

The Fairmont Colony in Martin County Minnesota in the 1870s

by Larry A. McFarlane

SOME STUDENTS OF THE IMMIGRANTS' role in agricultural history believe that recently arrived alien individuals and groups quickly adopted prevailing American farming practices; other researchers argue that in many instances immigrants continued over long time periods to practice farming techniques brought to America from the countries of origin.¹ Thus, in the battle of metaphors scholars may choose between a tossed salad of many contrasting ingredients and a melting pot in which differences dissolve into conformity. In studying individual ethnic groups of immigrants, researchers can compare these two contrasting models to determine which one, if either, best applies to a particular case study.²

In the three decades after the American Civil War many British settlement colonies were founded in various rural locations across the midwestern states.³ Scholars have studied some of these colonies, but as yet have neglected others.⁴ Each of these settlements was in

some way associated with agriculture. However, in only a few instances have researchers made a systematic effort to describe or analyze the farming practices of the British settlers or compare these behaviors to those of their neighbors of American and other nationalities.⁵

One of the little noticed colonies is the English settlement at Fairmont, Martin County, Minnesota, in the 1870s and early 1880s. Some authors have described the colorful social behavior of this group of Britons, but have alluded only superficially to some of their efforts at farming.⁶ This article identifies the agricultural setting in Martin County prior to the arrival of the English colonists. It then describes the founding and growth of the alien settlement, focusing on the agricultural endeavors of the Britons; finally, it analyzes the decline, disappearance, and legacy left behind by the English

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1. Robert P. Swierenga, "Ethnicity and American Agriculture," *Ohio History* 89 (Summer 1980): 323-44; Allan G. Bogue, "The Heirs of James C. Malin: A Grassland Historiography," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1 (Spring 1981): 113-14, 121-22.

2. Such a study need not be limited only to particular ethnic group colonies, but could also be done by studying individuals from a common ethnic background in comparison to the farming practices of their neighbors.

3. Rowland Tappan Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America, 1790-1950* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 107-18, esp. 110, 116; Charlotte J. Erickson, "English," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* ed. Stephan Thernstrom, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 325-29.

4. Jacob Van Der Zee, *The British in Iowa* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1922); Curtis Harnack, *Gentlemen on the Prairie* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1985); Oscar O. Winther, "The English and Kansas, 1865-1890" in *The Frontier Challenge: Responses to the Trans-Mississippi West*, ed. John G. Clark, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1971), 254-66; Blanche M. Taylor, "The English Colonies in Kansas, 1870-1895," *Historical Magazine of the*

Protestant Episcopal Church 41 (March 1972): 17-35; Nyle H. Miller, ed., "An English Runnymede in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 41 (Spring 1975): 22-62, (Summer 1975): 183-224; John L. Harnsberger and Robert P. Wilkins, "New Yeovil, Minnesota: A Northern Pacific Colony in 1873," *Arizona and the West* 12 (Spring 1970): 5-22; Bryn Trecatheric, "Furness Colony in England and Minnesota, 1872-1880," *Minnesota History* 47 (Spring 1980): 16-25.

5. For example see James P. Reed, "The Role of An English Land Company in the Settlement of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota: A Study in Historical Geography," (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska-Omaha, 1974); James L. Forsythe, "Environmental Considerations in the Settlement of Ellis County, Kansas," *Agricultural History* 51 (January 1977): 38-50; James L. Forsythe, "George Grant of Victoria: Man and Myth," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 9 (Autumn 1986): 102-14.

6. Sarah P. Rubenstein, "The British: English, Scots, Welsh, and British Canadians," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, ed. June Drenning Holmquist, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1981), 119; Aletha Marguerite Herwig, "The Settlement and Development of Martin County, 1856-1880," (M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1931), Chap. 5; Newman E. Olson, "An English Colony in the Middle West: A Study of the Fairmont Settlement in Southern Minnesota," (undated typed student paper, copy in Minnesota Historical Society [MHS]); Theodore C. Blegen, *The Land Lies Open* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), 130; *Minnesota: A History of the State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963, 1975), 306; Merrill E. Jarchow, *The Earth Brought Forth: A History of Minnesota Agriculture to 1885* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1949), 256, 299.

immigrant farmers in relation to subsequent land use patterns in the settlement area.

Martin County lies just north of the Iowa state line in south-central Minnesota. Its surface is a moderately level prairie interrupted by seventy natural lakes and numerous streams and marshes; narrow bands of timber surround the wetlands. Settlement began in 1856. The early pioneers spent much of their time hunting, fishing, and trapping the abundant game in the area. The settlers also experimented with subsistence farming by raising small patches of corn, wheat, and potatoes in the fertile black loam soil.⁷ However, thousands of blackbirds that nested in the local marshes ate most of the corn, and wheat growing was limited because of the great distance (as much as one hundred miles) to the nearest railhead.⁸ In these early years many settlers left the county because of poor crops, hard winters (e.g., 1866-1867), and prairie fires. Times improved with an abundant harvest in 1868. By 1870 the railroad was building closer to the county and farmers began raising commercial crops of corn, wheat, and oats. The average value of improved farms rose to ten dollars an acre when it had been closer to five dollars two years earlier. Only marginal land remained locally available for homesteading in 1870, but railroads offered to sell their large holdings for as little as four dollars an acre. The county's population jumped from 1,430 in 1865 to 3,867 in 1870. Of these, 529 persons were foreign born with 97 from England, the second largest group after the Canadians.⁹ During this period of rapid economic and population growth in the early 1870s the first ethnic settlement—the English colony at Fairmont—would be founded.

In 1872, Henry Franklin Shearman a Connecticut lawyer went on a hunting trip to Martin County.¹⁰ He

liked the economic potential of southern Minnesota so much that he purchased twenty-six hundred acres of raw land five miles south of Fairmont for development as a model farm. Shearman also became land sales agent for the Southern Minnesota Railroad Company. Early in 1873 he went to England and founded the American Land Company with offices in London and Liverpool for the sale of railroad lands in Martin County and elsewhere in southern Minnesota. Shearman chose a propitious moment to advertise American frontier farmland in Britain. In 1870, Prime Minister William E. Gladstone's government enacted a reform that required applicants for positions in the civil service to pass competitive examinations. Also in the early 1870s the beginning of the Great Depression in English agriculture was becoming apparent. These two developments induced many families of the landed gentry and urban middle class to seek new opportunities abroad in America and elsewhere for younger sons who failed the civil service tests and whose inheritances seemed threatened by a declining farm sector.¹¹

Anticipating a strategy that would lure young Britishers into ranching on the Great Plains a decade later, in 1873 Shearman published a pamphlet in which he asserted that investors in Martin County lands could make their fortunes within ten years by growing pea (navy) beans. Landowners could avoid any physical labor by hiring all work done by local residents; the young investors could avoid winters in Minnesota by returning to Britain for the social season each year. After becoming wealthy from bean production some Britons might decide to sell their farms for a large capital gain and return permanently to England to live out their lives in relative financial security. In a clever appeal to the Englishmen's addiction to hunting game, Shearman warned prospective land buyers that they might have to guard their crops from the plentiful numbers of wild animals and blackbirds living on Minnesota's frontier. Shearman got the inspiration for his basic crop idea during a visit to Brockport, New York, which was a prosperous rural bean growing center at that time. He began experimenting with raising beans on his own Two Flags model farm in Martin County. He brought over the first young English investors in 1873 and all of them immediately planted beans in the hope of making quick fortunes. Although Shearman sold raw lands for as much as twenty dollars an acre, most of the

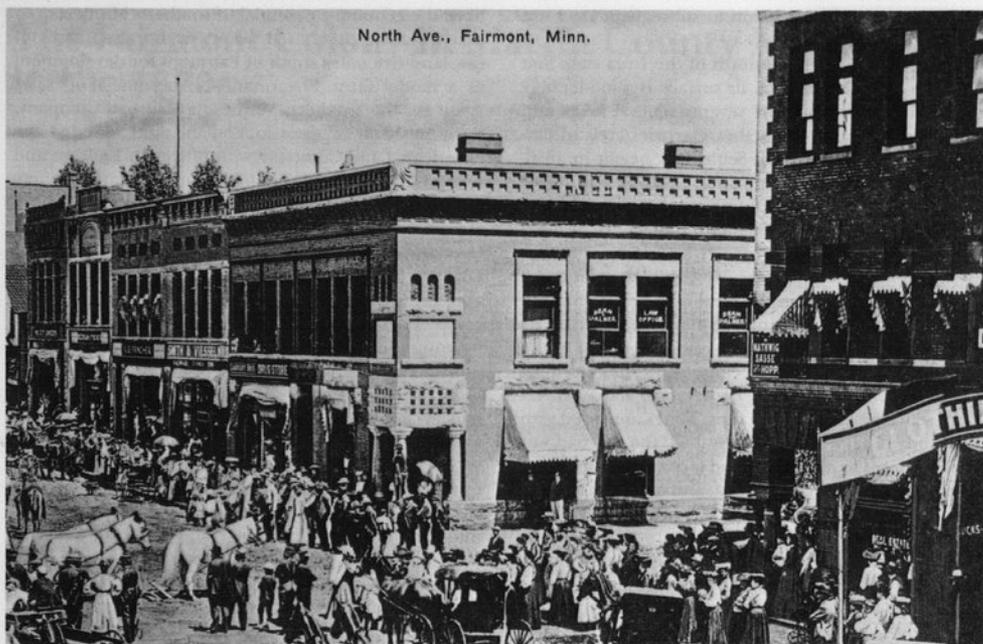
7. Herwig, "Settlement and Development of Martin County," 1-5; Maurice Farrar, *Five Years in Minnesota. Sketches of Life in a Western State* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1880), 73-75. Farmers also put up hay for their horses and oxen and raised small amounts of buckwheat, barley, and sorghum.

8. Timothy Rowley, "The Ordeal of Pioneering," *Minnesota History* 10 (December 1929): 404-6; Henrietta M. Larson, *The Wheat Trade and the Farmer in Minnesota 1858-1900* (New York: Columbia University, 1926), 19-20.

9. Rowley, "Ordeal of Pioneering," 404-6; Herwig, "Settlement and Development of Martin County," 3-5, 48-52, 55, 61; Thomas J. Pressly and William H. Scofield, eds., *Farm Real Estate Values in the United States by Counties, 1850-1959* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), 33; *Statistics on Population: Ninth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 360.

10. Information about Shearman is taken from a number of references in the *Martin County Sentinel*, from the early 1870s. The two most helpful sources are the *Martin County Independent*, October 23, 1926, and *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, June 16, 1930. Shearman was first attracted to Martin County through railroad advertisements in the East.

11. P.J. Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression, 1870-1914* (North Pomfret, VT: David & Charles, 1974), esp. Chap. 3; Emmeline Cohen, *The Growth of the British Civil Service, 1780-1939* (London: Keegan Paul, 1941), *passim*.



Shearman's English colonists settled around the town of Fairmont in Martin County, Minnesota. By the time this picture postcard of Fairmont appeared, ca. 1890, most of the British settlers had left the county.

foreigners apparently did not object to paying such a large markup over the four dollar railroad price because they anticipated quick riches from growing beans and rapidly rising land values. Besides, compared to land prices in England, Shearman's rate was cheap.¹²

Not one of the British investors had been a practical farmer in England. They were either recent college graduates or former army or navy officers. They developed their farms according to the guidelines Shearman provided. Plentifully supplied with money by their families, or in some cases from their own savings, they hired

the plowing and planting done by local farmers and paid cash for this labor and for all products they bought locally. In 1873 alone, over one thousand acres of beans were growing by early June.¹³ Farming on such a large scale contrasted sharply with the local American farmers' practice of breaking only a few acres of new land each year and performing their own labor. Suddenly, on June 18, a cloud of Rocky Mountain locusts descended on Martin County and in one day ate most of the crops. Within three weeks they laid their eggs in the soil and flew away to the east.¹⁴ Undaunted, the Englishmen

12. William H. Budd, *History of Martin County* (Fairmont: The Independent, 1897), 88, 90. A copy of Shearman's first pamphlet has not been found, but a copy of his second edition *Memoranda Concerning Farming in Martin County, Minnesota, U.S.A.* (London: Keeler, Kempell & Keeler, 1875) is in the author's possession. Also Shearman's advertisements for his American Land Company's one hundred thousand acres in southwestern Minnesota appeared in the *Anglo-American Times*, London, England, from October 29, 1875, to May 12, 1876. He offered the lands at £3 (\$14.58) to £4 (\$19.44) an acre and asserted that the "land can be made to pay £8 to £12 per acre with certain crops recently introduced or say a profit of one hundred to two hundred per cent. on the total outlay."

13. Budd, *History of Martin County*, 90. Most information about the colonists' farming activities and individual immigrants is taken from the *Martin County Sentinel*, from various memoirs written by colonists, and from Harry M. Serle's unpublished reminiscences of 145 members of the English colony at Fairmont, ca. 1936 (copy in the Martin County Historical Society, Fairmont).

14. Budd, *History of Martin County*, 90-91; Herwig, "Settlement and Development of Martin County," Chap. 6. Besides specific information in the *Martin County Sentinel* the best general account of the topic is Annette Atkins, *Harvest of Grief: Grasshopper Plagues and Public Assistance in Minnesota, 1873-78* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984).



J. C. Smales (left), shown with a companion identified only as "Dickens," was co-owner of a farm known for its fine racehorses and purebred cattle.

hired their beans replanted, but an early killing frost in October destroyed the second crop. Still undiscouraged, Shearman and several of the Britons returned to England for the winter and recruited a large group of new investor-colonists to come to Fairmont the following season.

In the spring of 1874 a new group of colonists joined others from the previous year and hired the planting of beans on an even larger scale than before. However, during June the locusts which had hatched from eggs in April destroyed the beans and other farmers' corn, potatoes, and timothy. As before, the Englishmen hired the replanting of at least one thousand acres of beans and also tried their luck with about five hundred acres of a local crop, buckwheat. In the fall both crops were harvested, though the yield is not known. The following spring of 1875 saw the arrival of a third installment of colonists, many of whom hired the breaking and planting of their raw land to beans and other crops. In July the locust plague returned, but it was only spotty and far

less damaging in Martin County than during the two previous years. In 1876 additional Britons arrived and opened so much raw land for beans and other crops that additional laborers had to come in from other counties. However, another locust infestation destroyed many of the farmers' maturing plants. After a meager fall harvest, Shearman, in November, obtained the colonists' renewed endorsement which he used to bring over more recruits from England the following spring. In 1877 the locusts' eggs hatched and the young insects devoured many of the crops before flying away in July. The fall harvest brought a fair crop of oats, but the other grains had been severely damaged.¹⁵ As it turned out, the locusts would never again visit Martin County.

In 1878 a few more Englishmen joined the colony. However, unseasonably hot weather caused a partial crop failure. The reduced harvest, combined with falling commodity prices, produced financial losses for many of the colonists and their neighbors. The following spring was very dry and grain did not sprout until late in May; more financial losses resulted from the reduced crops. By this time most Britons had abandoned their efforts to grow beans. In 1878 only 73 acres of beans were harvested with a yield of 602 bushels, only 8.24 bushels an acre in Martin County; there was a further decrease in acreage the next year with 48 acres harvested with a yield of 610 bushels, 12.70 bushels an acre.¹⁶

In addition to raising various crops, the English colonists at Fairmont also used a variety of livestock in their farming operations. They purchased horses locally and trained the beasts for work and riding.¹⁷ Some colonists purchased already established farms from their American neighbors and also acquired the livestock on those places, and one of the Britons was a practicing veterinarian in the colony.¹⁸ The preference of Englishmen for fine livestock should have been evident among the Fairmont colonists and occasional

15. Budd, *History of Martin County*, 92-93, 99-105, 108-9; *Martin County Sentinel*, July 3, 1874, July 30, 1875, January 7, March 31, April 7, December 1, 1876, May 11, July 27, 1877.

16. Commissioner of Statistics, *Statistics of Minnesota for 1879 ... Eleventh Annual Report* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company, 1880), 136; *Statistics of Minnesota for 1880 ... Twelfth Annual Report* (St. Peter: J.K. Moore, State Printer, 1881), 161. By 1876 the colonists were moving away from beans and into production of corn, wheat, oats, and barley. See *Martin County Sentinel*, July 30, 1875, January 7, 21, 1876.

17. Harry M. Serle later recalled that in the 1870s he had helped drive a herd of wild horses from Le Mars, Iowa, to Fairmont for delivery to Capt. Clement Royds, a colonist. Serle stayed on to break the horses and finally settled there permanently. See *Martin County Independent*, November 13, 1926.

18. Sally Archer-Burton, *Your Mother Remembers* (Fairmont: The Town Pump, 1931), 41; Serle, "Ian Turner," unpublished reminiscences.

examples of this interest have been found. J.M. Farrar brought in merino sheep, some cattle, and Poland China hogs from Illinois for his farm. Arthur W. Lyon and his partner J.C. Smales stocked their farm The Lair with fine racehorses and purebred cattle, and Lyon hired a shepherd in Scotland to bring over and care for a flock of purebred sheep on a second farm.¹⁹ Another colonist Kenneth Ffarington Bellairs became so well known that he was asked to write a series of reports on "Sheep Farming in the Northwest" for the *Prairie Farmer* newspaper.²⁰ John Thirwall, Sr., invested in blooded cattle and horses and imported the thoroughbred racing stallion Dudley Mambrin.²¹ Had the colonists known that a market for buying and selling racehorses was developing at that time in the Midwest they might have gone into that business instead of merely using their

fine horses for private races and hunting.²² Nevertheless, some of the colonists exhibited their fine stock at county and state fairs and performed exhibitions of horse racing and fox hunting at these occasions in the hope of interesting Americans in improving their livestock and in cultivating public interest in British sporting events.²³

Besides their efforts at farming, a number of colonists at Fairmont founded various businesses which were related to agriculture. In 1877 three Englishmen organized a cooperative cheese factory in the town. Profits from cheese-making were divided at the end of each season among the shareholders and the farmers who supplied milk at a predesignated price. However, the factory encountered problems such as spoilage, and profits were only meager. In 1880 the members sold the enterprise to a private owner who became successful by

19. *Martin County Sentinel*, January 21, 1876; Budd, *History of Martin County*, 104; Serle, "Sandy Strachan," unpublished reminiscences.

20. Farrar, *Five Years in Minnesota*, 82; *Martin County Sentinel*, September 22, 1876.

21. Herwig, "Settlement and Development of Martin County," 87, 92.

22. Margaret L. Woodward, "The Northwestern Farmer, 1868-1876, A Tale of Paradox," *Agricultural History* 37 (July 1963): 136.

23. *Martin County Sentinel*, September 21, October 12, 1877, April 26, 1878; *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, September 10, 1935; Herwig, "Settlement and Development of Martin County," 92-93, 95-96, 166-68.



Among the English living in Martin County was the Charles Jones family, shown at the family home in about 1890.

purchasing milk at the market price and keeping all profits for himself.²⁴ Other Britons individually operated a brewery, ice house, creamery, hardware store, and a farm implement dealership for brief periods of time. The premier businessman among the colonists was Percy Wollaston who operated a 460-acre farm, a thriving general store (1877-1891), a profitable wind-powered grist mill (1877-1889), and after 1881 the Merchants & Farmers Bank in Fairmont until moving to British Columbia about 1910.²⁵ In 1877 three colonists became partial owners of the Bank of Fairmont and many of their countrymen became depositors or borrowed money from the institution. However, the bank overextended its resources in financing construction of the lavish Occidental Hotel built by two Englishmen in Fairmont and by too much generosity and leniency to other borrowers. Many of the colonists lost heavily with the bank's failure in 1879 and its absorption by the rival Martin County Bank.²⁶

As the British and other settlers came to Martin County in the early 1870s a shortage of farm laborers developed. In 1875, Henry Shearman devised a plan to alleviate the problem.²⁷ He proposed that English families send younger sons in need of a calling to Minnesota to board on farms for three years. In exchange for a suitable fee the farmers would teach the young immigrants the basic skills of American agriculture and pay a basic wage. Upon completion of the training period, during which the apprentices would perform a variety of farm chores, the now seasoned trainees could, with financial aid from their families, acquire farms of their own in the Midwest. Shearman's scheme produced some recruits immediately and for the next seven or eight years a number of young Britons appeared around Fairmont to board with American farmers and even with some of the English colonists.²⁸

After a few years the practice became controversial. Most of the young apprentices had never done hard work before or been farther away from home than at

school. Moreover, many of those sent to America had been discipline problems in England. Their parents hoped that a spartan outdoor life on the farming frontier away from the temptations of the British social season would remold the youths into responsible adults. Predictably, most of the young men quickly learned to hate their new life, rebelled against it, and many of them moved on to other places in America or back to England. Meanwhile, they made trouble for their farm employers (and vice versa) around Fairmont and created controversy in the community with their wild parties and hunting trips. Between 1880 and 1884 opponents of the system attacked Shearman in the press. The promoter replied with a number of articles defending his policy and he even unsuccessfully sued the Edinburgh *Scotsman* newspaper for libel.²⁹ He could not, however, reverse the tide. Too much adverse publicity had already circulated among his client families in Britain and the residents of Martin County also had decided that the young "farm pupils" were more hindrance than help to their employers. By the mid-1880s the experiment had virtually died out around Fairmont.³⁰

A number of factors brought about the decline and disappearance of the English colony at Fairmont. Contemporary accounts of the settlement and memoirs of former colonists all comment on the enormous expense and financial loss caused by the locust infestations of 1873-1877. During the 1870s the colonists also suffered frequent damage or loss of crops from erratic climatic conditions. Moreover, surviving information about Minnesota's farm commodity prices suggests that returns to farmers were low during much of that decade.³¹ Thus, the immigrants spent large sums of their own and their families' money just to survive in a grand manner during those early years. Additional funds were lost through unprofitable investments in local service industries such as the cheese factory and the most severe failure, the Bank of Fairmont in which many of the Britons lost money.

Despite these setbacks the colony continued to expand. The number of British-born settlers in Martin

24. *Martin County Sentinel*, February 23, May 4, 1877; Arthur Reginald Moro, "The English Colony at Fairmont in the Seventies," *Minnesota History* 8 (June 1927): 148.

25. *Memorial Record of the Counties of Faribault, Martin, Watonwan, and Jackson, Minnesota* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1895), 43-44; Farrar, *Five Years in Minnesota*, 82.

26. *Martin County Sentinel*, May 5, 1876, January 31, 1879; Charles Sterling Poppel, *Development of Two Bank Groups in the Central Northwest: A Study in Bank Policy and Organization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), 37-38; Serle, unpublished reminiscences.

27. *Martin County Sentinel*, December 17, 1875; *Martin County Independent*, October 30, 1926; Olson, "An English Colony," 13-14; Herwig, "Settlement and Development of Martin County," 88-89.

28. Serle, unpublished reminiscences; *Martin County's Heritage* (Fairmont: Martin County Extension Home Council, 1974), 3: 47-48.

29. *Martin County Sentinel*, January 7, February 18, May 7, 1881; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, November 7, December 26, 1880.

30. *Martin County Sentinel*, May 6, August 19, 1881. The farm pupil system also declined at the same time in the much larger English settlement colony around Le Mars, Iowa, a few miles southwest of Fairmont. See Harnack, *Gentlemen on the Prairie*, 190-93.

31. Robert E. Marquardt, *Minnesota Agriculture—Prices, 1867-1959* (St. Paul: State-Federal Crop and Livestock Reporting Service and Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Dairy and Food; 1959), 41; Edward Van Dyke Robinson, *Early Economic Conditions and the Development of Agriculture in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Studies in the Social Sciences, No. 3, 1915), 59, 79, 108-260.



Percy Wollaston was perhaps the most successful of Martin County's English settlers. Photographed at the Wollaston farm, Homewood, are Anna Wollaston, Mrs. Percy Wollaston, and Bessie Sinclair.

County grew from 128 in 1875 to 219 in 1880.³² As climatic conditions and commodity prices improved in the 1880s the Britishers gained a second chance for success in Minnesota. However, by that time it was becoming apparent to the older colonists that their dream of quick riches was an illusion. They were increasingly confronted with the distasteful reality that even a modest income in the future was linked to the amount of farm labor they would do themselves instead of hiring it done by others. They would need to remain in Minnesota for more years than originally planned and reduce their number of trips to England as they built up their estates. Many colonists postponed such unhappy choices as long as possible. At this time Shearman's farm pupil

experiment became controversial in part because, like the colonists, the young apprentices rebelled at the prospect of changing their life-styles to include hard physical work. As the prospects for the colony and the apprentice program began to decline in England so too did the flow of British colonists to Martin County. Shearman had gambled all of his own resources on the continued growth of his Minnesota colony. With his bankruptcy and departure from the state in 1881 the colony lost its leading promoter. No other person or group with a British connection came along to replace Shearman. Individual colonists continued to move away. In 1890, 193 persons of English birth still remained in Martin County and 179 were there in 1900.³³

32. *Martin County Sentinel*, April 2, 1880; Budd, *History of Martin County*, 116; U.S. Dept. of Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States: Population, Part 1* (Washington: U.S. Census Office, 1901), 26, 762-63.

33. U.S. Dept. of Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part 1* (Washington: GPO, 1893), 636-37; idem., *Twelfth Census of the United States: Population, Part 1* (Washington: U.S. Census Office, 1901), 26, 762-63; *Martin County Independent*, October 30, 1926; Serle, unpublished reminiscences.

The most obvious legacy of the colony was the small group of English settlers who remained around Fairmont into the early years of the new century. Some of the Britons successfully adapted to their new life as American farmers. For instance, retired sea captain Frederick Wherland and his large family enjoyed a comfortable living on their 160-acre Belvedere Farm near Pierce Lake from their arrival in 1876 until the farm was sold following the captain's death in 1907.³⁴ As farmers other colonists were not so fortunate. Cecil Sharpe lost his 400-acre farm after the locust plague of 1874, but still resided in Fairmont in the 1890s where he was cashier in his father-in-law's (Wollaston) Merchants & Farmers Bank in the 1890s. Frederick A.B. Paterson purchased a farm in 1875, but sold it in 1883 after becoming discouraged by the meager returns. He later became cashier and a director of the Martin County State Bank, treasurer of the Fairmont Building and Loan Association, and an officer of a local board of trade, elevator company, and county agricultural society.³⁵ Lenny Archer-Burton came to Fairmont as a teen-ager in 1876. The next year he persuaded his family to finance his purchase of a 150-acre farm. He then eloped with Captain Wherland's daughter Sally, after which the couple with a rapidly growing family eked out a marginal living as they drifted from one farm to another until their third piece of land was foreclosed in 1893. Years later Sally Archer-Burton recalled that her husband "was like all green young Englishmen, never having been taught how to make money it went through his hands like sand."³⁶ He might have survived as a farmer had it not been for his too frequent and poorly chosen land investments which used up his family inheritance. The Archer-Burtons remained in Minnesota for the rest of their lives, working various jobs in or near Fairmont.

What can be said about the impact of the English colonists on farming practices in Martin County? They paid for opening some of the land to the plow and for other initial improvements which were later passed on to subsequent settlers. During the difficult years of the 1870s the Britons propped up the local economy by providing employment and spending their money freely. They also built a number of fine houses and other buildings which later farmers and businessmen used after the colonists departed. The experiment with bean production proved to be a negative lesson to other

residents of the district. Farmers elsewhere in Minnesota continued to raise small quantities of beans, at least through the 1890s, but Martin County emerged as a leading center of flax, grape, and apple production during that decade.³⁷ In animal husbandry the Englishmen's efforts in raising sheep may have encouraged other farmers in southern Minnesota to acquire small flocks in later years.³⁸ Also the dispersion of their purebred cattle must have upgraded the herds of local farmers. Among the service industries the cheese factory provided a base for a subsequent owner to use. Other individual colonists made modest contributions to local agriculture by managing or working for various commercial enterprises in Fairmont. Most importantly, Wollaston's store, mill, and bank provided services to farmers for some years after the colony's decline. Thus, the colony left a modest legacy to agriculture in the county.

What happened to the English colonists? The largest group drifted back to Britain where they took up urban-centered lives in the professions. The second largest group settled in various American cities such as St. Louis, Minneapolis, and St. Paul where they too became professionals. A third group emigrated to other British colonies, mostly to Canada, where some of them continued their efforts to practice farming. The smallest group remained in Fairmont where they became merchants, bankers, restaurateurs, realtors, tradesmen, and local politicians.³⁹

In comparing the two alternative models of the melting pot and the tossed salad with the Fairmont case study at least three possible conclusions emerge. First, many of the English immigrants did not even consider wholehearted adoption of American farming practices. They were determined to get rich quickly without soiling their hands or to move on to some other calling in an urban setting. Of course there were notable exceptions, those persons who tried to master farming in

37. *Martin County Sentinel*, December 7, 1877; Serle, unpublished reminiscences; *Martin County's Heritage*, 3: 20, 67-74, 99-101, 182-83, 225-27. Information about agricultural trends in Martin County in the 1890s is taken from the annual reports of Minnesota's commissioner of statistics for those years. See also Axel L. Anderson, *Dry Bean Production in the Lake and Northeastern States* (Washington: USDA, Agricultural Research Service, Agriculture Handbook No. 285, 1965).

38. However, Minnesota did not develop into a major center of sheep production before 1900. See Thomas Shaw, *Sheep Husbandry in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Webb Publishing Co., 1900), 15, 41-42; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Industry, *Special Report on the History and Present Condition of the Sheep Industry in the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1892), 811-21.

39. Serle's unpublished reminiscences provide the most useful series of biographies of most of the English colonists, including their later years after leaving Fairmont. Also see the county histories cited above.

34. *Ibid.*; *Martin County's Heritage*, 3: 70-71; Archer-Burton, *Your Mother Remembers*, *passim*.

35. *Memorial Record of the Counties*, 214, 217, 274, 279.

36. Archer-Burton, *Your Mother Remembers*, 55, *passim*; *Minneapolis Journal*, May 26, 1928, magazine section, p. 5; *Martin County's Heritage*, 3: 99-100.

Minnesota or later in a British colony. These individuals in various degrees did accommodate to the American agricultural melting pot. The tossed salad model is also inappropriate because the Englishmen brought no previously developed agricultural skills, and thus no strong desire to maintain them, to America. A third possible view is that the Fairmont colonists were representative of the main current of immigrants and Americans who migrated from rural to urban centers or directly from Europe to American cities. By the late 1800s these cities were the principal destination of English and most other European immigrants, as well as a growing number of American farmers.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, as a pioneer settler later recalled, after the locusts left and the railroad built through Martin County in 1878 the residents wrote letters to friends and relatives in the East, describing the fertile soil and agricultural potential of the area. New settlers brought

money and better methods of farming. They planted groves, erected better houses and outbuildings, and instituted a system of public drainage that dried up the marshes and the nesting places of the blackbirds that had destroyed crops and seeds. The writer might have added that in the late 1880s and 1890s several thousand Germans and Scandinavians supplemented the much larger migration of easterners to farms in Martin County.⁴¹ It was this new group of settlers and their descendants who developed the land-use pattern of mixed crop and livestock farming that has prevailed in southern Minnesota's cornbelt region in the present century.⁴² The English colonists at Fairmont played only a small part in the shaping of this evolving system. KH

40. Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America*, *passim*.

41. Rowley, "The Ordeal of Pioneering," 407-8; Walter Carlson, *Happenings in Our Neighborhood: Cedar, Galena, Trimont, Elm Creek, and Fox Lake* (Trimont, MN: Trimont Progress and Ceylon Herald, 1970), 3: 96-101; *Martin County Sentinel*, October 26, 27, 1882, April 13, 27, 1883. See also notes 32 and 33.

42. *Minnesota Agricultural Statistics, 1988* (St. Paul: Minnesota Agricultural Statistics Service, 1988), *passim*.