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MIDDLE WESTERN AGRICULTURAL HISTORY AS A FIELD OF RESEARCH¹

By EVERETT E. EDWARDS

If one is to comprehend the living past, he must give infinitely more attention to the implications of the fact that this country was primarily rural for over two and one-half centuries. The vast maze of forces and conditions that have entered into the evolution of rural life may well be taken as a central theme of American history. Today economic and social problems press for solution with perhaps more vehemence than ever before, and it behooves historians to supply the essential backgrounds of these current problems, many of which arise out of a rural past, if the people of this nation are to develop a sound national and international economy.

In turning more particularly to the Middle West, one should also bear in mind that farming and the accompanying rurality has had greater dominance there than in any other region except the South. Furthermore, its agriculture has probably been of greater importance to the nation than that of any other region. The sources of special interest to agricultural historians have already been considered in another connection,² and a fairly comprehensive, albeit somewhat out-of-date, bibliography of the history of American agriculture which includes sections relating to the Middle West is also available.³ It has seemed best, therefore, to devote this general discussion primarily to the phases

¹ This paper was presented at the joint session of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association with the American Historical Association at Providence, Rhode Island, on December 29, 1936.

² Everett E. Edwards, "The Need of Historical Materials for Agricultural Research," *Agricultural History* (Washington), IX (1935), 3-11.

³ Everett E. Edwards, "A Bibliography of the History of Agriculture in the United States," *United States Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Publication 84* (Washington, 1930). The vast amount of bibliographical material which has accumulated in the compiler's files since the issuance of this bulletin is available for examination at the office of the writer in the United States Department of Agriculture.

of Middle Western agriculture that are particularly deserving of the attention of the historians.⁴

As yet there is no comprehensive volume or series of studies on the subject. For general treatments, one must depend on summaries in the better economic history texts, and whenever there is need of detailed information one is obliged to turn to widely scattered articles, chapters, and monographs which, at best, cover the subject only as a woefully incomplete and ill-fitted patchwork. Although many of these writings hold a high place in American historiography, their usefulness as a contribution to the history of the American basic industry is often vitiated by the fact that they have usually been written as political, social, or diplomatic history. In other words, agriculture and rurality have been reached from the outside rather than used as the starting point.

Of the twelve states constituting the Middle West, only Wisconsin is provided with a modern history of its agriculture.⁵ In this respect, Joseph Schafer's excellent summary may well serve as a model.⁶ The other volumes of the same author's *Domesday Book* series and Frederick Merk's *Economic History of Wisconsin during the Civil War Decade* also deserve mention because of their contents and the significance of the methods used. E. V.

⁴ For three earlier treatments, see William J. Trimble, "The Agrarian History of the United States as a Subject for Research," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, VIII (1914-15), 81-90, which also appeared in slightly revised form in the *History Teacher's Magazine* (Philadelphia), VI (1915), 135-137; Louis B. Schmidt, "An Unworked Field of Mississippi Valley History," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* (Iowa City), XXI (1923), 94-111; and the "General Introduction" by Harry J. Carman and Rexford G. Tugwell to their *Columbia University Studies in the History of American Agriculture* series as given in Jared Eliot, *Essays upon Field Husbandry in New England and other Papers, 1748-1762* (New York, 1934), p. v-xii.

For other citations to pertinent articles of a similar nature, see Everett E. Edwards, "An Annotated Bibliography on the Materials, the Scope, and the Significance of American Agricultural History," *Agricultural History*, VI (1932), 38-43, which was later issued in revised form as a mimeographed publication of the United States Bureau of Agricultural Economics with the title, *References on Agricultural History as a Field of Research and Study* (Washington, November, 1934).

⁵ In this discussion, the Middle West is assumed to include the East North Central and West North Central divisions as used in the United States Census reports, i.e., Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas.

⁶ Joseph Schafer, *A History of Agriculture in Wisconsin* (Madison, 1922).

Robinson's volume on Minnesota is now over twenty years old, and that of C. W. Burkett on Ohio appeared in 1900.⁷ Some of the more recent state histories include chapters on agriculture, and there are also a number of experiment station bulletins that supply general summaries for states.⁸ Russell H. Anderson has done a period of Illinois agriculture and promises to expand his study into an agricultural history of the state.⁹ James C. Malin is working on the agricultural history of his native Kansas, and Harold E. Briggs, Marc M. Cleworth, and Herbert S. Schell have done similar research on the early years of the Dakotas.¹⁰ The agricultural history of Michigan, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska remain to be undertaken if the subject is to be developed in terms of states.

In studying the agricultural history of any region, basic consideration must be given to two primal factors—the settlers and the geographic moulds into which they poured themselves.

⁷ Edward Van D. Robinson, *Early Economic Conditions and the Development of Agriculture in Minnesota* (Minneapolis, 1915); Charles W. Burkett, *History of Ohio Agriculture* (Concord, N. H., 1900).

⁸ For example, Eugene H. Roseboom and Francis P. Weisenburger, *A History of Ohio* (New York, 1934), 4-7, 179-181, 306-314.

⁹ For an abstract, see Russell H. Anderson, *Agriculture in Illinois during the Civil War Period, 1850-1870* (Urbana, 1929).

¹⁰ James C. Malin, "The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (Topeka), IV (1935), 23-49, 164-187; *id.*, "The Turnover of Farm Population in Kansas," *ibid.*, IV (1935), 339-372; and *id.*, "The Adaptation of the Agricultural System to Sub-Humid Environment," *Agricultural History*, X (1936), 118-141; Harold E. Briggs, "Ranching and Stock-Raising in the Territory of Dakota," *South Dakota Historical Collections* (Pierre), XIV (1928), 417-465; *id.*, "The Great Dakota Boom, 1879 to 1886," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* (Bismarek), IV (1930), 78-109; *id.*, "The Development of Agriculture in Territorial Dakota," *Culver-Stockton Quarterly* (Canton, Mo.), VII (1931), 1-37; *id.*, "Early Bonanza Farming in the Red River Valley of the North," *Agricultural History*, VI (1932), 26-37; *id.*, "The Development and Decline of Open Range Ranching in the Northwest," *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XX (1934), 521-536; *id.*, "Grasshopper Plagues and Early Dakota Agriculture, 1864-1876," *Agricultural History*, VIII (1934), 51-63, "The Settlement and Economic Development of the Territory of Dakota," *South Dakota Historical Review* (Pierre), I (1936), 151-166, and "The Early History of Clay County," *South Dakota Historical Collections*, XIII (1926), 69-157; Marc M. Cleworth, "Twenty Years of Brown County Agricultural History, 1880-1899," *ibid.*, XVII (1934), 17-176; Herbert S. Schell, "The Grange and the Credit Problem in Dakota Territory," *Agricultural History*, X (1936), 59-83; *id.*, "Drought and Agriculture in Eastern South Dakota during the Eighteen Nineties," *ibid.*, V (1931), 162-180.

The physiography, climate, and soils of a region provide the physical setting with certain limitations and advantages for those who undertake to farm there. An intelligent comprehension of many phases of the subject, and especially the history of agricultural production, including its shifts and adjustments, is possible only if one considers the geographic factors. In this respect, the historian, is of course, largely dependent on the monographic literature of the geographers and the soil, climate, and type-of-farming bulletins of the federal Department of Agriculture and the experiment stations.

The history of the colonization and settlement of the Middle West has been told many times and in many ways, and it is hoped that further work on this phase of the subject will be concentrated on realities. In other words, historians should continue to seek what Frederick Jackson Turner termed "the vital forces" that called American institutions into life and shaped them to meet changing conditions. The social and economic status of the settlers and of the succeeding generations of newcomers was a factor in the development of their farmsteads and communities. So also were the settlers' preconceived ideas of farming. Although they may have attempted to follow the agricultural practices familiar to them in the localities from which they came, they were compelled to respond to the actualities of their new environments. The hesitation of the pioneers on the edge of the prairies and their ultimate conquest of them is an interesting and significant example.¹¹ The reasons why the different groups of settlers selected or perhaps simply found themselves on certain types of land also deserve attention. Probably it is not without significance that New Englanders settled the oak openings of Wisconsin, leaving the forest-covered land for the Germans, and that the Finns seem to have selected a habitat as nearly similar to that of their native land as they could find.¹²

The relation of the various immigrant elements to American

¹¹ William V. Pooley, *Settlement of Illinois, 1830-1850* (Madison, 1908), chap. 14; Joseph Schafer, *Four Wisconsin Counties; Prairie and Forest* (Madison, 1927), chap. 6.

¹² Joseph Schafer, "The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Madison), VI (1922-1923), 125-145, 261-279, 386-402, VII (1923), 3-19, 148-171; Horace H. Russell, "Finnish Farmers in America," *Agricultural History*, XI (1937), 65-79.

agriculture and rural life is also part of this subject. Although there are many valuable studies on the chief immigrant groups, one still lacks specific treatments of the actual adjustments by which they became American farmers and of their ultimate and distinctive contributions.¹³ As examples of the latter, one may cite the nexus of the Swiss to the early history of the cheese industry in Wisconsin, the Danes to coöperative creameries in Minnesota, and the German-Russians to hard winter wheat in Kansas.¹⁴

Although the general history of the policies by which the land constituting the Middle West passed from the federal government to individual owners is available in B. H. Hibbard's volume and in the monographs by P. J. Treat, R. G. Wellington, and G. M. Stephenson, there is still ample opportunity and need for clarification of the details.¹⁵ For several years Roy M. Robbins and Henry Tatter have been working in this direction.¹⁶ The policies pursued by the states in the disposition of the lands granted to them by the federal government are also important. However, the enacted policies are not the entire story, and the processes

¹³ In some instances, a group may have adopted American ways of making a living and economic organization so quickly that there is little to say and nothing of significance concerning adjustments. This is true of the Swedes, for example.

¹⁴ John Q. Emery, "The Swiss Cheese Industry in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, X (1926), 42-52; Glenn T. Trewartha, "The Green County, Wisconsin, Foreign Cheese Industry," *Economic Geography* (Worcester), II (1926), 292-308, esp. 296-297; Thomas P. Christensen, "Danish Settlement in Minnesota," *Minnesota History* (St. Paul), VIII (1927), 363-385, for scattered paragraphs on dairying among Danish settlers in Minnesota. The present writer surmises a nexus between the early coöperative creameries in Minnesota and the quickening of national consciousness in Denmark following the loss of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864. Hugh P. Coultis, "The Introduction and Development of Hard Red Winter Wheat in Kansas," *Kansas State Board of Agriculture, Biennial Report*, XV (1905-1906), 945-948.

¹⁵ Benjamin H. Hibbard, *A History of the Public Land Policies* (New York, 1924); Payson J. Treat, *The National Land System, 1785-1820* (New York, 1910); Raynor G. Wellington, *The Political and Sectional Influence of the Public Lands, 1828-1842* (Cambridge, 1914); George M. Stephenson, *Political History of the Public Lands, 1840 to 1862* (Boston, 1917).

For additional references, see Edwards, "Bibliography of the History of Agriculture in the United States," 50-59. An extensive unpublished bibliography on the land policies of the United States is also available for consultation in the writer's office in the United States Department of Agriculture.

¹⁶ Roy M. Robbins, "Horace Greeley: Land Reform and Unemployment, 1837-1862," *Agricultural History*, VII (1933), 18-41, and *id.*, "Preemption — A Frontier Triumph," *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XVIII (1931), 331-349.

by which land ultimately came into the possession of farmers are probably more significant. In the study of actual disposition, Paul W. Gates has made notable contributions, beginning with his research on the colonization work of the Illinois Central Railroad, and likewise James B. Hedges on that of the Northern Pacific.¹⁷ The activities of land companies and the extent and significance of land speculation as well as its connection with tenancy should also be considered. The public domain was distributed to private individuals with no restrictions on mode of use and the result has been widespread human suffering and devastation by erosion of thousands of acres. How to reconcile private exploitation of land with protection of the public interest has become the crux of the problem of developing a realistic land policy for present and future needs, and it is patent that historical studies of the land policies of the past have a distinctly pragmatic value.

At the present time one hears much discussion of farm tenancy, and when one recalls that 36.3 per cent of the farmers of the Middle West are tenants, one can appreciate the concern of those who are immediately confronted with the problem.¹⁸ For the United States as a whole the percentage is 42.1, and 40,000 farmers are passing from the owning to the tenancy class each year. Analyses by agricultural economists and rural sociologists

¹⁷ Paul W. Gates, *The Illinois Central Railroad and Its Colonization Work* (Cambridge, 1934). This monograph embodies the contents of the following articles by the same author: "The Promotion of Agriculture by the Illinois Central Railroad, 1855-1870," *Agricultural History*, V (1931), 57-76; *id.*, "Large-Scale Farming in Illinois, 1850 to 1870," *ibid.*, VI (1932), 14-25; *id.*, "The Disposal of the Public Domain in Illinois, 1848-1856," *Journal of Economic and Business History* (Cambridge), III (1931), 216-240; *id.*, "The Land Policy of the Illinois Central Railroad, 1851-1870," *ibid.*, 554-573; *id.*, "The Campaign of the Illinois Central Railroad for Norwegian and Swedish Immigrants," *Studies and Records of the Norwegian-American Historical Association* (Northfield, Minn.), VI (1931), 66-88. See also Paul W. Gates, "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System," *American Historical Review* (New York), XLI (1936), 652-681. Cf. Fred A. Shannon, "The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus," *ibid.*, 637-651; James B. Hedges, "The Colonization Work of the Northern Pacific Railroad," *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XIII (1926), 311-342.

¹⁸ United States Special Committee on Farm Tenancy, *Farm Tenancy; Report of the President's Committee* (Washington, 1937), 89. For the specific middle western states, the percentages are: Illinois, 44.5; Indiana, 31.6; Iowa, 49.6; Kansas, 44.0; Michigan, 19.0; Minnesota, 33.7; Missouri, 38.8; Nebraska, 49.3; North Dakota, 39.1; Ohio, 28.9; South Dakota, 48.6; Wisconsin, 20.7.

have appeared as articles and bulletins, but thus far, there are no adequate historical studies of this phase of the subject. The fact that farm families of half a century or more ago received virgin and productive land free from the government and yet were unable to hold it indicates that something more than the need of low-cost credit is involved. Although the recent policy of stabilizing farm prices has probably helped, discerning studies of the beginnings of tenancy and the economic and human factors accentuating its increase may indicate that it is undesirable to attempt to resuscitate individualistic farming and may justify the current experiments in new methods of farm economy. Probably the solutions of this problem will include limitations on the right to alienate holdings. In this connection one should also note the need of studies on the vast differences in the economic and social status of American farmers. The United States still proudly boasts that its tillers of the soil are farmers, not peasants, but accurate knowledge of the rural population in some areas would dispel any delusions that such is uniformly true. Some farmers are entirely capable of coping with changing conditions, while others need guidance and aid in varying degrees.

The economic geographers delineate the United States into a number of agricultural regions and indicate that, generally speaking, the various crops and livestock now dominate in the geographic areas best suited to produce them.¹⁹ Today the Middle West is represented on these maps by the American portion of the forest and hay region (the cut-over lands of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota), the western half of the hay and

¹⁹ Oliver E. Baker, in his articles on "Agricultural Regions of North America," *Economic Geography*, II (1926), 459-493, III (1927), 50-86, 309-339, 447-465, IV (1928), 44-73, 399-433, V (1929), 36-69, VI (1930), 166-190, 278-308, VII (1931), 109-153, 325-364, VIII (1932), 325-377, IX (1933), 167-197, and also in his other writings differentiates thirteen regions. In addition to those given in the text, the regions are: humid subtropical crops belt; cotton belt; Middle Atlantic trucking region; grazing and irrigated crops region; Columbia plateau wheat region; Pacific subtropical crops region; and North Pacific hay, pasture, and forest region.

The "Regionalized Types of Farming in the United States" map, issued by the planning division of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, delineates thirteen main regions and one hundred sub-regions.

The "Types-of-Farming Areas in the United States, 1930" map, prepared by the United States Bureau of Census in coöperation with the United States Bureau of Agricultural Economics, delineates 514 regions.

dairying region, the spring wheat region, the corn belt, the hard winter wheat region, and the northern portion of the mixed farming zone where northern and southern agriculture meet (the corn and winter wheat region). Historically the agricultural map has ultimately assumed its present form because of the operation of the many forces that made up what may be called the American agricultural revolution.²⁰ The history of the various crops and livestock, including their movement westward until they came to dominate in their present centers of surplus production, is a vital part of the subject. The changing ways of farm management and the introduction of new and improved varieties of crops and breeds of livestock and the efforts toward diversification also have a large place in the history of agricultural production. The series of articles on the historical background of the economic phases of the production and marketing of the basic agricultural crops that appeared in the *Yearbooks* of the Federal Department of Agriculture for 1921 through 1925 afford useful summaries, and they might well be taken as the starting points of detailed studies.²¹ L. B. Schmidt also outlined the westward movement of corn and wheat,²² and there are also a few valuable monographs like J. A. Hopkins' *Economic History of the Production of Beef Cattle in Iowa*, and J. G. Thompson's *Rise and Decline of the Wheat Growing Industry in Wisconsin* that point the way.

The other instrumentalities of agricultural production and rural life, other than land and management, namely, labor and equipment, need consideration. The ways in which the inadequacies of the labor supply have been met, the hired man and his wages, transient labor, etc., have hardly been mentioned, much

²⁰ Louis B. Schmidt, "The Agricultural Revolution in the Prairies and the Great Plains of the United States," *Agricultural History*, VIII (1934), 169-195. For a more general statement, see the same author's "The Agricultural Revolution in the United States — 1860-1930," *Science* (New York), LXXII (1930), 585-594.

²¹ The articles appeared as follows: 1921 — wheat, corn, beef, and cotton; 1922 — timber, hogs, dairy industry, tobacco, and small grains; 1923 — sugar, sheep, forage resources; 1924 — hay, poultry; 1925 — fruits and vegetables.

²² Louis B. Schmidt, "The Westward Movement of the Corn-Growing Industry in the United States," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* (Iowa City), XXI (1923), 112-141, and *id.*, "The Westward Movement of the Wheat Growing Industry in the United States," *ibid.*, XVIII (1920), 396-412.

less studied, by historians. The same thing may be said of farm buildings, horse and other draft power, implements and machinery, fences, seeds, feeds, and other equipment.

Although the process of mechanizing agriculture has probably gone farther and been of more general influence in the Middle West than in any other region of the United States, the history of agricultural implements and machinery has scarcely been touched by historians. With the steel plow the pioneers were enabled to subdue the prairies, and with the reaper they made them the veritable breadbasket of the nation. However, aside from the monograph by Leo Rogin, the articles by Russell H. Anderson, and the biography by W. T. Hutchinson, the detailed and accurate history of these and the many other machines remains largely untold.²³ There is special need for studies that give attention to the results of the various steps in mechanization.²⁴ In discussing the effects of technological and scientific improvements in agriculture Secretary Henry A. Wallace has said: "When we keep in mind the ancient nature of agriculture and compare increases in efficiency in agriculture with that part of city industry which is similarly ancient, we discover that agriculture has increased much more in efficiency than industry."²⁵ One speaks of the family-sized farm and discusses the desirability of instituting governmental policies that may preserve it. But already mechanization plus economic and geographic forces have compelled many modifications of that traditional unit. Is it not conceivable that detailed and discerning studies of the effects of mechanization would indicate the undesirability, economically

²³ Leo Rogin, *The Introduction of Farm Machinery in its Relation to the Productivity of Labor in the Agriculture of the United States during the Nineteenth Century*, University of California Publications in Economics (Berkeley, 1931), IX; Russell H. Anderson, "The Technical Ancestry of Grain-Milling Devices," *Mechanical Engineering* (New York), LVII (1935), 611-617, and *id.*, "Grain Drills Through Thirty-Nine Centuries," *Agricultural History*, X (1936), 157-205; William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick* (New York, 1930-35), 2 vols.

²⁴ Lewis C. Gray, "Agricultural Machinery," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1930), I, 551-553; Herbert A. Kellar, "The Reaper as a Factor in the Development of the Agriculture of Illinois, 1834-1865," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society* (Springfield), No. 34 (1927), 105-114.

²⁵ See his review of A. Parmelee Prentice's *Breeding Profitable Dairy Cattle*, in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (New York), XI (March 23, 1935), 563.

and sociologically, of attempting to preserve the traditional family-sized farm and the general lay-out of the rural community that is associated with it?

The marketing of agricultural products — the steps by which they were moved from the farmyard to the consumer — has infinite ramifications. Leading historians have asserted that the development of marketing is the central force in economic development, and L. B. Schmidt's survey of the grain trade of the Middle West, Henrietta M. Larson's monograph on the *Wheat Market and the Farmer in Minnesota*, and Guy Lee's research on the Chicago grain elevators, bear out this view.²⁶ Problems incident to marketing have usually been a factor in the so-called farmer-protest movements, and the economics incident to the spread between what the farmer receives and the consumer pays may well be the approximate but unrecognized common-denominator cause of these movements. The various ways by which the farmers have attempted to increase their share of the retail price and the multitudinous functions that the federal and state governments have been forced to assume as a means of aiding them in this respect are significant parts of this subject.

Coöperative marketing alone is a large topic that is deserving of further treatment than it has yet received. The fact that coöperatives have tended to develop in terms of individual commodities rather than all of the economic activities of a community as in Denmark and Ireland may be a significant trend, counter to the professed democratic objectives of America.

The river, lake, canal, and rail traffic by which the products of the Middle West reached the consumers has been the subject of many studies. Less is known of the development of roads and especially of the effects of the automobile and motor truck. While the latter is related primarily to marketing, the former also has a less tangible connection with the organization of rural life. At some time in their history most rural localities had suffi-

²⁶ Louis B. Schmidt, "The Internal Grain Trade of the United States," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XVIII (1920), 94-124, XIX (1921), 196-245, 414-455, XX (1922), 70-131; Henrietta M. Larson, "The Wheat Market and the Farmer in Minnesota, 1858-1900," *Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law* (New York), CXXII (1926), 203-475; Guy A. Lee, "The Historical Significance of the Chicago Grain Elevator System," *Agricultural History*, XI (1937), 16-32.

cient cohesiveness to justify their being referred to as communities or neighborhoods. Sometimes the rural school was the focal point; sometimes it was the church; then again it may have been the local market. The advent of the automobile put the American people on fast and far-moving wheels and shattered that cohesiveness, and here and there in the midst of the present social and economic chaos one encounters leaders groping, consciously or unconsciously, for means of salvaging or redeveloping the social values incident to a modicum of stability. The same force has also outmoded the traditional forms of local government. The introduction of swift mobility and its effects on rural life in all its phases challenges attention. Similar statements may be made with reference to the space-destroying effects of the radio.

The rural population as consumers must also be considered. That it is still important as such is indicated by the emphasis placed by the New Deal on the view that the purchasing power of the farmers must be restored and maintained if the nation as a whole is to enjoy economic stability. What food has been raised on the farm and how has it been prepared? What has been the history of the migration of industries from the farm to the processing plant and factory? For this phase of the subject, there is need for more studies like R. A. Clemen's *American Livestock and Meat Industry*, C. B. Kuhlmann's *Development of the Flour-Milling Industry*, and H. J. Thornton's *History of the Quaker Oats Company*. There is also the rôle and evolution of the country store and the rise of the mail-order house to be considered. Recently, a great deal has been heard about consumer coöperatives. A comprehensive history of the experiments in this field, beginning, so far as the Middle West is concerned, with the Granger movement, would be of pragmatic interest and value.

The matter of financing farming operations is likewise important. Farm incomes and expenditures, banking methods, interest rates, mortgages and foreclosures, taxation, insurance in all its forms and monetary legislation are topics that have been left mainly to the economists. Possibly this phase of the subject will continue largely in their hands, but even so the historians must give cognizance to these financial factors in any agricultural history research that they may undertake.

The gradual application of science to the methods of agriculture has had an important, if not a dominant, part in the evolution of agriculture from a self-sufficing economy to the commercial economy familiar today. The media by which scientific knowledge reached the farmers are many, and the history of each is part of this subject. Local agricultural clubs of all kinds and descriptions, agricultural fairs, agricultural periodicals, the federal and state departments of agriculture, the agricultural schools, colleges, and experiment stations, farmers' institutes, extension work and demonstration farms, county agents, 4-H clubs, etc., have served educational as well as many other functions. Except for W. C. Neely's *Agricultural Fair*, E. D. Ross's work on the land-grant colleges, A. L. Demaree's investigation of agricultural periodicals, and a number of articles and books on particular organizations, this phase of the subject offers almost unlimited opportunities for historians.²⁷

The agricultural leaders of the region are another interesting and significant part of the subject. As editors, writers, inventors, scientists, and promoters of protest movements, they contributed to the improvement of farming, and their writings are frequently important sources for agricultural history. That their contributions as leaders have frequently been national as well as regional is indicated by the fact that all of the secretaries of agriculture, except one short fill-in appointment, have come from the Middle West. To Herbert A. Kellar, scholars are indebted for the inclusion of agricultural leaders in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, for he persuaded the late Allen Johnson to include them and also supplied a working list of names. The result is a group of useful sketches of such men as Jearum Atkins, John Deere, Henry L. Ellsworth, William D. Hoard, and many others. Kellar's collection of Solon Robinson's writings also deserves special mention because it delineates the contributions of an important leader and supplies the student with a valuable deposit of information on Middle Western agri-

²⁷ Wayne C. Neely, *The Agricultural Fair* (New York, 1935). Cf. Earle D. Ross, "The Evolution of the Agricultural Fair in the Northwest," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XXIV (1926), 445-480. There are also a number of books and articles on the various state fairs. Ross, "The Manual Labor Experiment in the Land-Grant College," *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XXI (1935), 513-528.

culture during the years 1825-1851.²⁸ Wendell H. Stephenson's edition of the papers of Thomas Affleck will be similarly useful.

It will also perhaps not be remiss to call attention to the significance of the training given by the rural grade and high schools. Granted that it is the function of education to develop the individual so that he may serve the common good as a rational and socialized being, it is pertinent to know the extent to which the rural schools have played their part. One hears much of the little red schoolhouse — usually white in actuality — as the foundation of this country's democracy, but that democracy will be preserved and adapted to changing needs only in so far as the educational system fulfills its purpose. Hence, the importance of this topic.

Except the general chapters on the Middle West in the pertinent volumes of the *History of American Life* series there is little formal history of the rural home and community.²⁹ The farm house with its furnishings, conveniences, and surroundings; rural manners, customs, and morals; amusements and entertainments such as games and sports, sociables and surprise parties, and spelling, husking, and quilting bees; religious ideas and practices — these and many similar topics offer ample opportunity for those inclined toward social history. The lack of historical studies of rural health, including sanitary conditions, home remedies, and the country doctor, may also be mentioned in this connection.

The relation of the farmers to the political history of the region and the nation is less obscure. The significance of their part in the political revolution of 1860 is well known, and S. J. Buck's *Agrarian Crusade* summarizes their relationship to the protest movement during the remainder of the nineteenth century. The same author's monograph on the *Granger Movement* and that by John D. Hicks on the *Populist Revolt* are adequate. Mention should also be made of the pioneer work by F. E. Haynes

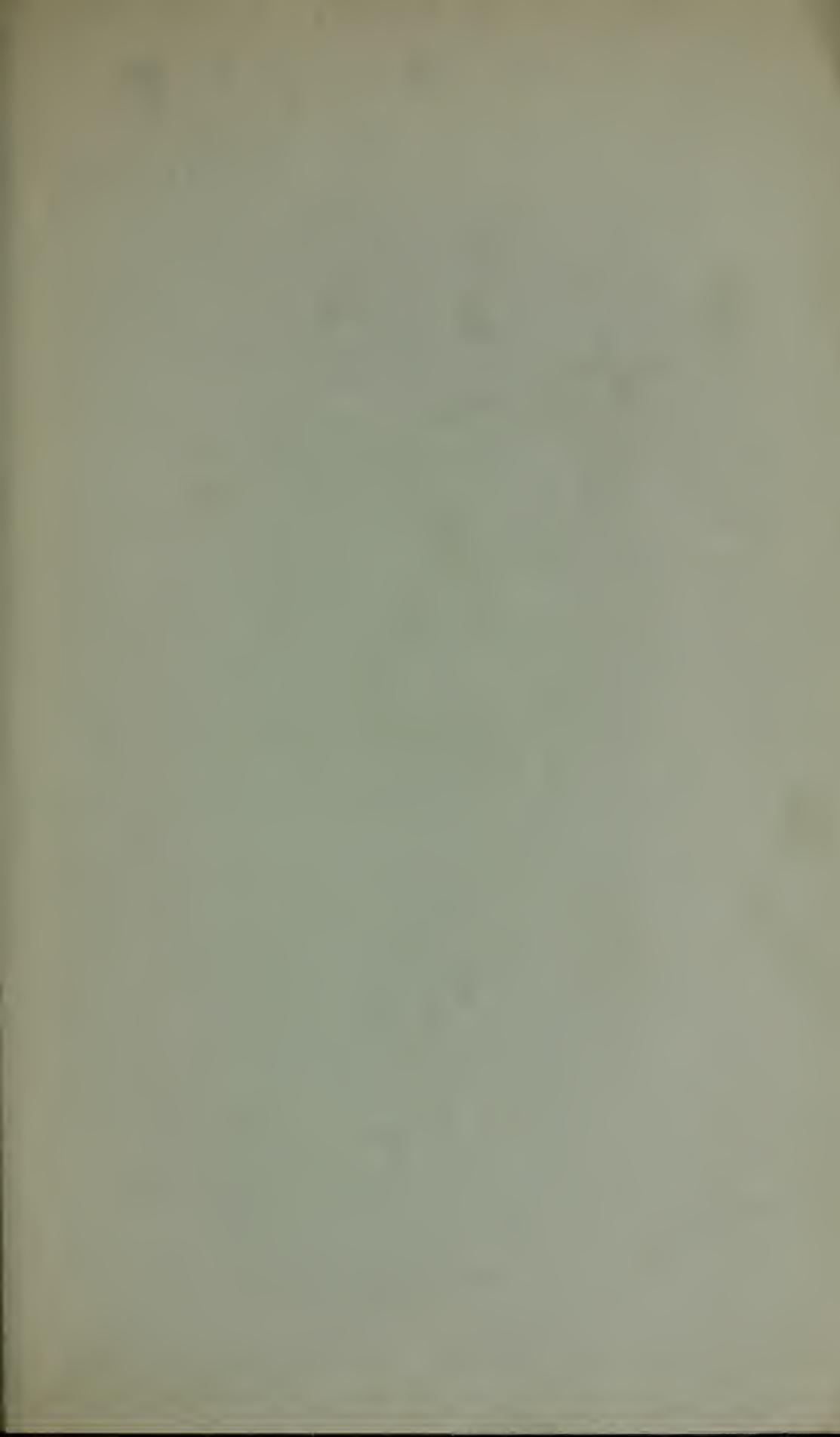
²⁸ Herbert A. Kellar, ed., *Solon Robinson: Pioneer and Agriculturist; Selected Writings, Indiana Historical Collections* (Indianapolis), XXI-XXII (1936), 2 vols.

²⁹ For a noteworthy series of articles, see Evadene A. Burris, "Keeping House on the Minnesota Frontier," *Minnesota History*, XIV (1933), 263-282; *id.*, "Frontier Food," *ibid.*, 378-392; *id.*, "Building the Frontier Home," *ibid.*, XV (1934), 43-55; and *id.*, "Furnishing the Frontier Home," *ibid.*, 151-193.

on third-party movements. Although none of the present studies of the National Non-Partisan League are satisfactory, probably that by R. H. Bahmer now in preparation will meet one's needs. The main criticism of the valuable articles and monographs on special phases of the farmers' relation to politics is that most of them treat their particular subjects as if they reclined in a vacuum.

Many less tangible rural contributions also deserve consideration. The drift of sons and daughters from the farms, together with its many ramifications, is economically as well as socially important. They contributed brains or brawn, and their rural mores may have tempered the ever-growing domination of urbanism. The expenditures for their formal education was an economic drain on the rural communities from which they came. When the old folks passed away, their estates were probably divided more or less equally among the heirs. The urbanized members of the family, not wishing or fitted to return, made financial adjustments with those who had remained on the farm. The contribution of rural to urban income through inheritance has been rather significant. The retirement of farmers to nearby towns, leaving their holdings to be operated by tenants, is a similar process. There is hardly anything about these and similar drains that contribute to the unbalance of the rural and urban elements of America. Conversely, the back-to-the-land movements of the population, especially as depression manifestations, deserve consideration.

Perhaps the prospectus of the history of Middle Western agriculture here outlined involves a broader interpretation than that usually associated with the term, agricultural history, and possibly the topics emphasized may seem mundane and drab when compared with what are ordinarily assumed to be the more colorful aspects of American history. Yet they are the vital forces of American development, and furthermore, on the basis of daily experience as historian of the United States Department of Agriculture, the author of this paper can assure his readers that there is a distinct pragmatic need for historical studies of these forces.



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