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Review of *Landlord William Scully* By Homer E. Socolofsky

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Landlord William Scully. By Homer E. Socolofsky. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979. Illustrations, tables, maps, bibliographic essay, notes, and index. 182 pp. \$15.00.

The main concern of this book is with the American holdings of the Irish landowner, William Scully. The story continues virtually to the present time when the American estate of 225,000 acres at Scully's death in 1906 had shrunk but little to 175,000 acres in the hands of his heirs. The report is notable for the wealth of business details uncovered, from which the account is largely fashioned.

One may wonder how different things might have been if Scully's intention to become a resident farmer on his recently acquired land in Illinois in the early 1850s had been realized. Instead, he was long an alien landlord, operating through agents. Until after the Civil War, his American operations were, in effect, carried by his Irish holdings.

Increasing demand for Illinois land, making Scully's investments there profitable, apparently helped make possible extensive acquisitions

in Kansas and Nebraska. Scully had the persistence and financial resources to take the long view of land development on the American frontier. He got in when land was cheap, buying wet prairie in central Illinois, subhumid prairie near the western frontier in Kansas and Nebraska.

William Scully and his agents chose well. Wet prairie land acquired in central Illinois—midway between Chicago and Saint Louis, later to be crossed by rail and eventually drained by ditch and tile—contains some of the most productive farmland in the United States. The fact that much of this land was concentrated in a block permitted the owner to drain the land independently of organized drainage districts. The Marion County, Kansas, holdings fairly early became wheat country. His land in Nebraska, located in Nuckolls and Gage counties, became wheat and corn country, although Socolofsky fails to point this out. Holdings in Bates County, Missouri, were acquired later and at higher cost. Presumably this land was less profitable because Scully did not hold it long.

Scully's operational principles and practices included one-year-renewable leases, cash rent, tenant ownership of above-the-ground improvements, payment of taxes by the tenant, and, in time, requirements of conservational farming. Understandably, Scully's operations aroused much opposition, especially in hard times. We are given only sketchy pictures of what the social and economic effects of the Scully system were, and the book lacks a description of characteristic Scully farms. Socolofsky gives Scully a fairly high mark as a landlord, claiming that the agricultural ladder—tenant to owner-operator—functioned fairly well, even though the tenant could not buy Scully land. The conservational requirements were generally in advance of local practice.

Many changes have taken place since Scully's death in 1906, with some of the heirs becoming local residents. Some flexibility in tenure is reported, with potential tenants competing for leases. The turnover of tenants appears to be low. In some cases, at least, tenants still

own improvements on the land. The number of tenants has shrunk from more than one thousand to fewer than six hundred. A Scully family land dynasty continues. The book concludes that despite the three generations of owners, William Scully's "shadow looms large."

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