the personal affairs of the Shaw family. Letters and letter books for the years 1890 to 1907 are valuable for information on the activities of the Milwaukee promoter, James L. Gates.

Wisconsin College of Agriculture Files. A case of files kept on the fourth floor of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin. Contains correspondence, reports and notes of the Dean of the College of Agriculture and various members of the staff, 1900 to 1930. These materials deal with branch experiment stations in northern Wisconsin, the work of county agricultural agents, land clearing activities in northern Wisconsin and other activities of the College staff.

Wisconsin Colonization Company Papers. In the manuscript collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. A small collection of correspondence, advertising material, pictures, and ledgers of the Wisconsin Colonization Company.

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In addition to the above collections the vast body of local history material in the Wisconsin State Historical Society Library was of special aid in this study. Especially helpful were the collections of pamphlets published by immigration agencies, railroads, land companies and promotional associations. Several pamphlet boxes of such materials are also available in the library of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, and in the Wisconsin State Legislative Reference Library.

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TITLE OF THESIS The Promotion of Agricultural Settlement in  
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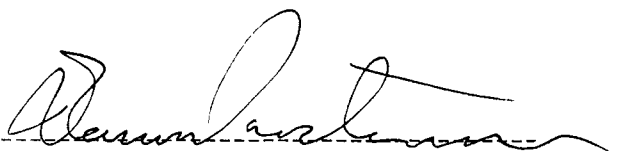
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