

## ADDENDA

### LAND OWNERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

A century or two ago we disposed of our lands as though they were a curse—something to be gotten rid of as quickly as possible. Millions of acres were given away, millions more were sold at the rate of 16¢ an acre—\$10.00 for a 640 acre tract. Later the price was raised to \$1.25 an acre, and vast areas were disposed of at this figure. In addition to lands legally disposed of at these figures, millions of other acres were lost through forgery and fraudulent claims.

Today there is no free land in the United States where a man may go to make a home, though our population averages but 42 to the square mile. President F. D. Roosevelt by two proclamations, one in November, 1934, and one in January, 1935, withdrew from homestead entry the last vestige of our public domain.

According to a report from the Department of Commerce and Labor, the United States made land grants to the railroads amounting to 190,000,000 acres, about one-tenth of the area of the United States. These were the Federal grants; in addition several of the states made grants to the railroads, which, combined, totaled an equal amount.

The Northern Pacific Railroad, at the time the report was made, had 47,000,000 acres on its main lines and 43,000,000 acres more on its branch lines, nearly 4,000,000 of it in timber lands.

The holdings of the Southern Pacific system included colossal timber resources which had come into its possession as land grants from the public domain. In almost the entire strip of territory 60 miles wide by 683 miles long, from Portland to Sacramento, this railroad was the dominating owner for both the timber and the land—the largest single timber holding in the United States. In addition to this the Southern Pacific owned also 650,000 acres in Southern California, much of it valuable oil property.

Other railroads likewise held enormous tracts, the combined holdings of three of them being sufficient to give fifteen acres to each adult male in the nine states in which these lands were situated.

Since these grants were made the railroads have sold considerable portions of their holdings, but it is estimated that they still hold over 200,000,000 acres, one-tenth of the country, the greater part of which is unused. When making its grants the Federal Government imposed the condition that the roads must be built within a specified time, otherwise the grants would lapse and the land again become public property. Though many railroads failed to comply with this condition, the lands in question have never been reclaimed and a government report, 1930, states: "The railroads are the largest private owners of land held for sale or for lease in the United States."

A report issued by the Bureau of Corporations stated that 1,694 timberland owners held in fee one-twentieth

of the land area of the United States, 105,600,000 acres; sixteen individuals of the 1,694 owned 47,800,000 acres. In the southwest part of the State of Washington, 40% of the timber lands were held by two men.

The greatest land holdings, in area, are found in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and other western states (where, in many instances, vast estates of from 500,000 to 1,000,000 acres were carved out of the public domain by fraudulent claims). But not all of the great land holdings were reported as being in these states. Fifty-two men held one-third of the State of Florida, chiefly in timber lands; in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, 45% of the land was held by thirty-two persons. In Mississippi, a British corporation held 2,000,000 acres; in Texas the King ranch covers over 1,000,000 acres; in Kansas a British land company owned 300,000 acres; in western New York "the Baron of Geneseo" owned 29 square miles.

The above instances are not meant to present the whole picture. They are only a few, a *very few*, of the sign posts pointing the way we are traveling; sign posts which show how far our country already has gone on a course which results in depriving men of opportunities to work and to keep for themselves what they produce. The government report of June 30, 1930, states: "With practically no available agricultural land in Federal ownership and relatively small acreage of such lands in State ownership, substantially all the remaining 60,000,000 acres of land physically capable of producing crops, but not now so employed, are in private ownership."

As land gravitates into fewer and fewer hands, tenantry must increase. Census reports show that in 1880, 25% of our farms were operated by tenants; by 1920

the percentage had increased to 38.1%. Secretary Wallace, in 1930, before a Committee of the Senate stated: "Today we find that half of our farm lands are operated by tenants, and nearly that large a percentage of our farmers rent all the land they farm."

Are the conditions different in the cities?

From reliable sources we learn that: in New York City thirteen families own nearly one-fifteenth of the assessed value of the land in Manhattan, though there are at least 560,000 families living there, 43,000 times 13. Two thousand people own the major part of the land values of Greater New York, and a greater part of its area. In New York City live about 1,723,000 families, of whom about 1,355,000 are tenants.

Over half of the business center of Chicago is owned by 85 people. The land of Cleveland is held by 86,000 people, less than 10%. One-half of the land value of that city is owned by about 500 people.

Census figures show that the number of tenant families living in any given city is practically always well over 50% of the whole; frequently the percentage is over 75%. These figures are for residence property; figures for the number of tenants using business property probably would differ.

No. 20 Wall Street, New York City, brought the highest price ever paid in this country for a plot of this size. It sold for \$1,220,000, or over \$655 per square foot (this is at the rate of \$28,531,800 an acre). Sixty years before, this property sold at the rate of \$30 per square foot. The property on the southeast corner of Broadway and Wall Street held the record before that. It sold in 1905 for \$558.65 per square foot, or at the rate of \$24,334,790 an acre.

Oil royalties (a form of land rent) in Texas in 1937 amounted to \$105,000,000; the state budget for 1941 was \$32,000,000. (This helps to answer the question sometimes asked as to whether ground rents would be sufficient for the costs of government.)