

1976

Cattle Kings Thrived with Shorthorn, Hereford

Prairie Lands Beckoned Farmer and Speculator

By DONALD L. PARMAN and HORACE PAARLBERG

The Land

The productive soils of Tippecanoe County have resulted from the great glaciers which leveled the hills and filled the valleys of the previous landscape. The Wabash River developed from the outwash of the late Wisconsin glacier and from the water released when the glacier receded. By the time of white settlement, the "Upper Wabash

Country" provided a variety of natural conditions. The area east and north of Lafayette was composed of transitional soils which were usually developed under timber. The topography was irregular and the streams flowed rapidly. Although blessed with more open clearings, the first settlers found soils and vegetation similar to south central Ohio and northern Kentucky. The Wea Plains to the south and west of Lafayette were underlain with glacial



A steam threshing machine, used for wheat and oats, could thresh between 400 and 500 bushels per day if a breakdown did not occur. (Tippecanoe County Historical Association archives)

outwash which subsequently was covered with a cap of loess soil. Grasses which were tolerant to drought covered the land. The area remained treeless, probably because the grasses were frequently burned by the Indians to improve their quality for grazing animals.

The greatest challenges — and the greatest opportunities — developed in "Grand Prairie," a vast region which starts at Lafayette and extends across Illinois and Iowa. This geographic province offered a mixture of grasslands and marshes with occasional groves of trees. The natural conditions grew out of the recession of the glaciers which left partially drained swamps. Vegetation decay over the centuries created immense amounts of organic materials which built an exceptionally rich soil. Reports by LaSalle and other French travelers do not speak of any agricultural potential but depict the prairie as a vast panorama of grass

The economic problems of the early settlers in Tippecanoe County were typical of other frontier areas. Many of the farmers overpurchased land and had little money left to buy livestock and machinery and to pay for clearing and fencing their farms. More importantly, early settlers invariably faced severe problems in marketing their livestock and grain to convert their products into cash. Extraordinary practices developed to solve this problem. Cattle raised around Lafayette prior to the Civil War were commonly driven overland to feedlots in Ohio or even to urban markets on the East Coast. Hogs also were driven long distances to markets in Cincinnati or Toledo. Early settlers frequently hauled wagonloads of oats and other grain to Chicago to trade for salt which they sold after their return.

The bottleneck of marketing was somewhat relieved



The Shunk Plow Company, of Bucyrus, Ohio, advertised this steel or cast-point plow as "the best general purpose plow on the market." Fitted with a rolling or knee coulter, jointer or fin cutter, it was made for two or three horses and could turn a furrow from six to nine inches deep and from 13 to 18 inches wide. Prices of its models were not listed in the company's brochure.

and marshes. Both the French and the early American settlers viewed this "sea of grass" as a hostile environment. They did not recognize that the prairie lands would become the corn belt which would profoundly influence the growth of American agriculture.

Early Settlement

The earliest white settlements in Tippecanoe County in the mid-1820s differed little from frontier patterns of past generations. The first pioneers preferred to farm treeless areas which were not wet, but they built their homes in timber because it provided shelter, wood, and fuel. They also located their cabins near streams or springs to avoid digging wells.¹

The farming methods of the early farmers were extremely crude and unscientific. Observers pointed out that land was planted to corn year after year until the soil fertility was completely exhausted. The field was then abandoned to weeds and a new area planted to corn. Systematic crop rotation and manuring land was never practiced. Livestock management was similarly crude. Most farmers refused to put up barns or sheds for their livestock and relied on timber for shelter during the winters. Improved breeding was neglected and the livestock were allowed to mate indiscriminately. Survival of the fittest best describes livestock management. The results were extremely hardy hogs and cattle which were of low quality and late maturity. Hogs were commonly sold at two years and cattle at three or four years.

by the Wabash River and marketing facilities of Lafayette. Typical farm products sold through Lafayette in the 1830s included pork, beeswax, corn, flax seed, flour, feathers, hay, lard, oats, and tallow. Virtually every business enterprise in the frontier settlement was related in some way to agriculture. The interdependence of farming and the city was much more apparent than it is today.

The career of Henry T. Sample offers an excellent illustration of this interdependence. Sample moved to Lafayette in 1826 and started a tannery. As a sideline he began to slaughter hogs in 1833, later adding cattle, which were packed in brine and sent by flat boats to New Orleans. Recognizing that his business interests were tied to agriculture, Sample engaged in many efforts to improve farming. He frequently loaned money to worthy farmers in financial duress, purchased a large tract of land in Benton County in 1858, and helped form the Tippecanoe Agriculture Association in 1851. He presided over the organization for its first thirteen years, and he served on the State Board of Agriculture from 1873 until shortly before his death in 1881.3

The short-lived Wabash and Erie Canal, which reached Lafayette in 1843, has often been dismissed as a failure because of its brief existence, but it provided an important new outlet for farm products. Farmers were able to shell their corn at home and haul it to shipping points along the canal where it was loaded onto barges. One account describes farm wagons lined up for one-half mile waiting to unload corn at shipping points on the canal. Live cattle and hogs were also hauled to market on the canal. While the

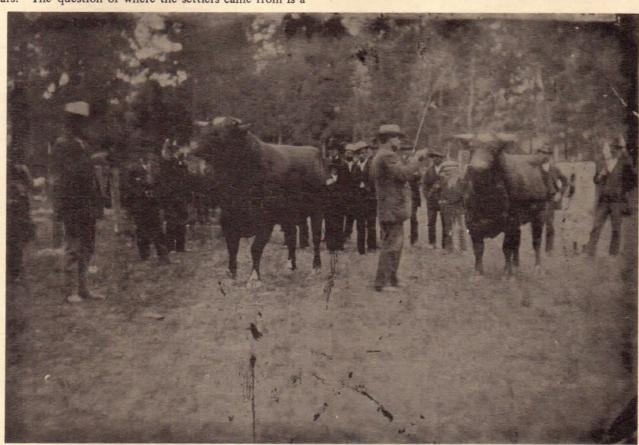
New Orleans market remained significant, the canal allowed farm produce to reach eastern urban areas through Toledo, the Great Lakes, and the Erie Canal. The construction of railroads in the 1850s and 1870s, of course, superseded the canal and afforded even better market access.⁴

Population Growth and Composition

The growth of population in Tippecanoe County was rapid but the composition of settlers is not entirely clear. According to the first federal census in 1830, the county had 7,187 residents. During the next ten years the population nearly doubled as it increased to 13,724, and it then rose by six to eight thousand per decade for the next thirty years.⁵ The question of where the settlers came from is a

mainly were English, Irish, and Germans. A total of 455 residents was listed as unknown in origin.

Although it would be useful to know about people's origins before 1850, the composition of Tippecanoe County citizenry in that year indicates that Ohio was by far the most common state of origin of the non-Hoosiers. Relatively few people came from New England or the Deep South. New Englanders, however, were important in merchandising in Lafayette and nearby towns. Considering the potato famine, it is not surprising that recently arrived Irish held a large proportion of the laboring jobs, especially as canal workers. In other words, Tippecanoe County settlement had no major variation from the normal east-to-west pattern that was typical of frontier movement.⁶



Massive and thickly fleshed, Shorthorn cows often weighed a ton. Some of the cattle raised by Jonathan Baugh, a leading breeder in the county, are shown in this tintype made at the Tippecanoe County Fair about 1880. (Tippecanoe County Historical Association archives)

matter of more than academic interest. Northern farmers, especially those from New England, were considered better agriculturists and emphasized raising hay, dairying, and livestock production. Southern farmers, in contrast, were tended toward a "cut and slash" agriculture which did not contiribute to long term development. Cultural differences such as speech patterns, frugality, religion, and education also separated the two groups.

Unfortunately the federal census did not include information on residents' origins until 1850, nearly three decades after the first settlement. An analysis of the 1850 census reveals that 7,547 people in the county were native Hoosiers. People born in northern states totaled 6,045 and, somewhat surprisingly, only 2,373 residents were from southern states. The 1,411 foreign born in the county

Settling the Prairie

The single condition distinctive about early agriculture in Tippecanoe County deals with the great prairie area northwest of Lafayette. A different type of leadership emerged here which has had a continuing influence until the present. In addition, settlement was accompanied by concentration of land ownership and a high rate of tenancy and absentee ownership which was at odds with the Jeffersonian tradition of small yeoman farms. The distinctiveness of prairie agriculture grew out of a chain of events in the early years of Lafayette.

Despite the obstacles of the prairie lands, a new type of character became interested in them after the first wave of settlement. This was the investment buyer or speculator.

Federal legislation of the 1830s placed no restriction on the amount of public lands that an individual or a group could acquire from the government. Land monopolization took place in the boom years of 1835 to 1837 and again after 1847. Most of this land was purchased from the government by absentee landlords for \$1.25 per acre.

The control of these vast holdings centered among Lafayette businessmen. The most prominent individual was Henry L. Ellsworth, a native of Connecticut who first became interested in this area in 1835. After being appointed as United States Commissioner of Patents soon afterward, Ellsworth became quite aware of technological developments in agriculture. He became overly confident that new crops and new machines, especially ditch diggers, would solve the problems of prairie agriculture. In a promotional booklet, Valley of the Upper Wabash, published in 1838 under his son's name, Ellsworth glowingly described the merits of the area in an attempt to attract eastern investors. He obviously exaggerated the opportunities for agriculture with fanciful projections of expenses and returns and minimized the hazards and risks. While Ellsworth hoped to develop a sizable amount of farm land for his own purposes, he additionally wanted to acquire government land at \$1.25 per acre and then resell it later at \$10.00 to \$20.00 per acre.

In 1845 Ellsworth left Connecticut and moved to Lafayette. Adding to his early purchases, he had acquired 93,000 acres in Benton, White, Jasper, Newton, Warren, Lake, and Tippecanoe counties by 1852. He also arranged the purchase of large amounts of lands for wealthy eastern friends. Both Ellsworth and his associates believed that Lafayette would soon develop marketing outlets far superior to the flat boat trade down the Wabash. They were optimistic that the Wabash and Erie Canal would provide access to eastern markets and that railroads would offer even greater potential profits. Ellsworth's colleagues were broadly experienced, wealthy, and well educated. Most were, like Ellsworth, graduates of Yale, and local citizens disparagingly referred to them as the "Yale Crowd" and resented their control over land holdings.

While agriculture developed fairly rapidly in the area, it was not fast enough to suit the "Yale Crowd." With the expense of draining, fencing, and breaking, customers did not want to pay high prices for Indiana land, particularly when they could buy excellent government land in Illinois and Iowa for \$1.25 per acre. Most of the "Yale Crowd" sold their holdings in the 1850s at a profit far under what they anticipated. Ellsworth retreated to Connecticut shortly before his death in 1858. His heirs, Wabash College, and Yale University spent the rest of the century renting and selling the 110,000 acres he had acquired.

The "Yale Crowd" was followed by an even more interesting type of leadership. Although most of the new leaders operated land north and west of Tippecanoe County, many were residents and businessmen of Lafayette. All shared an insatiable desire to make money and a willingness to take risks. To their credit, they did not hold their land idle but engaged in an active period of agricultural and community development. Towns such as Fowler, Earl Park, Raub, Atkinson Station, Wolcott, Kentland, Rensselaer, Gifford, Foresman, Reynolds, Boswell, Chase, and others were founded by this dynamic group.

Because of the high costs of overcoming the stubborn obstacles of the prairie, the new landowners recognized

that beef production offered the best opportunity for income. Initially, their operations closely resembled the "Cattle Kings" of the Great Plains. But within a short time, the large landowners invested their money in drainage, fencing, and putting in crops of corn. The emphasis turned from raising calves to fattening cattle for slaughter, many of which were purchased in the west.

The leader who perhaps best characterizes the "Cattle Kings of Indiana" was Moses Fowler. First moving to Lafayette in 1839, Fowler formed a partnership with John Purdue in a dry goods store. Five years later, he began his own business which soon grew to a substantial size. Fowler served as a major patron of the Wabash and Erie Canal, entered banking, and promoted railroads. In 1861 he and associates founded a packing house which became the second largest in Chicago. The following year he and Adams Earl, a brother-in-law, purchased 36,000 acres in Benton County. The two men divided their holdings a few years later. Fowler owned 25,000 acres in Benton and White counties at the time of his death in 1889.

Other large landowners of the mid-nineteenth century were equally impressive. Edward C. Sumner purchased 30,000 acres in Benton County and eastern Illinois. Parnham Boswell acquired 12,000 acres, Cephas Atkinson 12,000 acres and A. D. Raub 6,000 acres in Benton County. Lemuel Milk and Associates reputedly owned 65,000 acres in the Beaver Lake area of Newton County. In the same county, J. M. Gaff owned 16,000 acres and Alexander J. Kent owned 25,000 acres. James Goodwine of Warren County accumulated 10,000 acres.

These and other land barons in many ways resembled the controversial industrial leaders of the post-Civil War era. Both groups lived in richly furnished homes and exhibited their wealth without restraint. Their business methods were regarded by some as ruthless and their tax dodges retarded education and other public developments, but their wealth also created awe and admiration. Perhaps the primary consideration is that the land barons of the prairie were willing to assume risks and to exploit the opportunities of an expanding demand for agricultural goods. If they violated the Jeffersonian ideal of the small yeoman farmer, they nevertheless opened the prairie and developed new marketing outlets.

The Panic of 1873 and the eventual retirement or death of the land barons ended the age of bonanza farming rather quickly. The conditions of strong demand and high farm prices with continuing low costs of production terminated with the Panic of 1873 and bankrupted many operating on borrowed money. Individuals who retired or died were, of course, no longer present to manage huge estates with hired laborers. As a result the land was gradually broken up into smaller holdings and either sold or rented on shares. In some instances, the barons retained their cattle feeding operations by using their share of the corn raised by their renters. The general outcome was a pattern of agriculture quite similar to today — a mixture of tenancy and family-owned units with many farmers who both owned and rented land.

Agriculture in Tippecanoe County itself seems to have been affected only slightly by the bonanza farming of the post-Civil War period. An examination of the farm plots in the Kingman Brothers' Combination Atlas Map of Tippecanoe County (1878) reveals that most farms averaged from 80 to 160 acres and many were smaller. Clusters of holdings

of a larger size were doubtless owned by descendants of early settlers who had inherited plots that were not much larger than the general average for the county.8

Although the size of farm holdings did not greatly vary, the atlas suggests that considerable disparities existed in the wealth of farmers and the development of their land. Engravings of homesteads show that some farmers were able to afford large two-story homes complete with the ornate "gingerbread" of Victorian architecture, attractive landscaping, and large barns and outbuildings. Other farm homes were modest frame structures little larger or better than log cabins. Barns of the latter homesteads were small and crudely designed. The surprising prevalence of small lakes and marshes in the county reveals that ditching and tiling had not yet overcome the problem of wet land. Indeed, thousands of acres of land were not drained until the end of the nineteenth century.9



Moses Fowler, an Indiana land baron in the latter half of the 19th century, came to Lafayette in 1839 and was a partner of John Purdue in a dry goods store. He and his associates founded a packing house in Chicago. With his brother-in-law, Adams Earl, Fowler bought 36,000 acres in Benton County.

Improvement of Farm Methods

Improved methods of agriculture were advocated from the 1830s onward, but the abundance of fertile land and farmers' ingrained hostility for "book farming" stifled progress for many years. Typical-of their time, Tippecanoe County leaders believed that agricultural fairs offered the best means of overcoming the farmers' aversion to upgraded farming methods and livestock breeding. A short-lived agricultural society was formed in 1839 and sponsored several fairs until the group disbanded in 1842. Leading citizens nine years later formed the Tippecanoe County Agricultural Society and elected H. L. Ellsworth as its first

president. The new organization staged several fairs which paid premiums for the best exhibits of livestock, farm and home products, and farm machinery. Closely affiliated with the State Board of Agriculture, also founded in 1851, the local society hosted the second state fair at Lafayette in 1853.10

After a lapse caused by the Civil War, the Tippecanoe Agricultural Association reorganized in 1867 and began the county fairs again. Although the new group claimed that it was primarily interested in improving agriculture, the main emphasis of the fairs seems to have been on entertainment. The fairs, held annually in September, attracted large crowds, but the agricultural and home exhibits were overshadowed by the beer stand and the horse races at the "speed ring." Farmers resented the fact that the fairs seemed designed more for Lafayette city residents. Without the races, however, crowds would have doubtlessly been much smaller. In the mid-1880s a more serious clash arose when some local residents demanded that alcoholic beverages not be sold at the fairgrounds. The squabble was evidently intense for no fair was held for two or three years. The board's decision to reopen the fair in 1885 without the beer stand caused "an active hostility on the part of the liquor sellers, and through their efforts a large portion of this class of the community were [sic] conspicuously absent" The association secretary noted that the smallness of the crowds was offset by the "entire absence of all rowdyism and pilfering."11

The fairs were responsible, at least in part, for a vast improvement in livestock breeding which took place after the Civil War. The nondescript cattle of the frontier era were rejected by farmers who demanded improved performance. During the 1870s, the Shorthorns especially proved popular, and Tippecanoe County became known for some of the finest of the breed. Jonathan Baugh, a farmer in the southern part of the county, was a leading breeder and exhibited his cattle in competition with other Middle West stockmen at Lafayette and other major fairs. W. J. DeHart of Wea Township and Thomas Marks of Jackson Township also raised registered Shorthorns. The cattle were massive and thickly fleshed with an emphasis on refinement of bone and head. Shorthorn breeders paid little attention to early maturity and cows commonly weighed a ton. While these characteristics may not have been totally necessary, the Shorthorns were a decided improvement over the ragtag cattle of the past.

The popularity of Shorthorns was quickly challenged by Herefords. During the late 1870s, Adams Earl and his nephew, A. D. Raub, noted that part-Hereford cattle seemed to bring higher prices on the Chicago market. Earl and his son-in-law, Charles B. Stuart, visited England in 1880 and selected a shipment of Herefords which became the foundation herd for Shadeland Farm. Located southwest of Lafayette, Shadeland Farm soon became the mecca of the Hereford breed in the United States. Study of the herd books during the next few years shows that Shadeland stock largely dominated the lines of registered Hereford breeding in the United States.

The merits of Herefords were recognized by Moses Fowler who shortly formed a partnership with W. S. Van Natta to produce registered cattle. Van Natta possessed exceptional talent in the selection and breeding of cattle, and he and other members of the Van Natta family remained prominent in Hereford breeding for many years.

Shipments of Herefords from Tippecanoe County to other sections of the country, especially to the western ranchers, were a major contribution to improved cattle breeding in the United States.

The post-Civil War era witnessed similar, although less dramatic, breeding improvements for other types of livestock. The introduction of Berkshires and other breeds of hogs replaced the razorbacks of the prewar period. The importation of Percheron horses in the 1870s made farmers realize that they should keep heavy draft animals for their field work and lighter horses for transportation. Although sheep production was light in the county, reports on the county fairs noted that several local farmers were exhibiting registered stock in the 1870s.

The Grangers

The wave of agrarian protest which erupted in the Middle West during the 1870s was strongly felt in Tippecanoe County. As in other areas, farmers found that the recently organized Patrons of Husbandry, popularly known as the grangers, offered a convenient means of protesting against the high profits of the "middle man," the monopolistic power of railroads, and the woes of low prices and crop failures during the Panic of 1873.

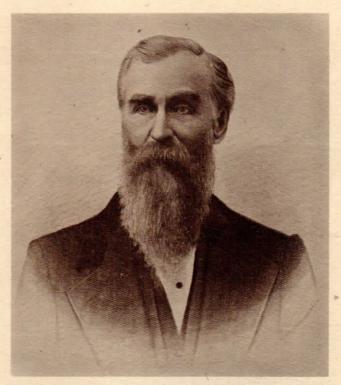
The first grange in the county was formed in March 1872 at Battle Ground. The movement swept the county in succeeding months, resulting in a total of forty-three granges with a membership of some 3,000 farmers. Members soon established a large cooperative store in Lafayette. Here farmers could purchase farm machinery, groceries, and household items which granger agents had procured in large lots at wholesale prices. The savings were often significant. One local purchasing agent bought 3,000 pounds of tea in San Francisco which dropped the price from \$1.40 to sixty cents per pound. Sewing machine prices fell from \$80.00 to \$32.50. Such successes prompted grangers to put up cooperative warehouses and elevators in another attack on the hated middlemen.

A variety of factors caused the granger movement to decline almost as rapidly as it had grown. Lack of business acumen and intense internal bickering within the organization, the sharp competition of private merchants, higher farm prices, and regulation of railroad and elevator rates by state and national legislation caused many farmers to lose interest. Nevertheless, the granger movement left several long term effects. It made the farmers more aware of their marketing problems, of their need for education, and of the desirability of voting independently. In part, the grangers' demise can be attributed to their success in forcing merchants and politicians to respond to farm needs. 12

Farm Clubs and Farmers' Institutes

The farmers' growing awareness of their need to be better informed was aided by new organizations after the decline of the grangers. Farm clubs, which apparently arose spontaneously in the late 1870s, offered a means of informing farmers about improved husbandry. Members demanded practical information on drainage of wet land, improving yields of their field crops, and livestock management.

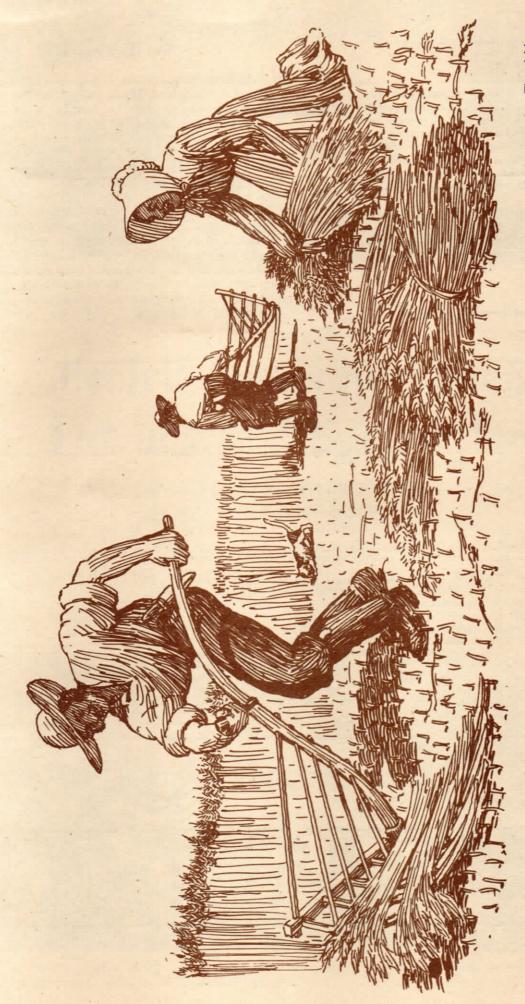
Noting the success of these groups, the State Board of Agriculture in 1882 decided to sponsor a more systematic



On a visit to England in 1880, Adams Earl (above) and his son-in-law, Charles B. Stuart, purchased Hereford cattle which became the foundation herd for Shadeland Farm. Earl's interest in the breed was stimulated by the higher price it brought on the Chicago market.

means of educating farmers by what were called Farmers' Institutes. The first was held at Columbus in March 1882. The Farmers' Institutes seemingly had only tentative impact until W. C. Latta of Purdue University was placed in charge of organizing meetings and speakers in 1879. A person of great religious devotion and energy, Latta tended to equate agricultural improvement with spiritual zeal. Somehow he managed to carry out his teaching assignments and research projects at Purdue and spread Farmers' Institutes throughout the state. By 1893, four years after taking charge, Latta offered institutes in every county in Indiana. What is perhaps more remarkable, is the fact that he was given only \$5,000 annually to pay for speakers, rental of halls, printing, and other expenses.¹³

The format of a typical Farmers' Institute stressed practical subjects or those of immediate concern to farmers. Latta began sending out speakers in the late fall and the meetings continued until spring. Most meetings took place in county seats and lasted two days. After reading their papers, speakers were asked questions and participated in group discussions. Two aspects of the meetings seem praticularly remarkable. First, Latta hired several women lecturers who spoke on such topics as home improvement, family life, and the role of women in agriculture. Secondly, many of the speakers - both men and women - were militant agrarian spokesmen. Particularly during the Alliance-Populist crusade of the 1890s, institute lecturers tended to criticize business monopolies, to demand more democratic government, and to attack anyone who hinted that farmers were socially inferior. They were equally troubled about young people leaving the farm for the city and how this problem might be relieved. The Farmers' Institutes responded to farmers' needs for better agricultural methods and a justification for his way of life.



One good man could cradle between one and two acres of wheat per day. The yield per acre around 1890 was about 18 bushels of wheat in contrast to today's yield of 45 to 50 bushels-per acre. (Illustration from Frontier Living by Edwin Tunis, copyright (c) 1961, used with permission of Thomas Y. Crowell Company, Inc., publisher.)

A Part of the Corn Belt

An associate professor of history at Purdue University, Donald L. Parman received his doctorate from the University of Oklahoma. At Purdue, his specialties are the American West and American Indian history. His book, *The Navajos and the New Deal*, which covers the period from 1933 to 1942, was published in 1976.

Horace Paarlberg, Purdue University's farm director, was an accredited farm manager with Farmcraft Service, Inc. He operates his own farm in Tippecanoe County.

By 1900 the patterns of Tippecanoe County agriculture had become settled. The discussions about exotic new crops and wondrous machines of Ellsworth's day were no longer heard. Corn became the most important crop and repeatedly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the county led or ranked near first in corn production in Indiana. Much of the crop was fed to hogs and cattle raised on the farms. Most farm units were family operated and were relatively small, but sought commercial gain rather than mere subsistence. The stubborn obstacles which hampered early agriculture were largely relieved through drainage, railroads, and better credit facilities. The Tippecanoe County farmer, in sum, had by 1900 become a fixed part of the Corn Belt which extended from Ohio to eastern Nebraska. The value system which they developed remains an influence upon the habits and attitudes of our community today.

FOOTNOTES

¹Sarah Murdock Crockett, Old Days and New in Tippecanoe (Lafayette, 1924), 27-28.

²Lafayette Free Press, April 17, 1835, 3.

³Annual Report of State Board of Agriculture, 1881 (Indianapolis, 1882), 97-98.

⁴Crocket, Old Days and New, 44; Paul Gates, "Hoosier Cattle Kings," Indiana Magazine of History, LIV (March, 1948), 4.

Fin 1850 the county had 19,377 residents; in 1860, 25,726 residents; and in 1870, 33,515 residents. Some indication of the importance of marketing access and obstacles of opening up prairie lands can be gained by comparing these statistics with those of Benton and White counties. White County listed 1,832 residents in 1840; 4,761 in 1850; 8,258 in 1860; and 10,554 in 1870. Benton County had no census returns in 1840 and only 1,144 in 1850; 2,809 in 1860; and 5,615 in 1870. See Annual Report of State Board of Agriculture, 1872 (Indianapolis, 1873), 232-33.

61850 Manuscript Census, Tippecanoe County Historical Museum.

⁷Paul Gates, "Land Policy and Tenancy," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXV (March, 1939), 21.

⁸Kingman Brothers, Combination Atlas Map of Tippecanoe County (n.p., 1878), passim.

9Ibid.

¹⁰Annual Report of State Board of Agriculture, 1853 (Indianapolis, 1854), 280-97.

11 Ibid., 1886, 329.

¹²R. P. DeHart, Past and Present in Tippecanoe County, I (Indianapolis, 1909), 347-48.

¹³Annual Report of State Board of Agriculture, 1892-1893 (Indianapolis, 1893), 465-71.