

## CHAPTER XVI

### AMERICA'S FIRST COLONY

California, the most progressive of our States and a pace-maker in many kinds of democratic legislation, is the first American State to develop the farm colony. She has embodied in her experiment many of the best features of other countries. Legislation was enacted in 1918 appropriating \$250,000 for a land settlement. The act authorized the purchase of not to exceed 10,000 acres of land for the purpose. A commission was appointed, with Professor Elwood Mead, of the University of California, as its chairman. Professor Mead had lived in Australia and was familiar with the land legislation of other countries, as well as of the conditions that have arisen in the United States by reason of our improvident land policy. A tract of 6,000 acres was acquired in a fertile part of the State, and placed

under cultivation. Experts were employed from the State university to divide and direct the colonies. It was later divided into small holdings and placed on the market. The entire settlement, with the exception of a few tracts, was taken up immediately.

The development of the colony, during the first six months of its existence, is described by Professor Mead in the first report of the Commission to the Governor of the State.

"The California Land Settlement Act is significant, the report says, because it eliminates speculation. It aims to create fixed communities by anticipating and providing those things essential to early and enduring success. It is also significant for the manner in which the expert knowledge and practical experience of the State has been mobilized to secure the desired results.

"Another feature is the use it makes of co-operation. The settlers are at the outset brought into close business and social relations. It reproduces the best feature of the New England town meeting as every member of the community has a share in the discussions and planning for the general welfare. This influence in rural life has been lacking in new communities in recent years. In the great movement of people westward, with its profligate disposal of public land, settlement became

migratory and speculative. Every man was expected to look out for himself. Rural neighborhoods became separated into social and economic strata. There was the non-resident landowner; the influential resident landowner, the tenant, aloof and indifferent to community improvements, and, below that, the farm-laborer who had no social status and who in recent years, because of lack of opportunity and social recognition, has migrated into the cities where he could have independence and self-respect, or has degenerated into a hobo.

#### **The Farm-Laborer.**

"At Durham, the scientific colony for the first time in American land-settlement, the farm-laborer who works for wages is recognized as having as useful and valuable part in rural economy as the farm-owner. The provisions made for his home are intended to give to his wife and children comfort, independence and self-respect. In other words, the things that help create character and sustain patriotism. The farm-laborer's homes already built are one of the most attractive features of the settlement, and when the colony members gather together, as they do, to discuss matters that affect the progress of the settlement, or to arrange for co-operative buying and selling, the farm-laborer and his family are active and respected members of the meetings."

**Objects of the Colony.**

The California Land Settlement Act aims to promote agricultural development, and the ownership of farms by their cultivators, by—

1. Lessening the expense of subdivision and settlement of large estates.
2. Providing the money or credit needed to improve and equip farms.
3. Reducing the cost of farm-buildings and other permanent improvements by the purchase of material at wholesale and for cash.
4. Giving beginners practical advice about farming operations, and thus preventing costly mistakes and the waste of money and time.
5. Making farming more profitable and attractive by the creation of co-operative organization, and thus bringing neighborhoods into closer social and business relations.
6. Creating better living conditions for farm-laborers and their families.

The limit of this demonstration was fixed at 10,000 acres. It might be confined to one locality. It could not profitably include more than two localities because the Act contemplates group or community settlement and

because overhead expenses are increased with each settlement. The board decided that the demonstration would be more instructive if made in two localities.

**Review of Board's Operations.**

The board was appointed in August, 1917, and organized at Berkeley on the last day of that month. Landowners were notified that it was ready to purchase from 4,000 to 6,000 acres of farm-land suited to intensive cultivation. Dean Thomas F. Hunt, of the College of Agriculture, was asked to advise the board regarding the relative merits of the different tracts offered, and he delegated the examination of these lands to Professor C. F. Shaw, professor of soil technology of the University of California. Forty tracts located in all sections of the State, from Modoc County to Imperial, were examined. A considerable number were well suited to the board's purpose, and Professor Shaw was asked to indicate the three most desirable tracts, and these three were, at the conclusion of the investigation, inspected by Dean Hunt and the board. . . . The result was the purchase of the tract now known as

the State Land Settlement at Durham, Butte County, California.

**Preliminary Investigations to Insure Success of the Enterprise.**

Before the land was purchased, the board drew largely on the technical experience of the university and other public authorities in gathering information about conditions which would affect the health and success of the proposed community. Frank Adams, professor of irrigation investigation in the State University, advised the board regarding the suitability of the land for irrigation and the cost of constructing irrigation works. Professor W. B. Herms reported on health conditions, and advised the creation of a mosquito abatement district to counteract any possible ill effects of irrigation. The district has been created. The chairman of the State Water Commission reported that the water-supply was adequate. The supervisors of Butte County and the water-users from Butte Creek co-operated with the board in settling by agreement, the rights to water for irrigation from Butte Creek, thus ending a long and costly

litigation over these rights, and the attorney-general made the necessary investigations of titles of the land and of rights to water, to insure the legality of the proposed transfer.

These various investigations and the settlement of water-rights took time, and it was not until May 7, 1918, that all of the preliminaries had been completed and the land finally transferred to the State. Through the assistance of the Bureau of Good Roads and Rural Engineering, United States Department of Agriculture, a contour map of the property was made before the final transfer and plans for the irrigation system based on this had been prepared. The land was subdivided while the arrangements for the transfer of the property were being completed and a large acreage was levelled and seeded. The board was able, therefore, without delay, to offer settlers farms on which crops were growing and on which a considerable area had been made ready for irrigation. Some of the land was leased, but the available land was, on May 15, 1918, offered for settlement under the following conditions:

**Method of Payment.**

Settlers were to pay 5 per cent. of the cost of the land and 40 per cent. of the cost of the improvements at the time of purchase, the remainder of the purchase price to extend over a period of twenty years with interest at the rate of 5 per cent. per annum. Payments on principal and interest to be made semi-annually in accord with the amortization table of the Federal Farm Loan Board, the settler to receive a contract of purchase which set forth the conditions of payment and the obligation he assumed, deed to the land to be given when payments were completed.

The ditching and levelling of land were treated as permanent improvements and the settler paid 40 per cent. of the cost. Ploughing and seeding of land to grain was regarded as temporary improvements and the settler paid the cost in cash.

Settlers who intended to have live stock were required to form a co-operative stock-breeders' association and agree to have nothing but pure-bred sires in the settlement, the board agreeing to extend aid in the purchase of these if proved necessary.



No settler who had less than \$1,500 capital, or a working equipment of implements or live stock the equivalent of such capital, was regarded as eligible to purchase a farm, and settlers were advised that \$2,500 to \$3,000 was a better sum for those contemplating the purchase of a farm allotment comprising 40 acres or more.

There were no requirements as to capital on the part of farm-laborers. It was expected that the savings from wages would be sufficient to meet the payments, as these would be less than the rental of a house in town.

**General Conditions Required by the Land Settlement Act.**

Lands must be sold either as farm allotments, each of which shall have a value not exceeding, without improvements, fifteen thousand (\$15,000) dollars, or as farm-laborer's allotments, each of which shall have a value not exceeding, without improvements, four hundred (\$400) dollars.

Applicants must be citizens of the United States, or have declared their intention to become citizens.

The State Land Settlement Board reserves the right to reject any or all applications it may see fit to reject.

Settlers must be prepared to enter within six (6) months, upon actual occupation of the land acquired.

No more than one farm allotment or farm-laborer's allotment shall be sold to any one person.

The repayment of loans, which may by the board be made to settlers on live stock or implements may extend over a period of five (5) years.

Every contract entered into between the board and an approved purchaser shall contain, among other things, provisions that the purchaser shall cultivate the land in a manner to be approved by the board and shall keep in good order and repair all buildings, fences, and other permanent improvements situated on his allotment, reasonable wear and tear and damage by fire excepted.

Each settler shall, if required, insure and keep insured against fire all buildings on his allotment, the policies therefor to be made out in favor of the board, and to be such amount

or amounts and in such insurance companies as may be prescribed by the board.

No allotment sold under the provisions of this act shall be transferred, assigned, mortgaged or sublet, in whole or in part, within five (5) years after the date of such contract, without the consent of the board given in writing.

At the expiration of five (5) years after the purchase of an allotment, if the board is satisfied that all covenants and conditions of the contract covering such allotment purchase have been complied with, the purchaser may, with the written consent of the board, transfer, assign, mortgage, sublet, or part with the possession of the whole or any part of the allotment covered by such contract.

In the event of a failure of the settler to comply with any of the terms of his contract of purchase and agreement with the board, the State and the board shall have the right at its option to cancel the said contract of purchase and agreement, and thereupon shall be released from all obligation in law or equity to convey the property, and the settler shall forfeit all right thereto, and all payments there-

tofore made shall be deemed to be rental paid for occupancy.

The failure of the board or the State to exercise any option to cancel for any default shall not be deemed as a waiver of the right to exercise the option to cancel for any default thereafter on the settler's part.

No forfeiture occasioned by default on the part of the settler shall be deemed in any way, or to any extent, to impair the lien and security of the mortgage or trust instrument securing any loan that the board may have made as in the Land Settlement Act provided.

The board shall have the right and power to enter into a contract of purchase for the sale and disposition of any land forfeited, because of default on the part of a settler.

Actual residence on any allotment sold shall commence within six (6) months from the date of the approval of the application, and shall continue for at least eight (8) months in each calendar year for at least ten (10) years from the date of the approval of the said application, unless prevented by illness or some other cause satisfactory to the board; provided, that in case any farm allotment disposed of is re-

sold by the State, the time of residence of the preceding purchaser may in the discretion of the board be credited to the subsequent purchaser.

**Things the Board Desires to See Achieved.**

1. The settlement to become widely and favorably known as the home of one breed of dairy-cattle, one breed of beef-cattle, one breed of hogs, and one or two breeds of sheep.

2. The co-operation of the settlers in buying and selling.

3. The establishment at Durham or on the settlement land of a training-school in agriculture.

4. The erection in the near future of a social hall owned and paid for by settlers.

**Allotment of Land to Settlers, June 15, 1918.**

Although June is not a satisfactory month in which to settle land, there were more than twice as many applicants as farms, there being from 10 to 14 applicants for each of the farms best improved. There were, however, a few farms on which no land had been levelled or planted to crops. Four of these farms were

unapplied for. They will be seeded and again offered to settlers at the opening of the next unit. All of the farm-laborers' allotments were applied for and are now occupied.

*The payments made by settlers, the income from interest and rentals made this investment self-sustaining and reproductive within 60 days after the land had been purchased. The State will receive back all the money advanced with interest. The main duty of the board is, therefore, to promote the success of settlers who show industry and thrift.*

Some of the applicants who failed to secure farms in June, have applied for farms in the unit to be allotted in November, and there are now on file enough applications to fully absorb this unit.

Some of the settlers were unable to get their equipment on the ground in time to harvest their grain-crops; in such cases the board harvested the crop and turned the land over to the settler after harvesting. The areas that were harvested by the board brought it a profit of over \$2,000,000.

The crops above enumerated were nearly all sold, and the money therefor received by

the settler inside of six weeks after the farms were allotted. Much larger acreage returns have since been obtained by settlers from farms on which alfalfa was growing.

**Aid to Settlers in Erection of Houses and Arrangement of Farms.**

Through the co-operation of the State Engineering Department, Mr. R. E. Backus, architect, was detailed to help prepare plans for settlers' houses, and the board employed Mr. M. E. Cook, a farmstead engineer, to prepare plans and specifications and supervise the erection of houses and other farm-buildings and to help settlers plan the grouping of buildings, orchard, garden, and field for the most convenient conduct of farming-operations.

Here is a field of rural planning which has been greatly neglected, and where expert knowledge and experience can be used to the greatest advantage. If nothing had been done for the settlers and each had been left to do these things unaided, there would have been 85 heads of families who would have been compelled to drop their farm-operations, at a period when every day was needed for the harvesting

or planting of crops, and go abroad to find carpenters; to buy lumber and hardware, and induce well-borers and plumbers to come out from town, and attend to their individual needs. Many of these settlers were not familiar with local conditions or prices; they did not know how to buy to advantage; they would have had to buy from people who would not know whether they were good or poor pay, and they would have been under pressure to buy quickly. The result of such conditions would have been delay in planting and harvesting crops and hastily built, poorly planned houses, some of them shacks, an eyesore to their neighbors, and all costing more than they should.

By letting the contracts for wells in groups of 10, buying cement, pipe, fence-posts, fence-wire, and lumber in car-load lots, by buying seed-grain and other equipment co-operatively, this settlement has saved, on the time of its members and on the actual cost of materials secured, fully 25 per cent. of the outlay which would have been inevitable if each settler had worked alone.



**Group Settlement. Reservation for School and a Community Centre.**

A reservation of 22 acres to be used for community purposes has been made. Here it is hoped that arrangements can be made for a vocational school of agriculture. There will be ample room for experimental plots, picnic-grounds, a social hall, and a community warehouse.

The commission has since acquired a second estate which is being opened to settlers under arrangements similar to those described.