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The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain

Edited by Vernon Carstensen. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison. 522 pages. 1963. \$6.75.

PPRIVATE CITIZENS and public officials alike have a continuing interest in the history, disposal, extent, character, and use made of the publicly owned and administered lands. *The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain* contains about 60 of the best historical articles on the public lands that have appeared in journal form since 1905. These articles provide a revealing review of significant plans and events in the disposal of public land to private citizens and corporations, in grants to railroads and States, and in the management of the remainder for public purposes.

May 20, 1962, marked the centennial of one of the most important land laws of the United States—The Homestead Act of 1862. The articles in *The Public Lands* impress the reader with the endless public actions since 1784, first, to encourage settlement and development of the public domain, and more recently, to provide for proper management of these lands. Not all the public plans to provide farms for the vast multitude of home seekers were successful. Yet, looking back today through the significant articles in *The Public Lands* there appear to have been enough honest successes over the two centuries of history to more than offset the failures and injustices. The public land disposal system illustrates the unchanging verities of good and bad in human behavior.

As expressed by Dr. Carstensen in the Introduction, "The land grabs . . . represent a . . . part of the story, but not the whole story. . . . The part . . . that involves the vast number of land-seekers who got their land without violating either the spirit or the letter of the law . . . is the part that provided a lure so strong that it drew millions of people across the Atlantic."

In like manner, Dean Eugene Davenport of the College of Agriculture, University of Illinois, in 1915, discussed the distribution of the public domain, recognized the waste and abuse, and then added, "but we have these farms, these cities, these

railroads, and this civilization to show for it, and they are worth what they cost."

On the credit side of the public land ledger, some 30 States were carved out of the public domain, settled and developed by people from the older States and from other countries. The farm settlers brought with them generally wholesome ideas of citizenship and government, and practical and thrifty ways of farming and rural development. A fact often overlooked is that many settlers had good health, ability to work, and a little money or other property with which to start farming or stock raising. The predominantly family farm communities of the Piedmont and Mountain Southeast sent thousands of settlers to the Midwestern and Western Territories and new States. Many other thousands went from the more compact Northeastern towns and counties.

As to the debit side of the ledger, one is led by the articles in *The Public Lands* to ask why the many thousands of landless poor people of the South and East were not given a public helping hand to move west from 1850 to 1900. With this help they might have achieved home ownership in one of the new States less bound by ways of the past.

In 1862, well over a billion acres of public land, or over half the Mainland 48 States, was available for settlement. This was enough to share with the landless of the South and East, had they had the means to reach it. In retrospect, not only was there a big gap in actual efforts to settle our own landless people in the Civil War and post-Civil War years after 1862, there is a blank spot in the follow-up public actions to carry out the few proposals that were made at the time. The loss of several hundred thousand of the country's most active men and the other staggering costs of the Civil War and its aftermath evidently crowded out many things which might have been done for the general welfare.

In contrast, to the limited aid for landless poor, without property or a grubstake, was the opportunity for the man with a horse, a team and wagon, or a few dollars, who could go West by his own efforts and claim a piece of land. Public encouragement was given to advertisements to attract home seekers from other countries. Also, war veterans, beginning in Revolutionary War days, were rightly rewarded by land or redeemable claims for land and preferences in homesteading. The vet-

erans and other settlers, who were able to travel and to live by their savings for a year or two brought much to the new States by citizenship, thrift, and hard work.

While it may be fruitless to daydream of what might have been, it is worthwhile to appraise the past for what may be gleaned in solving present problems of equal home and job opportunities for all citizens.

Information apparently is not readily available on public efforts to aid the landless of the South and East to obtain free land in the West during the heyday of the Homestead period, 1865 to 1920. Limited searches indicate it would be useful today to review the original public land records, and the efforts to aid the landless people of the older States at a time when the Nation had ample land to give away.

The Public Lands should stimulate more original research to fill gaps in the history of public domain disposal and settlement. The articles show that too many publications have accepted and repeated generalized and often incomplete, inaccurate, or overdrawn versions of homesteading, land sales, and grants to railroads and States. *The Public Lands* will prove useful to the student and research worker, and to all who are concerned with land ownership, use, management, and land affairs generally, whether owners, farmers, professional people, business men, or public officials.

Hugh H. Wooten

Status and Methods of Research in Economic and Agronomic Aspects of Fertilizer Response and Use

By the Committee on Economics of Fertilizer Use of the Agricultural Board. Publication 918, National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council, 2101 Constitution Avenue, Washington, D.C. 89 pages. \$2.00.

READERS INTERESTED in a summarization of the status of research on yield response to fertilizer will find this publication useful. Its scope includes discussion of the pertinent concepts and principles, the characteristics of different types of yield functions, and problems in obtaining suitable data. There is also a section on application of results. The importance of joint agronomic-economic effort is indicated.

The difference between basic laboratory research and research under field conditions is mentioned.