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Article Summary: The first settlers of Blackwood Township mistakenly believed that "the rain follows the plow." Drought caused them to mortgage and subsequently lose their property. By 1985 descendants of only two of the original Blackwood families still lived in the township.

Cataloging Information:

Early Settlers: Miles J Abbott, Michael Brennan, Warren Clark, Charley Coburger, Joab Copeland, Angus Crucklaw, Charles Deuter, David Fuller, Oscar Gruver, Dock Gruver, Franklin Hanks, John Heitkamp, John S and Mary Hughes, Ellsworth and Maggie Jeffries, William Keller, Jim Lakin, James and Anna Mansfield, Ezra McKenzie, Brice McMullin, Shaffer McMullin, Donald McNaughton, John Merriman, Charlie Nichols, Richard and Maggie Roberts, Andrew Schielke, Christian Schielke, James Scott, William Shupp, E R (Ed) Smith, J B (Rome) Smith, Joachim and Sophia Walter, Russell and Mary Watts, Samuel Clark West, Jacob Wiggins, Henry Wiswall, William and Anna Wittwer

Settlers' Descendants: Donald Fagerstone, Robert Korell, Homer and Mildred Richter,

Nebraska Place Names: Blackwood Township, Hayes County

Keywords: homestead, preemption, Timber Culture Act (1873-1891), mortgages, foreclosures

Photographs / Images: Table I—Timber Culture Entries; Table II—Preemptions and Commuted Homesteads, Length of Ownership; Table III—Disposition of Homesteads; map of Blackwood Township, 1890, indicating land ownership, churches and schoolhouses; Table IV—Disposition of Mortgages; Table V—Holdings, Resident and Absentee, Blackwood Township, 1890-1907; photo of Blackwood Precinct farm of Warren Clark, May 1, 1902

The Settlement of Blackwood Township, Hayes County, Nebraska, 1878-1907

By Robert D. Clark

Part I: Settler and Speculators

I—The early years of Hayes County were characterized by a rapid increase in population, an exhilarating rise in the sense of good fortune, and a precipitous decline in both, the entire drama played out in three decades, indeed, nearly all of it compressed into 11 years, 1884-1894. Everybody gambled on the future, settlers staking their hard labor and unrelenting purpose against the government grant of land—and the weather, speculators using their cunning to extract profit without labor; lenders putting their money on the line, betting on the labor of others. In 1890 it looked like a good gamble for all of them. The speculators did well. But only a handful of hardy, or lucky, settlers and a few of the men and women from distant places who put down their money remained after two decades to count their gains and losses.

The county, created by the Legislature in 1877, was not organized until late 1884, when appointees of Governor James W. Dawes met to name the county officers and select a board of commissioners, one of whom was John S. Hughes, a 30-year-old homesteader from Blackwood Township. In April, 1885, at the second of two elections, the residents chose the village of Hayes Center as county seat. It boasted a population of 100, had a general merchandise store, a drugstore, an agricultural implements and hardware store, a wagon maker, a physician, two lawyers, and a post office. Miles J. Abbott, one of the lawyers, who was also a printer and land sales agent, had issued the first number of his *Hayes Center News* on the day before the election.¹

Blackwood Township serves well to illustrate the operation of public land policies on the semi-arid plains of Nebraska. Unlike other townships and counties which have been an-

alyzed,² Blackwood lay west of the 100th meridian, it had no railroad grants or agricultural scrip to be sold in large blocks, and all of the land was distributed in tracts of 160 acres or lesser units, or multiples of 40 acres, as homesteads, pre-emptions, and timber culture claims. The settlement of the township tested the question of whether the government's policy resulted in the distribution of land to bona fide settlers and addressed the equally basic question of whether the high plains were suitable for distribution in small tracts to traditional farmers. The answers are not unambiguous. The study begins in 1878 because that is the year the first claims were filed in Blackwood, and it closes in 1907, not simply because that is the end of an era—1903 would have served quite as well—but because in that year a county atlas was issued (republished in 1980) which provides a convenient index to the status of the land holdings.³

The first settlers in the county, few in number, had pushed their way up the Red Willow Creek from Hitchcock County in the late 1860s or early 1870s into what was to become Carrico Township. A half dozen of them filed on homesteads in 1874 and 1875 and six more further down on the Willow in Thornburgh Township in 1878. Several others followed in 1879 and 1880, most of them along the Blackwood Creek, where Russell Watts, a rancher from North Platte, maintained a bull camp for his annual roundup. The abundance of rain in the early 1880s, the assurance of men of "science" and of the land promoters that cultivation of domestic crops would increase the rainfall ("the rain follows the plow"), and the advance of the railroads, with consequent access to markets, prompted men to breach the 100th meridian, considered the western boundary of arable land. By 1890 great numbers of homesteaders with their families, had swept onto the western plains, peopling whole counties, doubling the state's population in the decade.⁴

Only 17 men had taken claims in Blackwood from 1878 through 1883, three of them 40-acre plots. Twice that number, 34, filed in 1884, each on the allotted 160-acre tract. In the rush of 1885 another 57 registered claims, leaving scarcely a fourth of the township in government hands, and all of that save fragments would be taken up by the close of 1890.⁵

The county is mainly upland, dissected and veined by

numerous shallow canyons that widen and deepen as they feed into the waterways. One of the creeks, the Blackwood, dry save in rainy seasons, courses diagonally across the county and across the township that bears its name. Its tributary canyons, narrow and winding, cut into the upland surface of nearly every section in the township.

The soil in 60 percent of the county (in nearly all of Blackwood), is silty loess; in 30 percent of the county it is sandy loam, a reworking of loess and sand. Four percent of the land, lying along the narrow creek and river bottoms, is silty loam deposited by wind and water. The remaining 6 percent is sand, eolian sand the geologists describe it—"sandhills," the early settlers said, a term they applied indiscriminately to the sandy loam and the eolian sands.⁶

The land in Blackwood is for the most part gently sloping with steep grades along the edges of the canyons. The soil varies from light to dark grayish brown. Friable, it crumbles and powders easily in a man's hand. A homesteader standing at the canyon's edge could see the cross section of gray-brown soil, a foot thick, matted with roots of grass, an underlying layer of five feet or more, and beneath that, soil as deep as the eye could penetrate. To Richard Roberts, Warren Clark, Jacob Wiggins, and Henry Wiswall, who had burned and grubbed out stumps and hauled off rock from the fields they had plowed in upstate New York, it must have seemed a miracle of richness. It must, too, have evoked one nagging doubt: Would there be enough rain to produce crops?

But from the first the county and the township prospered. The rains came and wheat, corn, and other crops flourished. It was not only that the rains came in confirmation of the proverb of the rain and the plow, but that the rainfall had "increased remarkably" in each of the four years since 1885 when farming had begun in good earnest. Miles Abbott, in his paper, rechristened the *Hayes County Herald* (and soon to be the *Republican*), exulted: No other county "is better adapted to agricultural pursuits than Hayes County." That was in 1888. The county held its third agricultural fair that fall. Corn sat "enthroned," said the *Hayes County Times*. Not to be outdone in rhapsody, it continued. On the table were long lines of white and gold, "all the most perfect and best qualities." The walls "were festooned with noble stalks with mammoth ears

depending, a most gratifying sight." Two men exhibited corn stalks 14 feet tall and Henry Wiswall took 11 blue ribbons. A month later at the state fair in Lincoln, a Hayes County farmer won first place for wheat and another, Oscar Gruver of Blackwood, first place for oats. It was the third year in a row that Hayes County had won first in both wheat and oats.⁷

In 1888 all of the families in Blackwood lived in sod houses or dugouts, but the men had begun to plaster the interior with fine sand and clay from the canyons. Many of them, perhaps most, had their own wells, dug by hand, 150 to 200 feet deep, and by 1890 windmills were "looming up" all over the Ridge. Jake Wiggins attached a grinder to his pump to grind feed for himself and his neighbors. Oscar Gruver had laid 350 feet of pipe to convey water from the well to a cistern at his house. Three communities had begun to emerge, the most tightly knit in the northeast corner of the township. There, in the spring of 1886, neighbors put up a sod schoolhouse with dirt floor and sod roof and homemade desks and benches, one of the first schoolhouses in the county. By 1890 they built a new and better schoolhouse, still of sod but with wooden floor and manufactured desks and benches. They formed a Methodist society, laid out a cemetery in 1888, built a sod church in 1889, and a grange, also of sod, a year or two later. They placed the buildings at half-mile intervals—school, church, grange, on the road from Culbertson to Hayes Center, and the post office a half mile beyond, just across the line in Logan township. They called their post office Hope, their community Pleasant Ridge. Soon they had a country correspondent who sent items to the two newspapers in Hayes Center, Miles Abbott's *Herald* and the Democratic rival, the *Hayes County Times*. Passersby from elsewhere in the county, noting the dominance of the Methodists, dubbed the neighborhood Methodist Ridge, a name the settlers adopted, and Methodist Ridge it is to this day, nearly a century later.⁸

The other two communities in Blackwood were much less structured. German families, scattered across the southern half of the township, created some sense of community around an Evangelical German Lutheran church, and an adjoining cemetery. But the families were so widely dispersed that their children went to different schools, some of them to a dugout in the southeastern corner, others on the western border to

Houglan school. Non-German families in the Houglan neighborhood organized a Methodist Sunday school and had occasional preaching in the schoolhouse. Neither group had a post office or sufficient sense of identity or command of the English language to prompt a correspondent to represent them in the county papers.⁹

The population, which in 1880 had stood at 115 for the county, probably 21 for the township, had increased in 1890 to 3,953 for the county, 282 for the township. Blackwood, save for Hayes Center which included the village, was the most populous of the townships, but the margin over two others was slight.¹⁰

II—When the county was opened, the prospective settler, seeking title to public lands, had three options: He could homestead, preempt, or file on a timber claim. If he elected to homestead, as the greatest number did, he must reside on the land for five years, build a house or shelter, and cultivate a minimum of 10 acres. He could, with six month's residency, preempt 160 acres at a fee of \$1.25 per acre, \$200 for the total; or, after six months on a homestead, he could "commute to cash," take title by paying \$1.25 per acre, in effect, preempting. And, third, he could file on a timber-culture claim and earn title after eight years, provided he, or someone acting for him, had planted and cultivated 10 acres of trees, the first five acres of which need not be planted until the end of the third year. The enterprising farmer, if he were astute or lucky enough to meet the conditions, could file on two or all three options, thus acquiring a total of 320 or 480 acres.¹¹

The public land policy worked to the advantage of many and made possible the settling of the Plains, including Hayes County and Blackwood Township. But from the outset in Hayes County, as well as elsewhere, the speculator in one or more disguises temporarily thwarted and regularly exacted tribute from the bona fide settler. The first homesteaders in the township took out claims, 40-acre lots, in 1878. Local tradition has it that the first settlers in the township and among the first in the county were Michael Brennan and David Fuller in section 5 and Joab Copeland in section 9. It is unlikely that any one of them ever set foot in the county. All of them had homesteaded previously, Brennan at Boonville, Missouri, Fuller at La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Copeland at

Little Rock, Arkansas, but all had claimed less than the maximum allowed. Under the law they were entitled to add to their holdings from elsewhere in the public domain. We can conjecture that an enterprising dealer in land sales had combed the records to identify homesteaders with such entitlements and then, for a fee, had arranged to add the 40 acres to the homestead of each. They filed on the same day, October 23, 1878, their receipts numbered 827, 828, 829. All received final certificates to title that same day. And six years later, Russell Watts, the cattle rancher, finding the lots strategically located next to his bull camp, bought them in the name of his wife, paying \$125 for each of them.¹²

A more common stratagem for manipulating the law to turn a profit before an actual settler took possession was by subversion of the intent of the Timber Culture Act (in force 1873-1891). The legislation, introduced into Congress by Senator Phineas W. Hitchcock of Nebraska, sought to encourage tree planting on the barren plains with the expectation that the climate would improve, the rains increase, and the farmers have an adequate supply of wood for fuel, fencing, and lumber. The law provided that only one timber claim could be entered in each section, but it permitted men and women to file without residing on the property or, indeed, without living in the county or state. In consequence, it was an open invitation to speculation. Said the US land commissioner of newly opened public lands in 1884, "Every section is immediately entered as a timber claim by some speculators."¹³

Blackwood was, perhaps, too remote from streams and railroads to prompt such a rush of speculators, but timber culture claims were entered rapidly, nonetheless, most of them by speculators. The first were filed in 1879, five in number, followed by five more in 1880, and one in 1881. No more were entered until 1884 when rumors that the county would be organized apparently prompted 16 men to file before the end of the year and six more in early 1885. That brought the total to 33, only one less than the maximum allowed for the township when the two school sections (16 and 36) were excluded. In five instances timber claims were relinquished or canceled and new claims entered on tracts, all or a part of which had not yet been filed upon for any purpose, and in one section two timber claims, each occupying different tracts,

TABLE I—TIMBER CULTURE ENTRIES

	Canceled	Relqd.	Proved	Reentry Proved	Total
First entries	15	19	3	2	39
Second entries	2	11	7	2	22
Subsequent entries	0	6	2	6	14
Totals	17	36	12	10	75

The reentries are homesteads, preemptions, or commutations to cash.

Source: Compiled from US Land Office Records, Nebraska Tract Book, Vol. 81

were canceled and a third entered on a quarter section not previously claimed. In order to keep the data consistent, each of the above instances is defined as a first entry. Thus considered, there were 39 first entry timber culture claims in Blackwood.¹⁴ (See Table I)

Of these 39 claimants, as Table 1 shows, 15 canceled, 19 relinquished, undoubtedly for profit (which, it has been estimated elsewhere in the West, ranged from \$100 to \$500 or more). Three proved up on the title, two canceled and reentered, both as preemptions. Claimants made a second timber culture entry on 23 of the canceled or relinquished tracts; of these 10 were on canceled claims that had again become free government land, 13 on relinquished claims for which the new claimant paid a fee. The percentage of settlers in this second group was much higher than in the first; in consequence, three canceled, 11 relinquished, seven proved up, and two took title by commuting to cash. Ironically, all of the seven who proved up had been forced to purchase relinquished rights. In the 14 subsequent timber culture entries, none canceled, six relinquished, six took title by preempting or changing the entry to homestead, one of whom commuted to cash. All but two of these 14 claimants paid for relinquished rights. One of the tracts passed through the hands of three timber culture claimants, another through five, each taking his profit, we can assume, before legitimate settlers entered them as homesteads.¹⁵

It has been argued, persuasively, that homesteaders, short on funds for the development of their farms, might well have been justified in selling timber-claim rights to secure capital, even though the practice was illegal.¹⁶ Of the 36 relinquished claims in Blackwood, eight might be explained or justified on these grounds. John Hughes, one of the first settlers and one of

the first county commissioners, sold the rights to his tree claim, apparently to raise capital for his horse-breeding enterprise. Warren Clark, a homesteader, filed on a canceled timber claim for his New York brother-in-law, to whom he paid an unrecorded sum, and then traded the tract for the services of a well digger. Another homesteader relinquished his timber claim and shortly thereafter purchased another quarter section for reasons not clear. In the other five cases we know only that men holding both a homestead and a timber claim relinquished the latter and retained the homestead for one to several years; no doubt the sale of the rights to the tree claim gave them some capital for the purchase of equipment or improvement of homesteads. Beyond these eight cases, five settlers held timber claims temporarily for the benefit of some family member to whom they relinquished the rights. One settler not counted in the total, James Scott, trying desperately to survive (in the end he proved to be a permanent settler) filed on a homestead, re-entered it as a tree claim, and then again as a homestead, for the obvious intent of postponing the day when he would gain title and have to pay taxes. Another made the largest profit on his timber claim of any speculator on record in the township. After holding it for six years, meeting, we must assume, the minimum requirements of cultivation and tree planting, he canceled. Six weeks later—no doubt after he heard of a prospective buyer—he preempted the tract for \$200 and within a week sold it for \$1,600. He had previously disposed of his homestead after holding it for a year and commuting to cash. Altogether, 22 of the 36 who relinquished disposed of their timber claims for profit without any investment of the funds in the development of other holdings in the township. Quite clearly in Blackwood the timber culture policy did not serve effectively to get free land into the hands of settlers. But the remarkable fact remains, as Table I shows, that despite the speculator's profit, his exacting of tribute from legitimate settlers, 22 claimants filing on timber claims eventually took title, 12 by meeting the conditions of the act, 10 by reentering the claim as homestead or preemption.¹⁷

III—The right to preempt, to purchase land at \$1.25 per acre, \$200 for a quarter section, was as open to fraudulent practice as the Timber Culture Act. It was the "speculators'

law," the general land commissioner charged in 1875, used largely on the plains, he said, by cattle ranchers. In Blackwood only Russell Watts, the cattle baron—who proved a benevolent neighbor—manipulated the preemption law to protect his range against the encroachment of the homesteaders. He had large holdings in Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, Iowa, and Illinois and had given up the running of his cattle on the free ranges of Hayes County. But he wanted a base for whatever enterprise he continued there. He made his first purchase in Blackwood in November, 1880, 160 acres from Samuel Clark West, who had preempted it without a mortgage only two months earlier. West was a cowboy, 26 years old, who in the 1880 census reported that he had been employed all but one month of the previous year. Watts paid \$402.65 for the tract, a tidy profit for West whose preemption fee was \$200. Six months later, in May, 1881, three more residents of what was to become Blackwood Township went to the Land Office on the same day and put down their \$200 for preemptions, their receipts numbered 431, 432, 433. Two of them, Donald McNaughton, 27, and John Merriman, 23, both cowboys, were unmarried. Angus Crucklaw, 30 and married, and the third in the group, called himself a butcher. McNaughton in later years was to become Watts' foreman, responsible for his great herds and extensive operations. Undoubtedly the others, too, worked for Watts. McNaughton, Merriman, and West, in 1880, lived in the same household or camp, Crucklaw only two households removed on the census-taker's itinerary. Merriman, listing an Iowa address, sold to Watts in less than a year for \$400. Crucklaw sold in two years for \$700, McNaughton after three years for \$650.¹⁸

When Watts added the three 40-acre homesteads in 1884, he owned 760 acres in Blackwood, which a century later would be counted among the smaller farms, but was then the largest holding in the township. It was laid out, not in geometrical squares of 160 acres, but in smaller blocks of 40 to 80 acres, strung along more than three miles of the Blackwood and Little Blackwood creeks, some of the best bottom land in the township.

John Hughes, the other big landholder in the first years after the township was organized, lived in 1880 with his wife Mary

and two children on a homestead in section 5. He had also filed on a timber claim in section 3. He listed his occupation as sheep rancher. He was the first bona fide settler to file in the township, in October, 1879, and the first, in November, 1884, to prove up on his homestead. In the next two years he bought two preemptions of 160 acres each, paying \$400 for one and assuming the \$250 mortgage, \$1,000 for the second, and in 1884 he paid an unrecorded amount for a third. One of his purchases, at least, appears to have been an act of collusion. Alfred Curtis, from whom he bought the land, lived in Adams County, Nebraska. He preempted the property on November 3, 1884 (after in some manner meeting the six months' residency requirement) and sold it to Hughes on the same day. In the meantime, Sophia Hughes, a widow who seems to have been John's mother, had proved up on a homestead adjacent to his.¹⁹

Hughes borrowed heavily on all of his property, \$700 on his homestead, \$1,000 on two tracts, and \$1,000 on the fourth. He raised some money, perhaps \$100-\$200, by selling the rights to his timber claim, and he had a small cash income as commissioner and for his efforts as locator of homesteads for others. He needed the money, apparently, to underwrite his horsebreeding enterprise. To protect that business from his speculations in land he "sold" his homestead, once he had taken title, to his wife Mary and bought two of the preemptions in her name. She promptly transferred title of one of the latter to Sophia, and Sophia, in turn, commuted her homestead to cash and "sold" it to Mary.²⁰

Whatever Hughes' speculations, he was a legitimate settler. He was not only a rancher and a county commissioner but the acknowledged leader of the Democratic Party, president of the County Agricultural Society (which had charge of the annual fair), and a member of the State Agricultural Board. With his homestead and three purchased preemptions he owned 640 acres, and with his mother's commuted homestead controlled 800. He was, said the *Times*, the largest land holder in the county. He, like Russell Watts, had used the preemption law to build his little empire.²¹

Out of a total of 143 first entry claims filed in Blackwood, 29 (20.2 percent) were preemptions. Length of ownership of the property, supported by deed records and an occasional news

TABLE II — PREEMPTIONS AND COMMUTED HOMESTEADS;
LENGTH OF OWNERSHIP

	1-2 yrs.	3-4 yrs.	5 or more yrs.	Totals
Preemptions				
First entries	13	7	9	29
Subsequent entries	5	4	7	16
Totals	18	11	16	45
Commuted Homesteads				
First entries	7	3	15	25
Subsequent entries	1	1	4	6
Totals	8	4	19	31

Source: Compiled from US Land Office Records, Nebraska Tract Book, Vol. 81; Hayes County Deed and Mortgage Records.

report, provides considerable evidence to judge the intent of the preemptor. Thirteen claimants, as seen in Table II, held possession for only one or two years. Ten of them were profiteers. Three were settlers—one transferred title to a relative who resided in the township, and two suffered foreclosure, one remaining in residence on his homestead, the other fleeing from his debts and suffering confiscation of his chattels. Of the seven who held title for three or four years, three clearly sold for profit, one sold to develop other enterprises, and three lost their property but remained in the township. In summary, 16 of the 29 entry preemptors appear to have been well intended settlers. (See Table II)

In subsequent entries 16 preemptors filed on canceled or relinquished claims. Four of them were clearly speculators, three of whom sold in the first year, the fourth in the third year to a member of her family who promptly disposed of the lot for profit. Ten of the second entry claimants were settlers, seven of whom held title for six years or more, two who began eagerly enough but who, with the restlessness of the times, moved on in two and four years. One well intended and well-liked settler, unable to manage his debts, had his mortgage foreclosed and his property sold by the sheriff.²²

In summary, 45 men and women preempted claims, 19 of whom (42 percent) were profiteers, speculators. But 26 of the total number (58 percent) were settlers. Speculating on

preemptions was a serious problem in Blackwood Township for which a considerable number of settlers paid a price, but it took a lesser toll than in many counties, and it fell short of the worst fears of the commissioners of public lands.

Homesteaders, the most numerous claimants in Blackwood, accounted for 75 of the 143 first entries but, with money easy to borrow and the need of capital for development, one-third of them elected to commute to cash. To commute was in effect to preempt, it was to purchase the homestead after six months' residency at the preemption fee of \$1.25 per acre, \$200 for a quarter section of 160 acres. The land commissioners charged on numerous occasions, and with substantial evidence to prove their point, that commuters were more interested in selling their homesteads than in farming them, that great numbers were subverting the intent of Congress to put free land into the hands of settlers.²³

What then of Blackwood? Did the homesteaders commute to make a quick sale and a ready profit? Or did they seek title to the land so that they could mortgage it to pay for improvements—a house or a windmill—or to buy livestock and equipment? We cannot answer the question of what they did with the money they borrowed, but the great majority of them did not commute to sell.

Twenty-five first entry homesteaders and six who entered on relinquished or abandoned claims, 31 altogether (Table II), elected to commute. Of these 31 commuters, eight were on the land for a short period, from three months to two years. But four of the eight sold to members of their family who were long-term residents of the township. It might be said that the four hardly acted within the strict intent of the law, but they did get the land into the hands of settlers, probably with little or no cost. One of the eight sold to cover indebtedness but remained with her husband on another tract; three acted with what appears to have been a clear intent to speculate. Four of the commuters were on the land only three or four years; two of them apparently began in good faith but were restless, one selling to her family, another to cover his debts. But more than 60 percent, 19 of the 31 who commuted, remained on the land for periods ranging from five years to one or more decades, and they left for reasons that were hardly voluntary. In Blackwood the commutation clause benefited the settler.²⁴

TABLE III — DISPOSITION OF HOMESTEADS

	Cancl'd.	<i>Entries</i>		Comtd.	Prvd.	Totals
		Relqd.				
First entries	16	5		25	29	75
Subsequent entries	1	5		6	16	28
Totals	17	10		31	45	103

	Sold 1-2 yrs.	<i>After Title</i>		Totals
		Sold 3-4 yrs.	Retd. 5 or more yrs.	
First entries	0	1	28	29
Subsequent entries	2	2	12	16
Totals	2	3	40	45

Source: Compiled from US Land Office Records, Nebraska Tract Book, Vol. 81, and Hayes County Deed Records.

In the township there were (Table III) 75 first entry homesteaders, 25 of whom commuted to cash. Most of the remaining 50 showed even less disposition to speculate than did those who commuted, but there were a few gamblers among them. Five relinquished their rights in the first six months, before they were required by law to settle on the property. That strongly suggests that some or all of them had no intent to homestead but had, as was a common practice with the timber claim, filed to hold the land until they could collect a fee from a settler.

The 16 who canceled tell in the meagre record that survives quite a different story. One gave up a few days before the end of his first year, another after a year and a half, two just before the end of their second year. The majority held on to their claims two and a half or three years, three for more than four years, one for five. The median tenure for those who canceled was two years and six months. That was half of the time required to prove up and take title. We can guess that the one who retained his provisional title for five years had abandoned his farm long before the land office canceled his registration. We know that one man, Ezra McKenzie on Methodist Ridge, was sick, and his wife too. She died, leaving him with small children to care for. Ezra set aside two acres in the corner of his homestead for a cemetery and church. But the burden was

too great. He gave up, without searching for someone to buy out his rights, and died a short time later. James Mansfield, also on Methodist Ridge, despaired when his wife abandoned him. She took their small daughter with her and left their 10-year-old son, Abraham, with his father. Mansfield carried on for six months through spring, summer and fall of 1888, and then canceled his claim without seeking a buyer. But he remained in the neighborhood, boarding out where he could work and Abe could go to school. In two years the boy died, victim of the influenza. But Jim stayed on, filed again on a canceled homestead, married Anna McMullin, member of a stalwart, persevering family that came with the second wave of settlers, and remained on the land for 35 years.

We know nothing about the others who canceled, save their names, the dates they filed, and the location of their tracts. The times were good, the weather favorable. Some may have been ill-fitted for homesteading, some perhaps could not endure the bleak landscape, the treeless plain, or the rough life of the dugout.²⁵

Second and subsequent homestead entries, as Table III shows, resulted in one cancellation, five relinquishments, and 16 who proved up. The cancellation came in the fifth year, after the first dry summer. Of the five who relinquished, three clearly sought the profit, one simply held the property until another member of the family could file on it, and one, who apparently intended to settle and subsequently returned to the township as a short-term tenant, saw a good opportunity to sell his rights for a big profit and took it. After the profit taking was over and the cancellations accounted for, 29 first entry and 16 subsequent entry homesteaders, 45 altogether, proved up, having resided on the land the requisite five years. Add the 31 who commuted and the total is 76 (74 percent) who made entry on homesteads and took title.²⁶

By odd coincidence the 45 who proved up on homesteads is precisely the number of first and second entry preemptors. But there the comparison ends. Seventeen of the 45 preemptors took title and sold for profit; so far as we can determine only three of the homesteaders who made final proof were speculators—and they were the three who had filed in 1878, homesteaders in other states who added 40 acres each to their claims without residing in Hayes County. The four

M. Waldvogel W. J. Francis S. Hughes J. Enyeart J. Mansfield U.S.	J. Pressnall M. Watson M. Hughes M. Hughes M. Hughes U.S.	U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.	P. Grover U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.	H. Roberts R. Roberts R. Roberts R. Roberts R. Roberts	H. Mansfield H. Mansfield H. Mansfield H. Mansfield H. Mansfield	J. Wiggins B. McMullen W. Clark J. Southwell W. McMullen	G. Scott J. Abbott L. McMullen E. Jeffries J. Martin	J. Scott M. Williams M. Martin J. Smith E. Smith	J. Scott E. Driscoll A. Wickwire J. Smith G. Scott
U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.	R. Watts L. Miller A. Jay J. Johnson J. Johnson	U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.	G. McKenzie R. Watts R. Watts R. Watts R. Watts	A. Saling I. Mansfield C. Boyd C. Rodgers C. Coburger	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	J. McKillip J. Mendenhall J. Hughes J. Shupp F. Hanks	H. 1884 H. 1884 H. 1884 H. 1884 H. 1884	M. Nelson B. McInstry W. Amesbury A. Winters H. Walter	A. Nelson A. Winters C. Hacker C. Hacker C. Hacker
G. Ogland M. Lidvogel M. Bearsnes S. inainger A. Cook	P. Reichel A. Schielke C. Schielke J. Mosley G. Warren	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	G. Gray C. Landmark H. Weber H. Dice C. Walter	D. Happler J. McCurdy J. VOSS J. Walter J. Walter	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	E. McKenzie A. Jeffries W. Shupp F. Hanks C. Deuter	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	A. Winters H. Walter H. Walter H. Walter H. Walter	U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.
W. Lakin R. Walker U. Warren J. Lakin	U. Warren F. Rohler J. Moseley M. Runyan	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	F. Whitney U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.	J. Newell H. Stein H. Stein H. Stein H. Stein	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	J. Bailor A. Mieler J. Mieler J. Mieler J. Mieler	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	C. Hacker H. Walter H. Walter H. Walter H. Walter	U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.
J. Lakin J. Lakin J. Lakin J. Lakin	U. Warren M. Runyan M. Runyan M. Runyan	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	J. Rose U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.	F. Croy H. Stein H. Stein H. Stein H. Stein	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	C. Hammond J. Duck J. Duck J. Duck J. Duck	H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885 H. 1885	U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.	U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S. U.S.

Blackwood Township, T5N, R32W, Hayes County, 1890. Compiled from US Land Office Tract Book, Vol. 81, McCook; Hayes County Deed Records. Symbols: † church; ‡ schoolhouse. The nine sections in the northeast corner constitute roughly the Blackwood portion of Methodist Ridge. The churches in sections 11 and 20 and the schoolhouses in sections 14 and 19 are correctly located. The schoolhouse in section 34 indicates only that it stood somewhere in the neighborhood. Land areas are approximate.

homesteaders, two first entry, two second entry, who sold in the first four years after title, had experienced the early years of the dry period, or the drought itself, and had been on the land from six to ten years. They can scarcely be judged speculators. The first entry homesteader, who sold three years after title, appears from other evidence to have been more restless than speculative—but he sold for profit. Count him a speculator and the total is only four out of 45, and three of them with 40-acre claims. When it is remembered that five years after title means a minimum of 10 years on the land, it is clear that these 41 homesteaders were legitimate settlers.

The winnowing out of the gamblers, the restless, and the incompetent had largely taken place by 1890. Some would still come and go, adventurers who expected to find Blackwood better than the impoverished or neglected farm they had left behind, or those who, having tried Hayes County and found it wanting, saw some new dream beckoning them on.

The township was largely settled. Only 4 percent of the land was unclaimed: one quarter section which had been filed on and abandoned and a dozen fragments, six 80-acre tracts, six 40-acre. Settlers who had taken title or would take title possessed 84 percent of the land and so far as we can determine were resident on it. Absentee owners held only 12 percent of the land, Russell Watts chief among them, but he had title to only 760 acres, slightly more than a section.

The first dozen years, the first five of nearly full settlement, had been good. The rains came and the crops were abundant. But the fields of newly turned sod were small and the prices low—corn 25 or 30 cents, even down to 14 or 15 cents a bushel, the country correspondent said, freight rates high, and the cash flow for each farmer precariously small. They lived on hope, the expectation of increasing land values and of better days to come. Some had already learned the corn-hog, corn-cattle formula. Henry Wiswall, president of the Hayes County Agricultural Society and a farmer north of Hayes Center, who had one hog when he settled in 1886 now had 100; Charlie Nichols on Methodist Ridge had 10 head of calves; Warren Clark a “fine lot” of brood sows, some for sale; Jake Wiggins, also on Methodist Ridge, had built “the finest hog house for brood sows in the county,” eight stalls on each side of an alley. Feeding stock was “a good way to dispose of

cheap corn," moralized the Ridge correspondent to Abbott's paper, now the *Republican*.²⁷

Settlers had an increased sense of confidence and well being. Property values, for one thing, had climbed sharply. J. B. (Rome) Smith in 1888 had paid the highest recorded price in the township, \$1,600 for 160 acres of land on Methodist Ridge. The next year his brother, E. R. (Ed) Smith bought an adjacent quarter for \$1,250 and assumed the \$350 mortgage. The two brothers, from Saline County in southeastern Nebraska, induced one of their former neighbors, James Abbott (not related to Miles), to join them.

Meanwhile, John Heitkamp, on the western edge of the township, borrowing on a mechanic's lien, signed an affidavit swearing that his 160 acres, 80 of them improved, were worth \$2,000. Brice McMullin of Huntington County, Pennsylvania, arrived in the fall of 1889 with his wife and daughters to visit their daughter and son-in-law, Maggie and Ellsworth Jeffries, on Methodist Ridge. McMullin, said Miles Abbott, "is a man of considerable means." He liked the county, and homesteaded a tree claim Ellsworth was holding for some member of the family. He built a sod house, bought a new wagon, equipment, and provisions, and in December moved his family into his new home. By February he had put up a windmill and plastered his house, improvements most homesteaders could not make for two or three years or more. And all of this before he had put in his first crop.²⁸

The future had never looked better in Blackwood Township than it did in the spring of 1890. Barney Hofer of the *Hayes County Times* had said all, two years before, in a booster piece meant to match the puffery of Miles Abbott: "The agricultural and producing capacity of the vast Republican valley has long been the wonder of the world." Portions of that valley "would seem in a great measure to be superior to the rest," notably Hayes County which might be "justly termed the agricultural phenomenon of the great divide." March was "terribly windy" in 1890, but in April they had a "glorious rain" on the Ridge.²⁹

Part II: Mortgages, Drought, and Survivors

I—To the first settlers of Blackwood Township, the myth of the rain and the plow had come true. Men cultivated their

fields, and the rain increased year by year. At least Abbott in the *Herald* said it was so, "remarkably," he wrote, "each season for the past four years, during which period drouths and hot winds have been unknown." He could have taken the words directly from the pages of Lawrence Burch's *Nebraska As It Is*, published in 1878, or the sentiment from Professor Samuel Aughey of the University of Nebraska. The "no distant day" of which they had written had arrived. It was apparent that the "whole State as far as its western border," as they had predicted, now had "an abundant rainfall for all the needs of the agriculturalist." Moreover, the rain was timely, falling when the crops needed it.³⁰

A pervasive sense of optimism spread among the people. The assurance of rain and the expectation—or the fact—of rising land values prompted many of them to mortgage their property. Settlers needed the cash to develop their farms, speculators must have it to preempt or commute property for a quick sale. The mortgage was the most ready source of funds, but neither settler nor speculator could mortgage without holding title or, in actual practice, without using borrowed money to purchase title. That is precisely what they did.³¹

Through 1890 claimants had taken title to 96 tracts of land, 44 through preemption, 31 by commuting their homesteads to cash, and 21 by proving up on their homesteads. They had taken out 74 mortgages, 60 of them on preemptions and commuted homesteads, 11 on homesteads to which they had received title, and three on properties they had purchased (two of them by John Hughes). Three settlers who had taken title through 1890 mortgaged their tracts in the first years of the new decade. And from 1891 through 1900, 36 settlers earned titles, 22 on homesteads, one on a preemption, and 13 on timber claims. Having experienced an unprecedentedly dry year before taking title, they were more cautious about encumbering their land. Only 13 of the new patent holders, or purchasers, took out mortgages, six on homesteads (one of them commuted), five on timber claims, and two on property they had purchased. These 13, with the three early title holders who had mortgaged their property after 1890 and the 74 who mortgaged before that date, brought the total for the township to 90 (68 percent) of 132 tracts. Five more would mortgage in the years from 1901 to 1907.³²

The mortgages ranged from \$100 to \$1,000, the median \$450, the average \$467. More than half, 55 percent, clustered in the \$400-\$600 range. For those who preempted or commuted to cash, that provided a margin of \$200-\$400 for equipment or improvement of the farmstead—or that much margin of profit for the speculator. The interest rate ranged from 6 percent (for two contracts) to 10 percent (for 10 contracts). Approximately half (49 percent) stood at 7 percent. We have no data to determine the amount of the commission, over and above the mortgage interest, which was collected by the agent, but Allan Bogue, studying western Kansas for the same years, found it to be about 2 percent.³³

All of the early mortgages ran for five years. Interest payments, 10 in number, due semi-annually, were often secured by a second mortgage. Attached coupons reminded the borrower of the amount due and the date of payment. Typically, the mortgage provided that interest, computed at a lower rate, should increase to 10 percent if the note was not paid when due. And, if the borrower failed to pay interest “the whole sum of money hereby secured shall at the option of the legal holder or holders hereof becomes due and payable at once.”³⁴ It was an option that the lender did not exercise in any case of record in Blackwood.

John Hughes took out the first mortgage in the township in 1884, on his homestead, and another in 1885 on two tracts he had purchased. Twenty-two title holders mortgaged their property in 1886, 15 in 1887, and 31 in 1888 through 1890. Five years from the date of signing the mortgage seemed ample time for repayment.

II—Nothing in the climate bode ill for the township in the fall of 1889. There was not much rain in November and December, some snow and a little rain in January and February, 1890, no appreciable change from the experience of the past five years. It was “terribly windy” in March. The settlers, not apprehensive about the weather but complaining about low prices for produce, in February gathered at Martin’s school to organize a grange. Thirty-one of them, mostly from Methodist Ridge, signed up as charter members.³⁵

The last few days of March were calm, almost windless. The farmers hastily sowed spring wheat. On April 2 the rain came,

“a glorious rain,” and in mid-April, “just lots of rain.” Nearly every farmer on the Ridge began to set out trees, fruit trees chiefly, 50 each for three of them, 30 for another, 120 for the most ambitious. We will soon have “our own fruit,” the Ridge correspondent boasted.³⁶

But the winds returned. What rain fell was intermittent, there was too little of it, and it did not fall at the right time. Only two farmers had wheat tall enough to bind, Warren Clark and Jim Scott, and Warren’s crop, the only one reported, threshed out at 7 bushels to the acre. Rain in June sent the corn “booming skyward” on the Ridge, making the farmers “all happy.” But once again it failed the growing crop, as it had the wheat. Hot winds came in August, searing the bright green of the young leaves, curling, yellowing, withering the edges, scorching the plants, cooking them into dry and lifeless stalks. The reporter advised the farmers to cut their corn for fodder—“let it dry two weeks, then stack it for feed.”³⁷

No mortgages were due in 1890, save John Hughes’, but as the biggest land owner in the county and the leading Democratic politician, he had good credit. The Methodist Ridge reporter admonished the neighbors: “Let us brace up with the thought that next year Hayes County will have the largest crop ever known.” But the Populists that fall elected a county commissioner and in the county swept all but one of the state-wide and district contests.³⁸

The optimistic reporter, however, was right. 1891 was a good year, the wettest on record, and the crops were, indeed, the largest the township and the county had yet known. One farmer threshed out 38 bushels of wheat to the acre on a 45-acre field, another oats at 78 bushels, and a third barley at 60. Henry Wiswall, farming sandy loam in Government Township, harvested 2,523 bushels from 100 acres of wheat and in mid-summer had 70 acres of fine looking corn. Wheat and rye averaged 32 to 35 bushels to the acre in all parts of the county. This was before modern techniques of cultivation, fertilizing, and use of hybrid strains to produce huge yields. Following the drought prices had gone up, doubling for corn. At the State Fair in Lincoln, Hayes County again collected more than its share of premiums: first for spring wheat, second for oats, first for rye, first for beets. Henry Wiswall, now

county commissioner, chairman of the County Agricultural Board and a member of the state board, and frequent contributor of articles on agriculture to the *Republican*, cheered up his neighbors with the thought that they could endure a dry year once in five years, or once in ten, if the last decade were a basis for judgement. And the Populists in eight contests in Hayes County that November, lost all but one.³⁹

Jim Lakin in Blackwood had mortgaged his homestead for \$500, due in 1894, and had a total indebtedness of \$1,100. He paid it all and had 1,000 bushels of corn yet to market. He had three sections, one in adjacent Hitchcock County, and a full grown boy to help farm. So far as the record shows only three others paid up that year: Charley Coburger, a bachelor on Methodist Ridge, and two from the German community, William Keller and William and Anna Wittwer. Keller had mortgaged his homestead in 1888 and the Wittwers had purchased a quarter that Anna's father had mortgaged in 1886. Twenty-three other mortgages were due, three of them past due. Some properties changed hands, some extensions were granted, but all legal action was delayed. No doubt everyone counted on another good year.⁴⁰

1892 was a good year. Wheat was average and the corn was good—"immense" on some farms. Editor Abbott pooh-pooed the idea that there wasn't enough rain west of the 100th meridian, a supposition that had been "proved incorrect." Growing fanciful, he estimated that "where ordinary good farming" had been done the *average* yield in Hayes County for corn was 50 bushels to the acre, wheat 30, oats 50. Nonetheless, prices were low and the farmers grumbled. Henry Wiswall advised them not to be discouraged because the price of wheat was low. "It is sure to do better sometime." He urged them to diversify. If they raised "a good deal of everything" they would "be sure to hit something." The Republicans again carried the county but the Populists elected the county attorney and rallied a majority for the state senator, who was elected by the district.⁴¹

III—The drought came in 1894. The mood of the people that spring was ambivalent ranging from hope to despair. The first rains came in March, "showers of blessing," Abbott wrote, calling up the hymn he had learned in his preacher-

father's church. Then a northwester drove in a two-day blizzard—moisture. Everyone on Methodist Ridge was "happy," said the correspondent. The whole county came alive. Henry Wiswall and his son put in 160 acres of wheat, a farmer on the Ridge 150 acres. Men sowed spring wheat, plowed for corn, set out berries and more fruit trees. But the winds began to blow, unceasingly. Abbott wise-cracked: "The dust of the earth, from which you were originally manufactured, has been renewing relationship for some time." Homesteaders began to give up. In May a "constant stream" of white-covered wagons flowed across the country, bound eastward.⁴²

In early summer there was a brief moment of hope. Rain fell on June 14, an inch and a half in Hayes Center, two inches in some precincts. "The long drought is broken," Abbott exclaimed, and the correspondent on Methodist Ridge reported that faces had "broadened" to a "cheerful smile." The spring wheat grew tall enough to make good pasture, and corn sprouted and with July showers grew tall and sturdy, promising a good yield.⁴³

When the hot winds struck Hayes County in August no country correspondent, not Abbott himself, had the heart or the words to describe the disaster. "King corn is dead and his subjects demoralized," said a country correspondent. A reporter for *Harper's Weekly*, traveling through the western counties of the state, heard the story from the people: "Wind! Resistless, never-ceasing, dry and penetrating, hot as from the bowels of a volcano."⁴⁴

There were no crops, no small grain, no corn, very little fodder, only, said one correspondent wryly, half a crop of thistles. Only one farmer in the Eddy district threshed his wheat—average, "nearly 1 bushel to the acre." Farmers on the ridge hauled their stock to the market, whatever the price. More people joined the exodus, some temporarily, Henry Wiswall among them, hunting jobs and food until the rain came. Some left permanently, including Oscar Gruver—able men, Abbott wrote, the county can "illegally afford to lose." Ten thousand people, it was said, left western Nebraska that summer. The Republicans swept the county that fall, winning majorities in all 15 state-wide and three county contests. The Land Office, seeking to ameliorate the problem, granted extensions to those who left their farms to hunt for work but who intended to return.⁴⁵

At the first of the new year, Abbott, chastened, summed it up: "Last year these people [of Hayes County] put in 29,163 acres of corn, 18,656 acres of wheat, 1,882 acres of oats, 637 acres of barley, 552 acres of potatoes, and raised nothing." The organization of a relief program, private and state, the solicitation of aid, and the distribution of goods to the needy is an heroic tale. It is enough to say that more prosperous families, communities, churches, fraternal orders, from all over the Midwest, the East and the South, rallied to send food and clothing. Late in March, 1895, the Legislature appropriated funds to purchase feed for the horses and seed for the farmers to sow their fields. The allotment for Hayes County, Abbott thought, should "fix the farmers for seed." He added: "If the rain will only come everybody will soon be on their feet again."⁴⁶

The rain was adequate in 1895 but 1896, a year of great hope and of plentiful rain in much of the state, turned into disaster for Hayes County. A short hot spell in May damaged the wheat, and a hot dry wind in June shrivelled the grain in the husk. Rains came, two or three inches in early July. On Methodist Ridge, the reporter boasted, it grew so rapidly and so tall that farmers hurried to complete their plowing before they got lost in the field. But temperatures soared the first week in August, and no rains came. The leaves withered, the young ears shrank, the juices cooked out of them, and the farmers once more began to cut corn for fodder. The exodus from the county began anew. This time Henry Wiswall, and a number of settlers from Blackwood, left for good. Abbott mourned Henry. He was "one of the most thorough, up-to-date farmers that Hayes County ever had." For the remainder of the decade there was no more disaster, but there were no more good crop years and mortgages were long past due.⁴⁷

IV—Lenders were slow to foreclose on mortgages, county attorneys reluctant to prosecute, and courts disposed to delay action against farmers who lived on mortgaged properties. But in 1892 creditors moved against John Hughes, whose first mortgage had fallen due three years earlier. In the next half dozen years he lost all of his property, four tracts by foreclosure, and one that he deeded to his creditor for \$1.00. He moved his breeding horses to Culbertson, and his wife,

Mary, rallying to the family need, took in boarders. We know nothing more of him, save Abbott's trenchant characterization, some time later, "a wanderer on the face of the earth." Sheriff's sales, beginning with one in 1892, increased to seven in 1893, eight in 1894, and 33 more in inexorable succession through 1905. There were, as Table IV shows, 49 foreclosures on 90 mortgaged properties, 27 of them on the first mortgagor, 16 after the property had changed hands, and six on mortgaged property sold for taxes and not redeemed by either borrower or lender. In addition, prior to prospective legal action, 21 mortgagors "sold" their property and another released half of one tract to satisfy the mortgages and pay the indebtedness. When the 21.5 forfeited titles are added, the total rises to 70.5 (78 percent) of properties lost in consequence of drought, mortgage, speculation, and imprudence. Perhaps it is remarkable, given the severity of the drought, that over 20 percent were able to pay the mortgage and gain release.⁴⁸

The losses were greatest for the 96 settlers who took early title, 74 of whom had mortgaged their property before the dry summer of 1890. Their payments were due in the first years of the new decade. Only five of them, less than 7 percent, paid off the mortgage and retained their property. Ten who had purchased tracts paid the mortgage and secured release, but only three, each of whom also had an unmortgaged tract, continued to live in the township: William Wittwer and James Abbott, who paid off mortgages on quarter sections, and Richard Roberts, who salvaged one-half of the 160 acres he had purchased in his first move to enlarge his holdings.

TABLE IV — DISPOSITION OF MORTGAGES

	Home- steads	Home Comtd.	Pre- Emp.	Timber Claims	Pur- chased	Sub- totals	Totals
Paid and released							19.5
by mortgagor	4	1	2	1	1	9	
by purchaser	1	4	4	0	1.5	10.5	
Foreclosed							49.0
on mortgagor	9	6	9	0	3	27	
on purchaser	0	4	11	1	0	16	
for taxes	0	1	2	2	1	6	
"Sold" to cover	4	10.5	6	1	0		21.5
Totals	18	26.5	34	5	6.5		90.0

Source: Compiled from Hayes County Mortgage and Deed Records.

The 36 settlers who earned title in the 1890s were more cautious about going into debt. Only 13 of them, and three who had received their patents in the earlier decade, took out mortgages. For these 16 the old optimism seemed to die slowly. Given the wet year and bumper crops of 1891, the good year of 1892, and the fair one in 1893, they must have thought with Henry Wiswall that they could endure one dry year in 10. Eleven of the 13 took out mortgages before the drought of 1894. They fared but little better than those who had borrowed in the earlier decade. Four of them paid off the mortgage, two who no longer resided in the township and two of the most successful and permanent of the settlers, Andrew Schielke and Shaffer McMullin. But nine of the 16 suffered foreclosure, and three more signed over their property to pay their debts.

The principal beneficiaries of the mortgage were the 23 title holders who borrowed to preempt or commute to cash and sold to others who assumed the responsibility of paying the mortgage or facing foreclosure. Two who had proved up on homesteads and one on a timber claim likewise borrowed and sold for profit, bringing the total to 26. Some were clearly speculators, some restless settlers who saw an opportunity to make a little money, sold out and moved on. We cannot determine with any certainty what profit these patent holders realized, for we have no adequate records of what expenses they underwent for improvements on the property, but we have sufficient information on 20 to estimate, roughly, that their profits ranged from \$100 to \$1,000, with the median at \$600. That contrasts sharply with the 49 whose mortgages were foreclosed and the 22 who signed over their holding to pay their debts. Most of them lost much more: shattered dreams, a community of friends, a home they tried to build.

Many of the lenders, too, lost heavily, or were left with an abandoned farm of little value. Those who held on for 10 or 15 years, only a half dozen, avoided loss or realized some profit. The others settled for what they could get, 17 selling newly acquired property for the legal fiction price of \$1.00, which does not tell us what their loss was. None of those who took action to foreclose was able to sell at a price sufficient to cover a mortgage that ran as high as \$600-\$800. The law provided that the property owner who first took out the mortgage, and

succeeding owners, each of whom in making the purchase ordinarily assumed the mortgage, was liable for repayment. The published legal notice, announcing impending legal action, named all of the present and former owners. Presumably, their liability extended to any other property or chattels they owned. But no record of court action indicates that they were held responsible for the mortgage beyond the value of the mortgaged land. In the wake of the drought, borrowers and lenders alike were losers.

Of the 22 settlers who did not mortgage their property and who took title through 1890, nine sold for a profit, eight of them to Russell and Mary Watts. The other 13 fared but little better than those who had taken mortgages. Four, after a residency of seven or eight years, abandoned their farms for unpaid taxes; two mortgaged after 1890 and were forced to sell to cover their debts; one retired; and only four were still on the land in 1900. The 23 settlers who earned title from 1891 through 1900 without mortgaging their new property (but 11 of whom already held a mortgage on other property), had a better record of stability. Fifteen were still on their farms in 1900, and three persevered through 1907. The absence of a mortgage, we may conclude, was not decisive in the retention of the land, particularly among those who proved up on their claim before the dry summer of 1890, but it contributed to the stability of those who took title after 1890.

V—1890 had been the high point in the development of Blackwood Township as a community of small farmers, the moment in time when it came closest to representing the idealistic purposes of the federal government in the distribution of land to settlers. Table V shows the degree of apparent success in 1890, the subsequent rapid decline in resident ownership in the next decade, and the rise after the turn of the century of larger land owners, both resident and absentee. Since claimants secured patents for quarter-section tracts (approximately 160 acres, or 40-acre fractions thereof), we can most graphically and clearly exhibit the size and distribution of the holdings by showing them in multiples of a quarter section. The township had available for patent 136 tracts of approximately 160 acres each. Some claimants and purchasers took title to less than a quarter section, others to more. Eighty-

TABLE V—HOLDINGS, RESIDENT AND ABSENTEE, BLACKWOOD TOWNSHIP, 1890-1907

Resident	Number	1890		1895		1900		1907				
		160-acre units	Percent	Number	160-acre units	Percent	Number	160-acre units	Percent			
80 acres	4	2.00		2	1.00	1	0.50	0	0.00			
160	60	60.00		41	41.00	10	10.00	5	5.00			
200-280	4	2.75		1	1.50	0	0.00	2	3.00			
320	18	36.00		13	26.00	7	14.00	3	6.00			
360-400	1	2.50		0	0.00	1	2.50	3	7.25			
480	1	3.00		3	9.00	2	6.00	0	0.00			
560	0	0.00		0	0.00	0	0.00	3	10.50			
640	1	4.00		0	0.00	2	8.00	1	4.00			
720	0	0.00		0	0.00	0	0.00	2	9.00			
900 +	0	0.00		0	0.00	0	0.00	1	10.25			
Totals	89	114.25	84.0	60	78.50	57.7	23	41.00	30.2	20	55.00	40.5
Absentee												
40 acres	1	0.25		1	0.25	1	0.25		0	0.00		
80	1	0.50		3	1.50	7	3.50		6	3.00		
120	0	0.00		3	2.25	2	1.50		2	1.50		
160	9	9.00		34	34.00	67	67.00		38	38.00		
240-280	1	1.75		1	1.50	1	1.75		1	1.50		
320	0	0.00		3	6.00	5	10.00		5	10.00		
440-480	0	0.00		0	0.00	0	0.00		2	5.75		
640	0	0.00		0	0.00	0	0.00		1	4.00		
760	1	4.75		0	0.00	0	0.00		0	0.00		
900 +	0	0.00		1	6.50	1	6.50		2	14.50		
Totals	13	16.25	12.0	46	52.00	38.3	84	90.50	66.5	57	78.25	57.5
Unclaimed												
40 acres	6	1.50		6	1.50	6	1.50		5	1.25		
80	6	3.00		6	3.00	6	3.00		3	1.50		
160	1	1.00		1	1.00	0	0.00		0	0.00		
Totals	13	5.50	4.0	13	5.50	4.0	12	4.50	3.3	8	2.75	2.0
Grand Totals	115	136.0	100.0	119	136.00	100.0	119	136.00	100.0	85	136.00	100.0

Source: Compiled from US Land Office Records, Nebraska Tract Book, Vol. 81; Hayes County Deed and Mortgage Records; Hayes County Atlas, 1907.

nine settlers in 1890, as the first column shows, held title, or would earn title, to 114.25 quarter sections, 84 percent of the available tracts. Sixty of them owned one quarter section (160 acres) only, 18 had two quarter sections (320 acres), one, three quarters (480 acres), and John Hughes and his wife a full section, 640 acres. If we add the quarter section held by his mother, Hughes had control of 800 acres.⁴⁹

Absentee owners, chief among them Russell and Mary Watts with their 760 acres, held only 16.25 quarter sections, 12 percent of the whole. Several small plots of 40 and 80 acres each and one at 160 acres—which had been entered for timber culture and abandoned—all constituting but 4 percent of the township, were still unclaimed. Altogether, there had been a pretty even distribution of land to small, resident settlers, even though some of them, to acquire title, had been forced to pay a penalty to speculators.

In the five years to 1895, which followed the dry year of 1890 and included the drought of 1894, the number of resident owners, as the second column shows, dropped by one-third, from 89 to 60, and from 84 percent of the land to 57.7 percent. The decline in the next five years, through 1900, was even more precipitous, down to 23 resident owners and 30.2 percent of the land in the township.

At the same time, the number of absentee owners rose from 13 in 1890 to 46 in 1895 and 84 in 1900, and from 12 percent of the land in 1890 to 38.8 percent in 1895 and 66.5 percent in 1900. Twelve of the absentee owners in 1900 had once been bona fide settlers who still held title to property (or, in two instances, were in the last years of proving up on a timber culture claim) but who had moved from the township. Five of them faced foreclosure for unpaid mortgages or taxes, one still held the property in 1907, another, the eldest among them, had retired, four, having abandoned their farms, would sell before 1907 for what they could get, one for \$125, two for \$200, one for \$300, one, who held title until 1905, for \$600. Only one of these 12 former residents, Jacob Wiggins, prospered from the farms. He owned two quarter sections in Blackwood, including his homestead, and two in adjacent Logan township (his preemption and timber claim), but he had moved to Culbertson and put tenants on his farms. Finding his rental enterprise profitable, he would in 1902 buy

two more quarter sections in Blackwood. That, however, would be the last of his acquisitions, for he died shortly afterward.⁵⁰

The largest of the absentee owners was Mary Watts, widow of Russell, whose holdings had increased from 760 acres in 1890 to 1,040 in 1900 (4.75 quarter sections to 6.50). The great majority of absentee owners in 1900, 67 in number as the table shows, held only one quarter section, 160 acres. They were investors, many from New York and New England, who had entrusted their funds to land agents and who, for the most part, had acquired the property through foreclosures or forced sale. The number of resident owners in the township continued to decline through 1907. The number of absentee owners also dropped sharply, but the size of the holdings for both absentee and resident owners increased and the percentage of resident ownership, after a 10-year decline, began to rise. Sixty-four settlers in 1890 (72 percent of the whole), claimed title to no more than the standard homestead tract of one quarter section, 160 acres. In 1907 only five of the 20 resident owners had so small a holding. In 1890 only three settlers out of 89 held more than two quarter sections, in 1907 one-half of the resident owners, 10 out of 20, held more than two quarters.⁵¹

VI—Of the 89 settlers resident in Blackwood in 1890, only 17 survived in 1900, and three more who had filed claims through 1892; and of these 20, only 11 survived in 1907. We cannot easily determine why, when others failed or gave up, they, and more particularly the final 11, remained on their farms. Personal factors of good management, aggressiveness, hard work, prudence, seemed to have been freely distributed among both those who succeeded and those who gave up. Indebtedness brought ruin to 78 percent of those who mortgaged their farms, but only 25 percent of those who did not mortgage remained on their claims in 1900, and eight of the 20 still resident in 1900 had taken out mortgages. The size of the holding, likewise, had little to do with survival in Blackwood. Most of the homesteaders were traditional farmers, not equipped with machinery, horses, or manpower to farm large acreages. Of the 25 multiple-tract owners in 1890, only six (24 percent) still retained title and resided on part or all of their land in 1900. In the same period, of the 64 single tract owners 13 (20 percent)

still remained in possession and in residence. By 1900, however, the large acreage farm was well established as the pattern for the future in the township.

The families with German surnames, constituting over one-third (23 out of 60) first entry claimants in the southern half of the township, showed somewhat greater stability than non-German entrants in the same area. Of the 16 who filed on homesteads, 13 took title; that is 81.3 percent, which compares favorably with the 24 non-German claimants, 16 of whom (67 percent) took title. Eighteen of the first entrants with German surnames were resident owners or claimants in 1890, five in 1900, a survival rate slightly above that of the non-German settlers.⁵²

The most important factor in determining long tenure seems to have been the presence or absence of a kinship group. Of the 29 early entry settlers who survived in 1900, only two were without a kinship tie: Warren Clark and William Shupp. Shupp moved to Colorado in 1901 to engage in some unknown enterprise. Clark, after 18 years on his homestead, the longest tenure of any settler without a kinship group, sold out in 1903 to relocate in sandy loam where he could, experience showed him, grow crops in dry years.⁵³

Two of the survivors in 1900 had been in kinship groups which did nothing more than aid in initial settlement: Franklin Hanks, whose cousin came with him but soon abandoned his claim, and William Wittwer, recruited by his wife's father who promptly sold his preemption to his daughter, William's wife, and went back to Chicago. Both men purchased additional property, bringing Hank's total to 320 acres, Wittwer's to 560 acres. One of the strongest and most promising of the kinship groups, the Gruver brothers who had come to the county with their widowed mother in 1884, dispersed in the face of political and economic failure. Oscar, the only one with holdings in Blackwood, sold his preemption when he was elected county superintendent of schools in 1889. Turned Populist, and out of favor with Miles Abbott, he lost in his bid for reelection. His other enterprises likewise failed, and after the drought of 1894 he moved to Missouri. Of the other brothers, only Dock, the youngest, remained. He bought property in Blackwood, farmed, operated a threshing

machine, taught school, was active in the sod church, prospered, and in 1918 entered a bank in Palisade.⁵⁴

Four of the early settlers who survived had been sustained by others of their kin for a decade or more but were left as single families in 1900. All of them but one, James Scott, were gone before 1907. A more successful small kinship group, Joachim and Sophia Walter and their sons, Charles and Herman, emigrants from Germany, settled in Blackwood in 1879. Joachim retired to Hitchcock County before 1900; Charles and Herman remained another half dozen years. Equally supportive were Andrew and Christian Schielke, also from Germany, who homesteaded in 1885 on adjacent claims, and Charles Deuter, Christian's son-in-law, who filed on a homestead near them in 1886. Christian gave up after his mortgage was foreclosed, but Andrew stayed on to become in 1907, with his 640 acres, one of the largest landowners in the township. Charles Deuter, too, mortgaged his homestead and lost it, but in a transaction involving Christian Schielke bought other property and remained in the township, a holder of 560 acres in 1907.⁵⁵

The most stable and successful of the early settlers were members of the two strongest kinship groups: Roberts-Jeffries-McMullins-James M. Mansfield, and the Mansfield family, all of whom remained in Blackwood until their death or retirement. The first to come were Ellsworth Jeffries of Pennsylvania and Richard Roberts, a widower from New York, both of whom filed on homesteads in March, 1885. Ellsworth built his sod house, went back to Pennsylvania to marry his sweetheart, Maggie McMullin, and returned with his bride and his sister, also Maggie. In a short time Richard and Maggie Jeffries met, were married, and Richard was drawn into close association with Ellsworth for cooperative work and family socializing. Ellsworth, picking up a relinquished tree claim, recruited his father-in-law, Brice McMullin, who promptly took over the claim, filing on it as a homestead. In 1890 one of Brice's daughters, Anna, purchased the rights to a homestead and held it for her brother, Shaffer, who arrived and filed on it in 1892. That year Anna married the elder James Mansfield. He had migrated to the county in 1885 with his nephews Harry and John, but after an angry quarrel and a lawsuit had been alienated from them, and his first wife abandoned him. His marriage to Anna brought him into the kinship

group, which was now complete. Only Roberts, who had filed on a tree claim in 1885, held more than one quarter section. He bought an additional quarter in 1889, but was forced to sell half of it to pay the mortgage he had assumed. The others held tight in the decade of dry summers and drought, sustaining each other, attempting no expansion and losing no land. Shaffer in 1900 purchased 160 acres on Blackwood Creek and three years later bought out Warren Clark, bringing his holding to 560 acres. Richard Roberts, in the first year of the new century, bought two quarter sections adjacent to his homestead, giving him 720 acres, after the Mansfield brothers, the largest acreage among the resident owners in the township. Ellsworth Jeffries, stricken at 40 years, died in 1904, Brice McMullin in 1905, his eldest daughter, Anna Mansfield, in 1907. Anna's husband James, one of his orphaned daughters raised by the Shaffer McMullins, remained in the kinship orbit.⁵⁶

The Mansfield brothers, with their parents and sister, were the most successful of the early settlers in Blackwood, if success is measured by the number of acres they controlled. Harry and John emigrated from England in 1885, homesteaded and filed on preemptions, all of which they mortgaged, and after the dry year of 1890 bought at low prices heavily mortgaged abandoned land. Their younger brother, James, came out in 1899, filed on a homestead and a preemption, mortgaging the latter. The parents, John Sr., and Susan, with their daughter Mary, 16, joined them in 1891. The brothers, unable to cope with the dry years and mortgages, lost all of their property save James' homestead on which he had not yet made proof. They continued to farm, Harry and John as tenants, but engaged also in horse raising and trading, an enterprise in which they could cope with dry seasons by moving stock to available grazing land in the northern sandhills. John apparently reached an agreement with his creditors to repossess some of his lost property, for in 1898 by the formal payment of \$1.00 he regained title to his homestead and preemption, "free and clear." He and Harry as partners by astute buying with prices ranging upward from \$25 "and other valuable considerations" for a quarter section, had by 1907 acquired 1,640 acres and were the largest landowners in the township.⁵⁷

The younger James, too, had enlarged his holdings, pur-



Blackwood Precinct farm of Warren Clark, May 1, 1902.

chasing 280 acres in Blackwood and 480 acres in adjacent Hopewell, where he established his residence. In 1898 Mary filed on a homestead, a canceled timber claim near her brothers, and in 1905 purchased another quarter section. John Sr. likewise found a canceled timber claim, which he homesteaded in 1900, and after the law was liberalized added another 80 acres in 1905. The family, save for James, lived together and owned in Blackwood 2,720 acres.⁵⁸

Only 11 settlers from the 1880s and early 1890s survived until 1907, three of them on farms purchased after they had lost their homesteads—Harry and John Mansfield and Charles Deuter; and eight on the land they had homesteaded or preempted, in order of filing—Franklin Hanks, Richard Roberts, Andrew Schielke, William Wittwer, James Scott, James Mansfield the younger, Shaffer McMullin, and the elder James Mansfield.

In 1980 a new atlas was published for Hayes County. The population had dropped from the high of 3,953 in 1890 to 1,356 in 1980, in Blackwood from 282 to 68. The farms for the 19 families in Blackwood averaged about 1200 acres, five times the size for residents in 1890. Farmers now cultivate and harvest their fields with the best of modern equipment: tractors, gang plows and disks, combine harvesters and corn-

pickers, and trucks to haul the produce. And they are skilled in the arts of conservation: contour plowing, terracing, chiseling and stubble mulching, rotation of crops, fertilizing, and some deep-well irrigation. The land that at the turn of the century sold at \$1.25 an acre now brings \$400 to \$600 for dryland and more for irrigated farmlands.⁵⁹

Of the 19 families resident when the new atlas was published, only three could claim ancestry among the first settlers in the township: Mildred Richter, granddaughter of Warren Clark, Donald Fagerstone, grandson of Shaffer McMullen, and Robert Korell, grandson of Franklin Hanks. Mildred—whose father, Earl Clark, had returned to Hayes County in 1928—met and married Homer Richter, a native of the county. Homer fought his way up in the years of drought and depression from tenant to owner, his farm a half dozen miles from Warren Clark's homestead. Don Fagerstone was born across the road from his grandfather's homestead. He now lives on the Blackwood Creek, the place where his mother grew up and the first farm Shaffer bought in 1900 when he began to expand his holdings. Bob Korell, alone among the survivors, owns and farms the place his grandfather filed on a century ago, in 1883. Bob, too, was born in the township, on the farm where his mother was born, and he, too, lives on the Blackwood Creek, his residence on the quarter section his grandfather, Franklin Hanks, bought in 1900. Since the publication of the 1980 atlas, the Richters have retired and moved to Culbertson. Among the descendants, only the Fagerstones and the Korells are still in the township.

NOTES

1. *Hayes County Bicentennial Book* (Hayes Center, Nebraska, ca. 1976), pp. 2-4; reprinted in *Atlas of Hayes County in Nebraska*, compiled by Western Cartographers (South Sioux City, Nebraska, 1980), n.p.; *Hayes County Republican*, May 11, 1983.

2. Arthur F. Bentley, *The Condition of the Western Farmer as Illustrated by the Economic History of a Nebraska Township* (Johns Hopkins University Studies . . . 11th ser. nos. vii, viii; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1893), pp. 7-92; John Arnett Caylor, "The Disposition of the Public Domain in Pierce County, Nebraska" (PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1951); Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1959; Yasuo Okada, *Public Lands and Pioneer Farmers: Gage County, Nebraska, 1850-1900* (Keio University, Tokyo, Japan, 1971).

3. *Atlas of Hayes County*.

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4. *Ibid.*; Nellie Snyder Yost, *Call of the Range* (Denver: Sage Books, c. 1966), pp. 75-77; James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 195-196; Addison Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, Vol. I (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1931), pp. 661-662; Henry Nash Smith's excellent account of the mythology that fostered settlement on the plains is told in "Rain Follows the Plow: The Notion of Increased Rainfall for the Great Plains, 1844-1880," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol 10 (February, 1947), 169-193.
5. United States Land Office Tract Books for Nebraska, Vol. 81, Township T5N, R32W, Records of the Bureau of Land Management, National Archives (Washington, DC), Microfilm.
6. This description is derived from Steven A. Scheinst, *Soil Survey of Hayes County, Nebraska*, USDA Soil Conservation Service, in cooperation with University of Nebraska, Conservation and Survey Division (August, 1982, n.p.), pp. 1-9, and Soil Map Sheets 47, 48, 54, 55.
7. *Hayes County Herald*, September 6, 1888; *Hayes County Times*, September 5, October 3, 1888.
8. *Herald*, August 23, September 6, December 6, 1888; *Hayes County Republican*, April 18, December 12, 1889, January 9, February 13, August 14, 1890; *Times*, May 22, 1890; Warren Clark, Diary, 1879 (which contains entries for September 13, December 21-22, 1886), 1888, 1890; Nellie Clark Rodgers, "A Nebraska Pioneer," manuscript. The first use of Methodist Ridge that I find is by the Hope correspondent in the *Herald*, September 6, 1888.
9. Hellman-Wittwer, Family Records, typescript owned by Harold and Delores Gohl; Conversation with Mrs. Emma Gohl Wittwer, October 12, 1980; *Republican*, July 24, 1890.
10. 11th United States Census, Vol. I (Washington, DC, 1890), p. 229. Population schedule, 1880, reprinted with minor errors, in *Hayes County Bicentennial Book*, pp. 22-23.
11. Benjamin H. Hibbard, *A History of the Public Land Policies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 166, 385-87, 414-415; Addison E. Sheldon, *Land Systems and Land Policies in Nebraska . . . in Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, Vol. XXII (Lincoln, 1936), p. 111.
12. Homer Socolofsky found that ownership of 74% of land available for homesteading in Nebraska was achieved through Homestead or Timber Culture Acts—see "Success and Failure in Nebraska Homesteading," *Agricultural History*, Vol. XLII (January, 1968), 103; *Hayes County Bicentennial Book*, p. 3; Nebraska Tract Books, Vol. 81; Hayes County Deed Records, Vol. I pp. 17, 106, 110.
13. Sheldon, *Land Systems*, pp. 94, 111-112; C. Barron McIntosh, "Use and Abuse of the Timber Culture Act," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. LXV (1975), pp. 335, 360; Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Development* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 468 ff.
14. Nebraska Tract Books, Vol. 81.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Gates, pp. 399-400; Okada, p. 65; Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c. 1963), p. 45.
17. Nebraska Tract Books, Vol. 81; Hayes County Deed Records; Warren Clark, diary, September 29, 1888.
18. Sheldon, *Land Systems*, p. 105, citing the Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, 1875; Yost, pp. 75-77; *Hayes County Centennial Book*, pp. 22-23; Hayes County Deed Records, Vol. I, pp. 30, 104, 105, 112.
19. *Hayes County Centennial Book*; Hayes County Deed Records, vol. I, pp. 34, 152, 187; Mortgage Records, Vol. VI, p. 335.
20. Mortgage Records, Vol. I, pp. 58, 225, Vol. VI, p. 335, Vol. XIII, p. 364; Deed

Records, Vol. I, pp. 144, 153, 187, 457. The fee for relinquishments on timber claims varied from \$25 to several hundred—see Paul Gates, “Homesteading on the High Plains,” *Agricultural History*, Vol. LI (April, 1977), p. 113—but in this instance with preemptions still available at \$200, it was probably \$100 or less. Jules Sandoz asked \$25 for locating a claim in Mari Sandoz, *Sandhill Sundays and Other Recollections* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 5.

21. *Times*, September 5, October 10, 31, 1888.

22. Data on preemptions are taken from the Deed and Mortgage Records.

23. Nebraska Tract Books, Vol. 81; Sheldon, *Land Systems*, p. 109, quoting Noah C. MacFarland, US land commissioner in his report for 1883.

24. Tract Books, *ibid.* One of the speculators mortgaged for \$600 and sold for \$1,600 (Deed Records, Vol. IV, p. 339); another mortgaged for \$450 and sold for \$800 (Deed Records, Vol. X, p. 298); the third mortgaged for \$400 and sold for an amount no longer contained in the record. Some of the deed and mortgage records were destroyed in a courthouse fire (*Times*, May 6, 1891), and only partially restored from private sources to the official record.

25. Tract Books, *ibid.* Warren Clark, Diary, August 26, 1888; Hayes County Court Journal, May, 1888, p. 23; *Times*, January 8, 1890; Rodgers, “A Nebraska Pioneer.”

26. The three who “sold” for profit held temporary title for short periods before relinquishing, one for five months, one for 16 months, one for two years and two weeks. The fourth, who seemed well established in the community, “sold” for \$675. *Republican*, October 9, 1890.

27. *Times*, June 5, 1889; *Republican*, January 30, February 13, April 10, May 8, 29, 1890.

28. Deed Records, Vol. IV, pp. 289, 339, 347; Mechanics’ Liens Record, Vol. I, p. 82; *Republican*, November 24, 1889, January 9, March 20, 1890.

29. *Times*, September 5, 1888; *Republican*, March 27, April 10, 1890.

30. *Herald*, September 6, 1888; L. D. Burch, *Nebraska As It Is . . .* (Chicago: C. S. Burch & Co., 1878), pp. 27-28; Samuel Aughey, *Sketches of the Physical Geography and Geology of Nebraska* (Omaha: Daily Republican Book & Job Offices, 1880), pp. 35, 41-49. The idea of increasing rainfall was pervasive. C. D. Wilbur said in the report of the Nebraska State Horticultural Society for 1878-1879, “The rainfall is steadily increasing westward, following the pioneer farmer and his plow,” cited by Sheldon, *The Land and the People*, p. 49; Everett Dick quotes the editor of the *Chase County Call* as saying, “The rain-fall, once very light is gradually increasing, and as it always increases with the cultivation of the soil and the growth of trees and shrubbery we need have no fear of drouth,” in (Publications, XXVII) *Conquering the Great American Desert: Nebraska* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1975), p. 330.

31. Allan Bogue, *Money at Interest: The Farm Mortgages on the Middle Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), pp. 2-5; The census report for 1890 shows that 33 percent of those who mortgaged their land in Hayes County did so to purchase it and another 49 percent (82 percent total) used the funds to purchase land, make improvements or buy equipment, *11th US Census*, Vol. 12, *Real Estate Mortgages* (Washington, DC, 1895), pp. 284-85.

32. Compiled from Mortgage and Deed Records.

33. Compiled from Mortgage Records; Bogue, *From Prairie to . . .*, pp. 66, 116.

34. Mortgage Records, Vol. XV, p. 1, December 22, 1892.

35. *Republican*, February 27, March 20, 27, 1890; *Times*, April 16, 1890.

36. *Republican*, April 10, 24, 1890.

37. *Ibid.*, June 19, July 24, August 7, 1890.

38. *Ibid.*, August 7, November 6, 1890.

39. *Ibid.*, August 6, September 17, October 22, November 19, 1891; *Times*, June 24, 1891.

40. *Republican*, May 12, 1892; Mortgage Records, Vol. XIII, p. 157, December 2,

1891, Vol. XV, p. 104, January 12, 1893; Deed Records, Vol. XXII, pp. 31, 33, August 9, 1909.

41. *Republican*, August 18, October 13, November 10, 17, December 15, 1892.

42. *Ibid.*, March 10, 17, 24, 31, April 7, 14, 28, May 31, June 7, 1894.

43. *Ibid.*, June 14, 21, July 12, 19, 26, 1894.

44. *Republican*, August 22, 1894; "The Destruction in Nebraska," *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. XXXIX (January 19, 1895), p. 62.

45. *Republican*, June 27, July 12, 19, 26, August 2, 9, 16, 23, October 25, November 8, 1894.

46. *Ibid.*, February 14, April 11, 1895.

47. *Ibid.*, November 15, 1895, June 11, July 9, 16, November 19, 1896; *Times*, December 4, 1895; August 12, 1896.

48. *Republican*, June 26, 1890, September 24, 1894. The data in this section are taken from the Mortgage and Deed Records, *passim*, and specifically, Deed Records, Vol. IV, p. 547, October 15, 1892; Vol. VI, p. 120, June 28, 1893, p. 228, May 10, 1894; Vol. VIII, p. 142, August 5, 1897; Bogue, *Money at Interest*, pp. 18-19, 62-63. In George W. Norris' campaign for district judge in 1895, Abbott praised him for his "leniency," as judge for Red Willow County, towards residents in danger of losing their farms, *Republican*, October 31, 1895.

49. Resident and absentee owners were determined by examination of deed and mortgage records, which frequently give places of residence, and of 12th US Census.

50. Deed Records, Vol. VI, p. 235, June 26, 1903; Vol. IX, p. 116, December 6, 1901; Vol. XII, p. 355, May 3, 1902; Vol. XV, p. 171, July 31, 1905.

51. Deed Records, *passim*. *Hayes County Atlas*, *op. cit.*, republishing *Standard Atlas of Hayes County, Nebraska*, 1907.

52. Tract Books; Deed and Mortgages Records, *passim*; the non-German settlers included at least one immigrant, Christ Landmark of Denmark. James C. Malin, *Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas ...* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1944), p. 133, found that Germans, Swedes, and Bohemians were more stable than native-born Americans. Contrarily, Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community*, pp. 70-71, found the non-English speaking foreign born no more or slightly less stable than the native born.

53. *Times*, June 27, 1901, January 15, March 19, 1903.

54. Mrs. Robert Korell to Robert D. Clark, September 10, 1983; Tract Books; Deed Records, Vol. V, pp. 479-80, September 28, 1901, Vol. XIII, p. 171, July 31, 1905; *Republican*, November 9, 1893, September 20, October 25, 1894, July 29, 1897, April 4, September 5, 1901; *Times*, January 6, April 7, 1897, July 10, 1902; Viron Baxter to Mildred Richter, July 7, 1983.

55. 12th US Census, 1900, Population Schedules for Hayes County, Blackwood Precinct and Hitchcock County, Pleasant Hill Precinct; Deed Record, Vol. VIII, p. 100, August 12, 1896, Vol. IX, p. 153, April 1, 1902, p. 206, January 3, 1903, Vol. XII, p. 242, February 14, 1902; *Atlas*, 1907, *op. cit.*, Blackwood Township.

56. Tract Books; *Hayes County Bicentennial Book*, p. 82; William Bert McMullen, *The McMullen Family Book* (Kansas City, 1953), p. 19. The author uses the spelling, McMullin, which appears most frequently in the public record, for Brice and his children, and McMullen for the generation of the grandchildren; Hayes County Court Journal, May, 1888; *Atlas*, 1907.

57. Conversation with Charles Mansfield, October 13, 1980; Tract Books; *Atlas*, 1907; for these numerous transactions see Hayes County Numerical Index, sections 4, 7, 8, 10, 17, 18, 20, 21.

58. Tract Books; *Atlas*, 1907.

59. *Atlas*, 1907; United States 1980 Census of Population, Vol. I, *Characteristics of Population*, Chapter A, *Number of Inhabitants*, Part 29, *Nebraska* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1981), p. 16. Van Korell, President, First National Bank, Hayes Center, to Robert D. Clark, April 2, 1984.