The role of an English land company in the settlement of northwestern Iowa and southwestern Minnesota: A study in historical geography

James P. Reed
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THE ROLE OF AN ENGLISH LAND COMPANY IN THE SETTLEMENT OF
NORTHWESTERN IOWA AND SOUTHWESTERN MINNESOTA:
A STUDY IN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

A Thesis

Presented to the
Department of Geography
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
James P. Reed
March, 1974
Accepted for the faculty of The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

Graduate Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philip E. Vogel</td>
<td>Geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Chairman
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information and insight about the areal and temporal setting of this study and the principal persons involved. Particularly helpful in this respect were: Miss Winifred Bartlett, historian and currently the Director of the Pipestone County Historical Society and Museum at Pipestone City, Mr. Robert Rice, practicing attorney in Pipestone City, and William Farmer, retired farmer now living in Pipestone City; Mr. Lew Hudson, Regional Editor of the Worthington Daily Globe, Worthington, Minnesota; Mrs. Mary Skiver of the Skiver Title Company, Sibley, Iowa; Mr. Raymond Hess, practicing attorney, Kingsley, Iowa, and Mr. V. Heacock of Kingsley, a retired school superintendent.

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J.P.R.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An Overview of Some Social and Economic Aspects of the Settlement Process on the Mid-Continent Frontier</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Purpose and Objectives of the Study and Its Areal and Temporal Extent</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of Relevant Literature, Documents and Records</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explanation of Research Methods Used</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Historic-Geographic Background of the Study Area</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Frontier in 1870</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retarded Settlement and Probable Causes</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>MID-CONTINENT ANTECEDENTS</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign Investment in the Land</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Genesis of Large-Scale Farming on the Prairie</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different Types of Nineteenth Century Large-Scale Farming in Mid-America</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>THE CLOSE BROTHERS IN IOWA</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Choose Iowa?</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Land Purchases</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Close System</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Closes Extend Their Holdings</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Closes Promote a British Colony</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>THE COLONY, SUCCESS AND FAILURE</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keys to Success--Publicity and the Pupil System</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keys to Failure--Notoriety and Disillusionment</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>MORE LAND AND NEW HORIZONS</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Pivotal Years--1880 and 1881</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Iowa Land Company</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;It Blossoms Like The Rose&quot;</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Western Land Company</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Corn Production in Selected Iowa Counties, 1867</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Corn Production in Selected Iowa Counties, 1875</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Corn Production in Selected Iowa Counties, 1879</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Corn Production in Selected Iowa Counties, 1885</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Rise in Value of Close Owned Land, 1878 to 1881</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Land Purchased and Later Sold by the Close Brothers in Northwestern Iowa, 1878-1898</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Land Purchased and Later Sold by the Close Brothers in Southwestern Minnesota, 1881-1898</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>All Land Purchased and Later Sold by the Close Brothers Within the Study Area, 1878-1898</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Map showing the Areal Extent of, and the Location of Key Towns in, the Study Area</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Photograph circa 1890 of Close-built Farmhouse Located Near Pipestone, Minnesota</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Map showing the Settled Regions of the United States in 1870</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Map showing Locations of Iowa Counties Selected for Corn Yield Comparisons</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Map showing Locations of Representative Large-Scale Nineteenth Century Farming Operations</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Floor Plan of a Standard Close House</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>A Typical Land Contract Used by the Close Brothers</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Map of Minnesota and Iowa showing Major Soils Distribution</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An Overview of Some Social and Economic Aspects of the Settlement Process on the Mid-Continent Frontier

Scholars of frontier settlement have been aware for a long time that the westward expansion of the United States involved far more than the legendary "advancing wave" of hardy and determinedly independent pioneers, seeking "free" land on which to build themselves a permanent home and begin life anew. That the homeseeker played an important role in western settlement certainly cannot be seriously challenged. Indeed, a less mythical version of this particular kind of pioneer probably was, in the end, the most important of all. Scholarly research in recent years however, has revealed that the homeseeker was not very often the first occupant (or holder) of newly opened western lands. But rather, it was the non-homeseeker who most often came first, with the homeseeker following in his wake or not at all.¹

Among the many kinds of non-homeseekers, were those involved in preparing the way for settlement and providing certain services during and

¹Leslie E. Decker, "The Great Speculation: An Interpretation of Mid-Continent Pioneering," in The Frontier in American Development, ed. by David M. Ellis (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 359-380, passim. The author has borrowed the terms "homeseeker" and "non-homeseeker" from the Decker interpretation. The terms are used in this discussion to denote respectively: (1) the pioneer whose primary goal was to build himself a "home" and establish "roots," and (2) the pioneer who may have been looking for a home but whose first interest was the desire for speculative profit.
after the settlement process. Included in this group were the territo-
rial officials, soldiers, surveyors, Indian agents, and the mule team and
ox train human and freight haulers. Then there were the "skimmers,"
interested only in taking the immediate wealth available and moving on.
This group included the hunter, the trapper, the logger, and the initial
wave of wealth-seeking miners.²

By far the largest group of non-homeseekers, however, can be referred
to collectively as speculators, especially when considered in the broader
sense of the word, i.e., one who buys or sells any commodity with the
expectation of material profit—the commodity is land in this context.
Of this group the capitalist-speculator was the most important, simply
because he had, or could command, the necessary capital to purchase large
quantities of land or bear the initial costs of building railroads, plat-
ting towns, and, in some instances, improving the land sufficiently for
large-scale commercial farming.

Of the capitalist-speculators involved principally in land specula-
tion were those "... who purchased large acreages of unimproved land,
intending to sell after land values had risen sufficiently to make their
sale remunerative and who [were] not interested in working the land as
a personal enterprise or in building up a long-term tenant estate."³

²Ibid., p. 361.

³Allen E. Bogue and Margaret Beattie Bogue, "'Profits' and the Fron-
tier Land Speculator," in The Public Land: Studies in the History of the
Public Domain, ed. by Vernon Carstensen (Madison: University of Wisconsin
Press, 1963), p. 389, n. 1. Reprinted from the Journal of Economic His-
tory, XVII (March, 1957). According to Bogue, the cited definition of
the word "speculator" is essentially the connotation given it by the Mid-
dle Western newspapers of mid and late nineteenth century.
Frequently this large-scale land speculator never saw the land he (or the corporation in which he had invested capital) had purchased. More often than not, he purchased his holdings through one or more of the numerous professional land agents whose enterprise flourished wherever new land was opened for settlement. For a commission (usually 5 percent of the purchase price), or a share of the purchase (up to one-quarter), the land agent undertook to select the kind of land desired by the speculator. This usually meant actual on-site investigation or sometimes only a cursory search of land office and other available land records. Thus, the land agent was a first-comer in every sense of the word, and the fact that he brought with him the necessary "first" capital to invest in the land made him an important personage indeed. In fact, Paul Gates ranked him, along with land office registers and receivers, "... among the most important on the frontier."  

There were at least two other types of large-scale land speculators on the frontier. One type usually followed on the heels of the "first-wave" land speculator already discussed above. The other most often came later, and frequently even after the ever fluid frontier had moved on. These two types of speculators were respectively:

1. The bankers and other money lenders (including the unsavory loan shark) who acquired their land holdings most often through forfeited claims of squatters and foreclosed mortgages on the lands

**Footnote:**

of bona fide homeseekers. This speculator, like the first, was not often interested in improving or working the land either personally or through a tenancy arrangement. His primary objective was to make whatever speculative financial profit possible through the resale of the land he had acquired by forfeit.

(2) Individuals (or corporations) who purchased their land holdings mostly from the first-comers including "tired" speculators, railroads, squatters, and disillusioned homeseekers. Unlike other of the large-scale land buyers, these speculators were interested mainly in establishing very large farming operations, using either hired labor or tenants to till the land. Their speculative motive was profit gained directly or indirectly from the produce of the land. 5

Also important among the speculators were the builders, i.e., the railroaders and the town "boomers." Before the Civil War, railroad building and town-booming were considerably less a speculative venture than they came to be later as the frontier advanced across the more western prairies and onto the high plains. The railroads, from their beginning in the early 1830's and until a decade or so after the Civil War, followed settlement and were constructed, by and large, to meet the ever growing demand for freight and passenger service. As the railroads pushed out ahead of settlement into the Dakotas, Western Nebraska, and Kansas, the risks became so great that "promoters would accept the challenge and investors the stock

only if prospective profits were large indeed." This meant, of course, that settlers had to be attracted to the land quickly, else the capital and tax costs would wipe out any prospect of speculative profit. To accomplish this, the railroad builders became also ardent town (mostly their own) and territory promoters, and colonizing agents.

Before the railroads became a significant factor in the settlement of the United States, town sites were mostly a matter of physical (natural) location. In pre-railroad days, new towns along the developing frontier usually sprang up more or less naturally as trade and service centers at the heads of and along navigable streams, or at the confluences of such streams, or along established roads, trails, and other land gateways. It was relatively easy for the founding fathers of such towns to attract the necessary investment capital so as to assure continuing growth of their community. Town-booming became a much more "chancey" venture, however, as railroads began to influence frontier settlement. Location remained important but in a different sense. The course of the new kinds of rivers (the railroads) with their own confluences (their junction and feeder lines), allowed for more arbitrary location of towns. The railroads, of course, promoted their own towns, which were strategically located to encourage agricultural development and also to function as railroad servicing installations. For the leaders of non-railroad towns, however, assuring the growth of their communities became a matter of political maneuver in order to influence the course of railroad routes and a matter of propaganda in order to attract immigrants.

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6Decker, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 363.
7Ibid.
While generous Federal land grants to the railroads determined the general direction that the eventual rail lines would take, the exact line along which tracks were laid was a different matter entirely. The Federal or states governments' practice of granting the railroads alternate sections of land up to twenty miles on either side of their proposed routes (primary and lieu lands) plus the fact that the original grants were sometimes changed (by forfeit or at the behest of the railroad companies themselves), permitted considerable flexibility in determining precise routes. In towns organized before the railroads and lying within, or near, these up to forty-mile-wide strips of potential railroad land, the political maneuvering by vested interests to see that the coming rails ran through their town became fiercely competitive and often expensive. Such profitable political plums as being named the county seat or the territorial or state capital, or being selected as the site for the state agricultural college, or university, or even the state penitentiary, were aggressively and bitterly fought for. Indeed, competition for "... these institutional guarantees of immortality became ... classic battles between small-town gladiators to whom defeat meant stagnation." 8

Even after the main lines and major feeder lines of the various railroads had been determined and track had been laid, the struggle continued unabated among the small towns to entice the lesser feeder lines and junctions that eventually were to "flesh out" the growing railroad networks. Many times efforts to attract such feeder lines were herculean.

Enticement included often outright gifts to the railroads in the form of municipal and county bonds or property. On the western prairies and plains, the sums of cash and other enticements paid out to the railroads were immense. For example, it has been estimated that between 1872 and 1890, Nebraska towns spent approximately four million dollars to attract railroads and Kansas spent over eighteen million during the same period for this purpose. The towns that eventually won the railroads and that subsequently were able to attract a population, were the speculative successes—those that did not or could not, of course, were the speculative losers.

Not to be omitted from the list of speculator types on the mid-continent frontier were the numerous small-scale speculators from all walks of town life. These were the merchants, doctors, lawyers, tradesmen, artisans, local politicians, and even clergymen, most of whom were probably bona fide homeseekers initially. The lure of speculative profits, though, made many of them over into part-time speculators. They invested whenever they could in town lots and nearby farmland, hoping that rising values would net them a quick resale profit.

A final and important type of speculator on the mid-continent frontier can be identified as the transient or migratory settler. These "professional first-comers" made up the "... 50 to 80 percent who, in every new area, moved on within a decade," and they acquired their land by any number of means (legal and illegal). One means was from the Federal

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9Ibid., p. 366.  
10Ibid., p. 367.  
11Ibid., pp. 374-5.  
12Ibid., pp. 375-6.
government. For example, by 1873 it was possible, with only "fee" money, for one to acquire as many as 480 acres of land legally, simply by filing separately a homestead, a pre-emption and a timber culture claim. To drive up the value of their land, these transient settlers were as interested as were the big-time speculators and builders in attracting immigration; and it was they who voted in the municipal bonds for railroad support and other promotional schemes (e.g., public improvements including schools, roads, and bridges). If all the various promotional schemes to attract the homeseeker paid off, the transient settler sold his land at a profit and moved on. If the homeseeker did not come or was slow in coming, the alternatives were either to stay and make a home or take a loss and move on.\(^{13}\)

To be sure, many of the large and small speculative ventures on the frontier failed just as many more were hugely successful. The intent here, however, is not to point out the successes or failures of speculation on the frontier; but rather to isolate and identify the speculator types who, as a group, dominated the mid-continent frontier.\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 379.

\(^{14}\)There have been numerous scholarly studies during the past thirty or forty years relative to land speculation on the frontier. The author has leaned heavily on Leslie Decker's article (op. cit., Footnote 1) in this respect. The most pre-eminent authority on this and other aspects of frontier study, however, is considered to be Paul W. Gates. In addition to the two articles already cited (Footnotes 4 and 5 this chapter), especially noteworthy are his "Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System" first published in American Historical Review, XLI (July, 1936), pp. 652-681; Frontier Landlords and Pioneer Tenants (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1945); and The Farmer's Age, 1815-1860 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).
Many scholars today either deny that the American frontier advanced in a series of identifiable stages or overqualify the hypothesis to such an extent that it has little meaning as such. Then there are some who believe that certain social institutions and economic conditions did recur (often in the same sequence) especially on the mid-continent frontier. It is suggested that the truth of the matter may lie somewhere between Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis of an orderly "procession of civilization marching single file"¹⁵ westward, and Carl Sauer's contention that there was "no general cultural succession nor identical series of stages"¹⁶ on the American (or any other) frontier—at least Professors Gates and Decker seem to think so.¹⁷ It may even be argued that there is a considerable difference between migrating "social institutions" and "cultural succession," in that the former implies transience while the latter implies more permanency. Be that as it may, resolution of the various points of view in this respect is not the objective of this study. They are mentioned only to point up the apparent disagreement and thereby to suggest that one of our Nation's most unique experiences—its nineteenth-century frontier—requires and deserves continuing study.


¹⁶¹⁶Carl O. Sauer, Historical Geography and the Western Frontier (1930), and Forward to Historical Geography (1941), in Land and Life ed. by John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 49 and p. 377 respectively.

The Purpose and Objectives of the Study and Its Areal and Temporal Extent

In this study a single family speculative enterprise of large-scale land buying in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota will be examined with two broad objectives in mind, viz., to determine, from the information and evidence available, the extent that the single enterprise influenced: (1) settlement (or resettlement) and agricultural development of the area; and (2) the type of agriculture carried on in the area today.

The study area (see Figure 1) includes eight counties in Iowa (Crawford, Woodbury, Plymouth, Cherokee, Sioux, O'Brien, Lyon, and Osceola) and five counties in Minnesota (Rock, Nobles, Jackson, Pipestone, and Murray). It extends more than 160 miles south to north, 85 miles east to west (at its widest point), and encompasses some 8,625 square miles.

The time span of the study is a twenty-year period between 1878 and 1898. These dates mark the beginning and about the end of the activities of the Close Brothers of Manchester and London, England, who together comprised the speculative enterprise to be examined.

Review of Relevant Literature, Documents and Records

Aside from the various state and county histories, several known regional studies, and the newspapers and other periodicals of the day, little literature has been published about the settlement and agricultural development of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota. Much less has been published (or even recorded) about the considerable land-buying enterprise of the Close Brothers and the land companies they
THE STUDY AREA
NORTHWESTERN IOWA
AND
SOUTHWESTERN MINNESOTA

Figure 1
represented during the late 1870's, the 1880's and 1890's. The only
extensive account of the Close Brothers' operations in Northwestern Iowa
and Southwestern Minnesota known to the author is Jacob Van Der Zee's
book, The British in Iowa, published in 1922. Mr. Van Der Zee's book,
therefore, is the basic reference used for this study.

All of the state and county histories consulted proved valuable to
the research in that each gave considerable (though frequently biased)
insight into life and circumstances during the temporal extent of the
study. Most helpful among these histories was Arthur Rose's history of
the Minnesota counties of Rock and Pipestone (see county locations,
Figure 1). Rose's frequent citation of official records, newspapers,
and other written accounts proved to be accurate and most valuable as
leads to other sources of usable information. Of particular value in this

\[18\] Jacob Van Der Zee, The British in Iowa (Iowa City, Ia.: The State
Historical Society of Iowa, 1922). Other references to the Close Broth-
ers that are based at least partially on Mr. Van Der Zee's book or on his
research may be found in: Gates, op. cit., Footnote 5, pp. 69 and 70;
Ruth A. Gallaher, "The English Community in Iowa," Palimpsest, II (March,
1921), pp. 80-94; Arthur F. Allen, ed., Northwestern Iowa: Its History
and Territories, 1804-1926, II (Chicago: S. J. Clark Publishing Co.,
1927), p. 817; Staff, Iowa State College and Iowa Agriculture Experi-
ment Station, A Century of Farming in Iowa: 1846-1946 (Ames, Ia.: The
Iowa State College Press, 1946), pp. 7-9, and 12; Earle D. Ross, Iowa
Agriculture: An Historical Survey (Iowa City, Ia.: The State Historical
Society of Iowa, 1951), p. 65; Curt Harmack, "The Amazing English Colony
in Northwest Iowa," The Iowan, II, April-May, 1954, pp. 10-13, 42 and 44;
Arthur Larson, The Story of a Prairie Town (Le Mars, Ia.: Le Mars Daily
Sentinel, 1969), pp. 21-27; and William Houlette, Iowa: The Pioneer Heri-
tage (Des Moines, Ia.: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1970), pp. 112 and
113.

\[19\] Arthur P. Rose, An Illustrated History of the Counties of Rock
and Pipestone, Minnesota (Pipestone, Minn.: Northern History Publishing
Company, 1911).
respect, were the several pages that Rose devoted to the Close Brothers and the role they played in settling the two Minnesota counties. 20

The newspapers of the period also proved valuable to the research for local color and the attitudes and thoughts of the contemporary scene. Especially helpful were the Le Mars Sentinel (Plymouth County, Iowa), the Sibley Gazette (Osceola County, Iowa), and the Pipestone Star (Pipestone County, Minnesota).

Numerous pamphlets and articles of great variety concerning the settlement and development of frontier America were published during the last half of the nineteenth century. The most common of these were the various guides and "boomers" which were designed to attract immigration and were published by the states, railroads, towns, and private citizens. Of those published about the study area the most important, of course, is William B. Close's Farming in North-Western Iowa, 21 which he prepared and published in England in 1880 to attract immigration to the Close-sponsored colony in Northwestern Iowa. Another such pamphlet is T. G. Mellersh's The English Colony in Iowa U.S.A., 22 published in 1881.

There are, of course, many scholarly books, treatises, monographs, and articles concerning the general subject of the white settlement process of the United States. Indeed, every part of the American frontier


from the original colonies westward has been separately analyzed and written about dozens of times. The mid-continent frontier has been no exception, especially as concerns the various roles played in its settlement by local, state and federal governments, capitalist speculators (including railroads, town builders, and migrant settlers) and permanent homeseekers. Aside from the contributions of such classicists as Frederick Jackson Turner, "the godfather of the professional study of the frontier," and Paul Wallace Gates, who "paced" the study of the frontier speculator, the general works most valuable to the research of the study has been Allen Bogue's From Prairie to Corn Belt (and other of his and Margaret Bogue's writings); Fred Shannon's The Farmers Last Frontier; a collection of articles about the frontier in The Frontier in American Development, edited by David Ellis; Ray A. Billington's Westward Expansion; Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey by Earle D. Ross; and Robert Swierenga's Pioneers and Profits. Many other well

23 Decker, op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 357 and 359. See also Footnotes 4, 5, 13 and 15.


28 Ross, op. cit., Footnote 18.

known (and not so well known) books and articles were highly important to the research too and, in some instances, influenced the author's thinking. One such article was Leslie Decker's, "The Great Speculation," which was the basis for the introductory remarks in this study on the different social and economic aspects of the settlement process on the frontier.

There are any number of municipal, county, state, and Federal records that contain valuable information and statistical data about the study area during the study period. Included, of course, are the various Federal and state censuses and related special reports. The Census of Iowa for 1880, Historical and Comparative Census, 1836-1880, Des Moines, 1883, for example, provides valuable statistical data about agriculture in Northwestern Iowa just prior to the Closes' occupancy. Also important are the state, district, and county Agricultural Society Reports of the period, including the culminating reports of the Secretary of Agriculture. Other Federal and state publications (old and current) pertaining to the geology, climate, topography, soils, crops and livestock of the study area also were extremely helpful. Especially valuable were the current and older soil surveys published by The United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with the several counties. These soil surveys aided materially in the detailed analysis (in Chapter VII) of certain Close properties.

Most important of all to the research however, were the official records of the several counties including deed books and registers,

30 Decker, op. cit., Footnote 1.
original land entry books, land transfer books, books (by various titles) containing articles of corporate and other legal agreements, supervisor minute books, and other papers. Without these records it not only would have been impossible to identify and locate the Close Brothers' extensive land holdings, but answers to the seven questions listed below as fundamental to the objectives of the study could not have been resolved even partially. Still, other county records which would have been valuable to this study have been destroyed. In Iowa, for example, the State Code (332.15) permits the destruction as "useless documents" assessor rolls and tax lists over ten years old. Many of the counties in Iowa, including those within the study area, have taken advantage of the law and have destroyed such records. In Minnesota these kinds of records may be kept indefinitely, as determined by the county assessor. Pipestone County, Minnesota has retained, for example, all of its tax records since the county was organized. These have proved useful to this study.

Explanation of Research Methods Used

Before beginning the detailed research and in order to accomplish the study's objectives (Page 10), it was necessary first to determine what questions pertaining to the basic problem (the objectives) need be answered. After some preliminary research, the following seven questions were considered fundamental to the problem:

(1) To what extent if any, did history and prevailing conditions influence the Close Brothers in choosing the study area for the location and style of their land purchasing operations?
(2) Was there anything unique about the Close Brothers' method of operation? If so, what was unique about it?

(3) Was the "Close System" of farming the right motivation at the right time to induce immigration to the region? Or were there other perhaps more fundamental (or more complex) factors that attracted settlers to the region at a more accelerated rate after 1877?

(4) In addition to other British, what kind of settler did the Closes attract to their lands? Were they predominantly permanent homeseekers or was there a transient tendency among them?

(5) Preliminary reading indicated that the Closes preferred a stock farm operation on their personal properties. What may have influenced their preference? Did they, in turn, influence in any way the operations of their tenants or buyers? If so, to what extent?

(6) Were the Closes intelligent land buyers? That is, were they deliberate in selecting only land that had a high potential for raising crops and livestock? Or did they simply buy any land that was available at the right price? Or both?

(7) What lasting influences did the Closes leave behind as their legacy? Was it actually as Van Der Zee suggested with respect to all the British of the Close Colony—hardly any at all?  

Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 18, p. 252.
Once these basic questions pertaining to the problem were determined, every effort was made at every location and stage of the research to check off and answer each as completely as possible.

The principal research method used for the study was archival from the relevant literature, documents and records already discussed above, and entailed:

(1) A general search of the literature and document holdings in local and nearby institutional and public libraries for information pertaining to the white settlement process on the mid-continent frontier with emphasis on the study area and its occupants before, during, and after settlement.

(2) An expanded search of other educational institutions and public libraries and of special holdings in official state archives and historical societies for information pertaining particularly to the Close Brothers and other similar land buying operations either in the study area or elsewhere.

(3) A detailed entry by entry examination and analysis of the various county records of each of the thirteen counties comprising the study area in order to determine: (a) the amount, areal extent, and location of the land (within the study area) purchased or managed by the Close Brothers; and (b) the dates that these lands were purchased and sold including from whom bought, and to whom sold.

(4) An analysis of pertinent information in Federal and state censuses, soil surveys, drainage enterprises, climate reports and
analyses, crop and livestock reports, and other similar documents and reports, to help determine insofar as possible:
(a) whether the Closes were knowledgeable and selective land buyers (Question 6, page 17); and (b) whether the agricultural practices of the day within the study area were influenced by the Closes; and if so, to what extent and for how long (basically Question 7, page 17)?

While a lack of knowledge about the thesis subject limited the extent of archival research in the beginning, leads developed rapidly. In a very short time the research encompassed and was being carried on simultaneously in all the areas identified.

A certain amount of on-site investigation also was attempted during the research. The value of this kind of investigation was extremely limited, however, in that the passage of time has obliterated nearly all vestiges of the Closes' operations. All that seemingly remains is an occasional house or barn reportedly built by the Closes, or remnants of a grove of trees probably planted by them. Unfortunately, there is no certain proof (no official record) however, that even these few relics of the past are actually the work of the Close enterprise.

Research by correspondence for the study was extremely limited too, and involved only: (1) letters of inquiry to several historical and government archives in Great Britain to obtain background information on the Close family business and financial activities in England; and (2) correspondence with several persons who became interested in the study.
The correspondence with Great Britain proved largely unproductive and resulted only in some biographical background about the Close Brothers and their forebearers. While it seems certain that more information pertaining to the Closes' business connections is available abroad, the additional knowledge would likely be "nice to have" but not necessarily essential. Most of the information available in this country emphasizes the fact that British money was behind the Closes' (and many other) land buying ventures and that many of those who purchased land in Northwestern Iowa then were English attracted there by the Closes. Additional research in Great Britain seemingly would only embellish these facts.

Correspondence with several interested natives of the study area, on the other hand, was interesting and rewarding, in that a number of important facts and anecdotes about the Close Brothers and the study area would have been overlooked otherwise.

The time frame of the study made it impossible of course to obtain, through interview, first-hand accounts of the Close Brothers' operations. It was possible, though, to interview several "oldsters" who were able to give at least second-hand accounts of certain of the Closes' activities and remembrances of the locations of Close properties. For example, two "oldtimers" living in the town of Kingsley, in Garfield Township, Plymouth County, Iowa (see Figure 1 for location), knew a great deal about the Closes' activities and properties in Garfield and neighboring Elkhorn townships. Indeed, one of these gentlemen was a young boy when the Closes were active in the Kingsley, Iowa area. Both gentlemen identified and

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32 He is Mr. Charles Knowles who has lived in or around Kingsley for nearly all of his ninety-six years. The other gentleman is Mr. Stephen C. Thompson who is presently the Garfield Township tax assessor.
located for the author a number of Close-built houses and barns as well as several residual groves of trees planted by the Close firm. Another retired farmer living now in Pipestone, Minnesota, was born in and lived most of his life in a Close-built farmhouse near Pipestone. The original house still stands, though it has been extensively modified (see Figure 2). He too had considerable knowledge of the Closes' operations, at least in and around Pipestone City and County. While interviews such as these were limited in number and scope, the information gained from them was both interesting and helpful.

The Historic-Geographic Background of the Study Area

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the Close Brothers' speculative venture in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota, the social, economic and other environmental conditions that existed there earlier and just prior to their arrival, are summarized briefly in the following paragraphs.

The Frontier in 1870

By 1870 the official frontier line of the United States had passed through most of Iowa and the southern half of Minnesota and had spilled

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33 Appropriately, the name of the gentleman is Mr. William P. Farmer, who provided the photograph (Figure 2) of the house and outbuildings as they appeared in the early 1890's.

34 To qualify as frontier, the Federal Census considered that the population density had to be at least two but no more than five persons per square mile. If the density was less than two the area was considered trans frontier, and if six or more it was considered as post frontier. See (among others) Jack E. Eblen, "An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Frontier Populations," Demography, I (April, 1964), p. 400.
Figure 2.—Photograph circa 1890 of Close-built farmhouse (right portion of photo) located near Pipestone, Minnesota. The summer kitchen shown had been added on to the original structure some time before 1890. (Photo courtesy of Wm. P. Farmer, Pipestone, Minn.)
westward along the Missouri River into South Dakota, into eastern Nebraska, Kansas, and Texas, and beyond that into regional pockets of the Colorado and New Mexico Rockies, the Mormon settlements in Utah, California, and the Willamette Valley of Oregon (see Figure 3). Generally, by 1870 the continuity of settlement had progressed to mid-continental United States roughly along the 97th meridian. Significantly Figure 3 shows that the extreme northwestern corner of Iowa and southwestern portion of Minnesota were still beyond the 1870 frontier line. Even more significantly, however, is the fact that a short ten years earlier all of the northwest quarter of Iowa and all but the southeastern quarter of Minnesota had a population density of less than two persons per square mile. And even in 1870, roughly the same area in Iowa and most of the southwestern two-thirds of Minnesota had a population density of only six persons or less per square mile.

Retarded Settlement and Probable Causes

That a large area of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota lagged behind several of the more western states in settlement is paradoxal, because this same region today contains some of the most productive farmland in the United States. A number of theories have been advanced to explain this lag. One blames the Indian, but in his study


THE UNITED STATES
White Settlement in 1870
Regions settled (over 2 persons per square mile)

Adapted from Brown, R.H. Historical Geography of the United States, p. 246

Figure 3
concerning nineteenth century farming in Illinois and Iowa, Allen Bogue
gave little credence to this theory, at least insofar as Illinois and
Iowa are concerned, simply because the Indian in both states had sold or
had given to the Federal Government title to his lands before settlers
moved in. There were, though, such renegades as the Sioux Inkpaduta,
who in 1857 led a small band of his braves against an equally small com-
munity in the vicinity of Spirit and Okoboji Lakes, Iowa, killing some
thirty of its inhabitants. Bogue conceded that the "Spirit Lake Massa-
cre," as the incident came to be known, probably retarded settlement
somewhat, but that it probably had less effect in this respect than did
the general depression of that same year. Indian disturbances were a
much different story in Southwestern Minnesota. The Sioux uprising of
1862, "... a series of frontier raids of exceptional violence ...,"
caused many potential settlers from the eastern states to change their
minds about locating in that part of Minnesota. In fact, the United
States Commissioner of Agriculture later asserted that this particular
Sioux outbreak so impeded settlement that "its effects were still visible
in 1863." The 1862 Indian uprising in Minnesota doubtlessly militated
against the settlement and development of extreme Northwestern Iowa too,
but other factors also impeded it.

Bogue suggested that a "complex combination of factors" is always
involved in the settlement of any new area and these include the availa-
bility of transportation and routes, location of potential markets, real

or imagined quality of the land, and the progress of the "settling in" process. 39

Bogue also touched on (and seemingly supported) a suggestion by some writers that the nonavailability of an early maturing variety of corn may have contributed to the lag in settlement of the study area—at least in the Northwestern Iowa portion of it—for up to twenty years after the coming of the railroads. 40 This may have been true, but information available relative to climate and soils and even limited corn yield data for Iowa during the last half of the nineteenth century, tend to refute this thesis. It has been known since the first settlement on the Grand Prairie in Illinois, for example, that prairie soils were excellent for growing corn. Further, since most of the varieties of corn used in the future "corn belt" states during the 1860's and 1870's probably matured within 110-120 days, 41 the average 140-160 frost free days within the study area made climate only an occasional (and often only a local) problem of too early or too late frosts, or too little moisture.

With respect to corn yields during the late 1860's and 1870's, data contained in the various Federal and State censuses indicate that corn


41Staff, Iowa State College and Iowa Agriculture Experiment Station, op. cit., Footnote 18, pp. 34 and 35.

production in Northwestern Iowa probably was geared more to the "settling in process" than to the development of an earlier maturing variety of corn. Unfortunately, of the statistics on corn production available, the earlier years are sketchy making it difficult to evaluate them. Taking this into account as well as considering climatic and other variables (i.e., too little or too much moisture, plant diseases, insect damage, etc.) that adversely affected, to a greater or lesser extent, the corn yields in Iowa in those years, Tables 1 through 4 reveal some significant facts.

While Table 1 shows a huge disparity in overall corn production between the northwestern counties and certain of the longer settled east-central counties in 1867, three of the former (O'Brien, Plymouth, and Crawford) had bushels-per-acre yields comparable with the latter (see Figure 4 for location of compared counties). This seems to indicate that even in 1867 the then known corn varieties could produce yields on par with yields in other parts of the state. Table 2 shows that again in 1875 three of the study area counties (Cherokee, Crawford, and Woodbury) had corn yields comparable with the east-central counties. Perhaps more significant, however, is the fact that in two of these counties (Crawford and Woodbury) more than 30 percent of the improved farmland was devoted to corn production that year. Again this compares favorably with

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43 Only Woodbury County in the southern portion of the study area had enough population in 1867 to be considered officially "settled." (See Footnote 34, page 21 for criteria.) The remaining seven Iowa counties in the study area were still officially beyond the frontier. In fact, Lyon and Osceola counties had not been organized yet in 1867. See (among other statistical sources) Iowa: the Home for Immigrants, Des Moines: Iowa Board of Immigration, 1870, republished in Studies in Iowa History, I (Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1970), pp. 73 and 74.
# TABLE 1

**CORN PRODUCTION IN SELECTED IOWA COUNTIES: 1867**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Acres of Improved Land</th>
<th>Acres of Improved Corn</th>
<th>Total Acres Produced</th>
<th>Bushels Per Acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Area Counties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3,511</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1,623</td>
<td>47,315</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Not Rptd.</td>
<td>Not Rptd.</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Brien</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2,110</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osceola</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Not Rptd.</td>
<td>Not Rptd.</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>7,555</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sioux</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodbury</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1,676</td>
<td>40,370</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals or Averages of Counties Shown</strong></td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4,139</td>
<td>101,061</td>
<td>24.4d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| East Central Counties |                        |                        |                     |                 |
| Benton            | --                     | 31,060                 | 901,480             | 29.0            |
| Cedar             | --                     | 50,295                 | 1,529,540           | 30.4            |
| Clinton           | --                     | 52,594                 | 1,408,933           | 26.8            |
| Johnson           | --                     | 50,146                 | 1,629,207           | 32.5            |
| Jones             | --                     | 45,161                 | 1,185,238           | 26.2            |
| Linn              | --                     | 50,651                 | 1,415,373           | 27.9            |
| **Totals or Averages of Counties Shown** | --                     | 279,907                | 8,069,771           | 28.8d           |

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*bSelected for their contiguity and for their combined areal extent comparable with the study area counties.

cNot reported at 1867 census.

dAverage. (Determined by dividing totals into totals.)
TABLE 2  
CORN PRODUCTION IN SELECTED IOWA COUNTIES: 1875

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Acres of Improved Land</th>
<th>Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Percentage of Improved Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Total Bushels Produced</th>
<th>Bushels Per Acre Produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Area Counties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>54,636</td>
<td>9,459</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>315,215</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford</td>
<td>58,058</td>
<td>17,957</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>648,858</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon</td>
<td>15,872</td>
<td>2,645</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>10,396</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Brien</td>
<td>33,626</td>
<td>6,379</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>106,052</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osceola</td>
<td>18,490</td>
<td>2,510</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>17,279</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>58,233</td>
<td>10,976</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>175,778</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sioux</td>
<td>39,824</td>
<td>6,780</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>32,038</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodbury</td>
<td>41,179</td>
<td>14,667</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>490,370</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals or Averages of Counties Shown</td>
<td>319,918</td>
<td>71,373</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>1,795,986</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

East Central Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Acres of Improved Land</th>
<th>Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Percentage of Improved Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Total Bushels Produced</th>
<th>Bushels Per Acre Produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benton</td>
<td>297,518</td>
<td>83,244</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>3,328,921</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar</td>
<td>248,693</td>
<td>78,224</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>2,845,921</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>299,855</td>
<td>89,297</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>3,061,338</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>241,021</td>
<td>77,142</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>3,158,178</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>208,907</td>
<td>63,423</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>1,909,534</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linn</td>
<td>281,118</td>
<td>91,773</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>3,439,923</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals or Averages of Counties Shown</td>
<td>1,577,112</td>
<td>483,103</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>17,743,815</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled from: Thirteenth State Census. The Census of Iowa as Returned in the Year 1875 (Des Moines, 1875), p. 112.

Selected for their contiguity and for their combined areal extent comparable with the study area counties.

Average. (Determined by dividing totals into totals.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Acres of Improved Land</th>
<th>Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Percentage of Improved Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Total Bushels Produced</th>
<th>Bushels Per Acre Produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>146,397</td>
<td>54,960</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>2,306,301</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford</td>
<td>223,950</td>
<td>73,920</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>3,047,849</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon</td>
<td>29,689</td>
<td>6,410</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>213,648</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Brien</td>
<td>51,609</td>
<td>17,332</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>651,095</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osceola</td>
<td>60,467</td>
<td>7,912</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>239,676</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>148,743</td>
<td>41,310</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>968,032</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sioux</td>
<td>91,625</td>
<td>23,554</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>761,156</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodbury</td>
<td>121,350</td>
<td>39,925</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>1,459,939</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals or Averages of Counties Shown
873,830 265,323  30.4 c  9,647,696  36.4 c

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Acres of Improved Land</th>
<th>Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Percentage of Improved Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Total Bushels Produced</th>
<th>Bushels Per Acre Produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benton</td>
<td>404,527</td>
<td>127,752</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>5,871,574</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar</td>
<td>301,056</td>
<td>107,035</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>5,180,808</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>391,097</td>
<td>129,544</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>5,885,760</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>291,170</td>
<td>108,417</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>4,951,472</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>270,716</td>
<td>95,825</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>4,207,611</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linn</td>
<td>341,686</td>
<td>120,872</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>5,022,699</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals or Averages of Counties Shown
2,000,252 689,445  34.5 c  31,119,924  45.1 c

a Compiled from: Census of Iowa for 1880. Historical and Comparative Census, 1836-1880 (Des Moines, 1883), pp. 266-7 and pp. 278-283.

b Selected for their contiguity and for their combined areal extent comparable with the study area counties.

c Average. (Determined by dividing totals into totals.)
## TABLE 4
### CORN PRODUCTION IN SELECTED IOWA COUNTIES: 1885<sup>a</sup>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Acres of Improved Land</th>
<th>Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Percentage of Improved Acres in Corn</th>
<th>Total Bushels Produced</th>
<th>Bushels Per Acre Produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study Area Counties</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>203,734</td>
<td>73,400</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>2,714,634</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford</td>
<td>283,890</td>
<td>110,551</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>3,685,714</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon</td>
<td>54,117</td>
<td>9,555</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>247,152</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Brien</td>
<td>112,795</td>
<td>28,497</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>745,816</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osceola</td>
<td>61,123</td>
<td>7,806</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>174,351</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>193,270</td>
<td>105,722</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>2,455,936</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sioux</td>
<td>146,618</td>
<td>44,292</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>1,516,299</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodbury</td>
<td>173,066</td>
<td>74,180</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>2,714,690</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals or Averages of Counties Shown</strong></td>
<td>1,230,613</td>
<td>454,003</td>
<td>36.9&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>14,254,592</td>
<td>31.4&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **East Central Counties** | | | | | |
| Benton            | 338,870                | 108,663       | 32.1                                 | 3,327,115              | 30.6                     |
| Cedar             | 297,965                | 84,436        | 28.3                                 | 3,025,161              | 35.8                     |
| Clinton           | 343,448                | 101,891       | 29.7                                 | 3,727,540              | 36.6                     |
| Johnson           | 288,556                | 92,548        | 32.1                                 | 2,871,029              | 31.0                     |
| Jones             | 250,557                | 71,760        | 28.6                                 | 2,236,141              | 31.2                     |
| Linn              | 320,618                | 90,516        | 28.2                                 | 3,220,040              | 35.6                     |
| **Totals or Averages of Counties Shown** | 1,840,014 | 549,814 | 29.9<sup>c</sup> | 18,407,026 | 33.5<sup>c</sup> |

<sup>a</sup> Compiled from: Census of Iowa for the Year 1895 (Des Moines, 1896), pp. 676-78 and 688-690.

<sup>b</sup> Selected for their contiguity and for their combined areal extent comparable with the study area counties.

<sup>c</sup> Average. (Determined by dividing totals into totals.)
IOWA
LOCATIONS OF SELECTED COUNTIES FOR CORN YIELD COMPARISONS 1867-1885
(See text)

Figure 4

Compared Counties
the percentage of improved land devoted to corn the same year in the east-central counties. It would seem then that, if corn growing was a problem of a too short growing season, a lesser percentage of the precious little improved farmland in that part of Iowa, at that time, would have been devoted to corn production.

Tables 3 and 4 point up the rapid expansion of corn production in the selected Iowa counties, particularly in the study area counties. The significance of these two tables is twofold: (1) While corn yields in the Iowa study area counties never matched yields in the east-central Iowa counties, production increases between 1867 and 1885 were nothing less than remarkable and by 1885 all but three (O'Brien, Osceola, and Lyon) were approaching or exceeding the yields of the more eastern counties. (2) The overall percentage of improved farmland devoted to corn in the study area counties in 1879 was still some 4 percent less than in the east-central counties, but in 1885 these same counties devoted some 7 percent more improved acreage to corn than did the east-central counties.

From the foregoing then, it would seem that commercial corn production in the study area counties simply had to wait on the "settling in process," that is, until conditions permitted it; and the permitting conditions probably did not include the development of an early maturing variety of corn. In other words:

... In the early years, even if he [the early pioneer] had known the cropping patterns suited to Iowa soil and climate, he didn't have much choice. There was little transportation available to bring in food and clothing. Trips to the nearest trading post were made on horseback or by wagon. As a result, the crops a farmer planted were those his family needed for food, and as feed for the few animals he raised. ... This type of subsistence farming was reflected in early crop patterns, in which garden crops like beans and pumpkins and orchard crops like
apples and grapes had an important place. Certain other minor crops like tobacco and fiber flax were planted, not because they were suited to the soil and climate, but because the settler needed them. Wheat was an important crop, seldom taken to market, but instead hauled to the local mill to be ground into flour. If the farmer had more wheat than his family needed, the miller took a portion to pay for the cost of grinding. Corn furnished feed for livestock and food for humans. Only a small excess over the family's needs was grown to be sold or traded for sugar, coffee, tea, and thread. Since the farmer raised little to sell and most of his labor had to be done by hand, acreages were not large...

The coming of the railroads, the growth of county seat towns approximately twenty-four miles apart, and the improving of country roads helped bring in commercial farming. Now the farmer began to choose those combinations of crops and livestock which would give him the highest net income.

Although Iowans knew little about soil, they soon found that their soils had a lot to do with the combination of crops which was most profitable. . . ., the Iowa farmer discovered or learned through others that his land was best suited to the growing of corn. Wheat, which had played such an important role in the pioneer economy, became less important.

Certainly of considerable significance to the retarded initial settlement of this region was the lack of timber. This drawback coupled with an initial lack of transportation and routes (roads, rivers, and railroads) denied the first settler the materials which he had been accustomed to using for shelter, fuel, and fencing. (Only later came such innovative substitutes as the sod house.)

Other contributing factors to the lag in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota settlement, even after the Civil War and after the railroads had been extended over the region, were simply "acts of providence." It was difficult enough for the settler to cope with the bone chilling blizzards of winter, the searing heat of summer, and the

44 Staff, Iowa State College and Iowa Agriculture Experiment Station, op. cit., Footnote 18, pp. 20 and 21.
ever present danger of prairie fires. But when these routine hardships were compounded by devastating grasshopper plagues in 1873, 1874, and 1876, it was more than enough to drive away the less hardy and keep away the timid.

Probably contributing as much as anything to the lag of settlement and development of the area was man himself. Specifically referred to in this respect are those who were the "first-comer" land speculators (or their agents) and the railroad builders.45

"Of all the public land states, speculators were most active in Iowa."46 Probably the principal reason for this was the fact that Iowa's public lands had been surveyed and brought into the public market quite some time before the settlement of the state was begun. Consequently, there were no restrictions on the amount of land that one could buy. The circumstances in Southwestern Minnesota, on the other hand, were somewhat different. The lands there were surveyed and offered for sale much more slowly. This permitted the settler (or squatter) to improve his claim over several years and enter a pre-emption on it before it could be grabbed off by the speculator as unimproved land.47

45The view that the early speculator was partially responsible for the slow settlement and development of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota is not necessarily shared fully by others. For example, Robert P. Swierenga in Pioneers and Profits (op. cit., Footnote 29), with reference to Iowa (on p. 220), stated that because of "their [the speculators] nationwide advertising and their reputation for offering land of better than average quality, they attracted many buyers to the Hawkeye State." Thus, "rather than retard settlement, speculators likely promoted it." Notwithstanding this theory, there seems to be enough evidence to the contrary to support the opposing hypothesis, at least as concerns Southwestern Minnesota and Northwestern Iowa.


Indicative of the immense amount of speculator activity in Iowa, is the fact that while title was given to well over seventeen million acres of land during the 1850's, the 1860 Federal Census indicated that only 7,234,000 of these acres were sufficiently improved to be regarded as farmland. The 1860 census further indicated that at least twelve million acres (about one-third of the state's original public lands) were owned by persons not living on the land. For example, one large absentee land owner (the firm of James A. Easley and William W. Willingham of Virginia) entered more than 328,000 acres of land in Iowa alone during a seven year period between 1852 and 1858, most of it by the "time-entry" method. Of this amount over 49,000 acres (about 88 percent of it time-entry) was located in the northwest quarter of Iowa. After the Civil War and by 1875, the same firm bought some 160,000 acres of land at tax sales in nine counties of Western Iowa.

Beginning with the Wall Street financial panic of 1857, a number of major setbacks adversely affected the lot of these first-comer land

48 Ibid.

49 Swierenga, op. cit., Footnote 29, pp. 140, and 162-64. Briefly, the "time-entry" method of speculation involved the selling of land warrants on credit to settlers or other speculators. The selling speculator would protect his investment by taking title to the land and then transferring it to the new buyer only after the latter had fulfilled his contract (usually within a year). The contract usually required that the prospective buyer pay the land office fee and taxes plus a fixed amount to the speculator. During the 1850's this amount averaged $1.75 an acre against the price paid by the speculator which ranged then between $1.00 and $1.20 an acre.

50 Ibid., p. 176. The nine counties are not identified by Swierenga. However, while culling the various Iowa County records for information on the Close Brothers' land holdings, the author noted numerous land entries in the name of Easley or Willingham, particularly in the land transfer records of Woodbury County.
speculators. First of all, the 1857 panic led the nation into a general depression which lasted until the Civil War. A particular adverse effect of the depression with respect to land on the frontier was the many-fold increase in the forfeiture rate on the thousands of land contracts that had been negotiated by the speculators. In the case of the firm of Easley and Willingham, the percentage of forfeiture on these contracts rose from a moderate 12.8 percent in 1855 to 60.5 percent just two years later in 1857. During the seven years from 1852 to 1858, this one firm repossessed some 50,000 acres of time-entry Iowa land, almost half of which (23,960 acres) lay in the twelve-county Sioux City Land District.\textsuperscript{51}

The fact that the agricultural census of 1860 showed only 30,782 acres of land (improved and unimproved) in the Sioux City District "in farms,"\textsuperscript{52} is indicative of the amount held by the speculative buyer at the beginning of that decade. In fact, the single firm of Easley and Willingham during the 1850's acquired some 18,000 more acres of land in that district than was reported in farms at the 1860 census.

Doubtless the advent of the Civil War did much to impede the white settlement of the United States from mid-continent westward. Immigration into the "new lands," already curtailed by the Panic of 1857, fell off sharply in 1860. The principal reasons for this, of course, were the exigencies of the war effort. Manpower, for example, was needed not only

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 172-3 and 176. The twelve counties in the Sioux City Land District were: Lyon, Osceola, Dickinson, Sioux, O'Brien, Clay, Plymouth, Cherokee, Buena Vista, Woodbury, Ida and Sac. Only Crawford of the eight Iowa counties comprising the study area was not part of the Sioux City District.

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 172.
for military service but for industry and construction in the expanded war economy. Though immigration managed to revive somewhat beginning in 1863, it did not reach its pre-panic level until the late 1860's and 1870's53 and, without immigration, the market for the land speculators was drastically reduced. The speculator had other problems; particularly affected by the war was the southern speculator who lost his lands through confiscation and tax sales. For example, while Easley and Willingham had none of their lands confiscated, they, as Virginians, were unable to visit and give proper attention to their western holdings. Consequently, taxes went unpaid during all of the war years and "tens of thousands of acres were sold at tax sales."54 The probability is high that much of the land lost through tax sales during the Civil War (or seemingly at any other time) was grabbed off by other speculators. This was the case at least, as concerns the tax sales of Easley-Willingham lands. In fact, several of the firm's own agents bought Easley-Willingham land at tax sales.55

Further adding to the woes of the speculator on the mid-continent frontier, were the frequent grasshopper infestations during the 1870's accompanied by some dry years. These conditions depressed the economy to such an extent that many time-entry land contracts and other mortgages were defaulted. As a result many thousands of acres of land in Northwestern Iowa, Southwestern Minnesota, and elsewhere, reverted to the speculator, making him a reluctant, tax-paying (sometimes paying exhorbitantly

55 Ibid., n., p. 175.
high taxes) absentee land owner. In nearly all instances of default, whether in the 1870's or earlier in the 1850's, land was denied to the vast majority of homeseekers either because they could not afford the asking price of the land, or (more probably), the cost of improving it. Consequently huge tracts of potential farmland did not feel the bite of the plow until the settler who could pay the price came along—and this sometimes became a matter of years.

There have been numerous authoritative writings about the land grant railroads and about the huge tracts of the public domain set aside for them as subsidies to offset the considerable financial risks involved in railroad building. The railroad land grants are mentioned here, therefore, only to suggest that they probably directly or indirectly hindered somewhat the initial settlement and later development of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota.

To illustrate, in the spring of 1856 Congress and the State of Iowa granted well over four million acres of the public lands in Iowa to the railroad companies to build four east to west cross-state lines running roughly parallel, and evenly spaced from south to north. The grant to each railroad was extremely liberal in that they were given the alternate sections of land at a distance of six miles on both sides along the length of their projected routes—and nine miles farther than that on both sides as "lieu" lands if the "primary" lands along the route had been bought or pre-empted previously. Later, lieu lands were extended to as much as twenty miles on both sides of projected routes. Later still in 1864, a fifth cross-state railroad (northern route), and another to connect Sioux City and St. Paul were granted alternate sections of land in a primary
zone of ten miles on both sides of their projected routes and lieu lands in a twenty mile zone on either side. These latter two rail lines and one of the four involved in the 1856 Congressional Act, were to traverse Northwestern Iowa eventually, and one was to pass through Nobles County, Minnesota. None of the three, however, were completed until well after the Civil War. In fact, one was not operational until the early 1880's. The failure to complete these railroad lines until so late in the nineteenth century and the fact that access to the lands within their land grants were withheld from public sale from 1856 until the railroads had been built, effectively slowed down the settlement and later development of the region.

The Homestead Act of 1862 was passed by Congress in response to "a growing popular demand for free land." The main feature of the act was that as much as 160 acres of the Public Domain could be claimed (for the stipulated price—see Footnote 57) in return for improvements on the land and five years occupancy. The former included the building of a house and the clearing and cultivation of a portion of the land. For the most part, the business of war delayed claim activity under the act until after 1865. After the Civil War many millions of acres of the Public Domain in the western states and territories (including Minnesota) were open for homesteading. Iowa, on the other hand, had only some 1,720,000

56 Gates, op. cit., Footnote 5, pp. 74 and 75.

57 Ibid., Author's note: The right of pre-emption was never withdrawn, during these years, but a "double rate" ($2.50 per acre instead of the customary $1.25) had to be paid for lands that lay within the primary or lieu zones of the railroads.

acres of such land remaining (out of nearly thirty-six million acres originally), and most of this was in Northwestern Iowa. The number of entries made on the huge amounts of land in the West and the less than two million acres remaining in Iowa was relatively small. In Northwestern Iowa, for example, the number of yearly homestead entries made the first year following the Civil War and until 1869 never exceeded 995.

One reason for so few entries was the fact that the railroads actually owned, or had option on, so much of the better land. Beginning in 1869 and for twenty or so years, the railroads sold off huge tracts of their lands. This, coupled with the return to market of public lands not finally claimed by the railroads, set off a vigorous though comparatively small speculative boom. Once again, though, the speculator was the principal land buyer, particularly of those reopened for public sale, thus again a considerable amount of the best lands were denied to the bona fide homeseeker—at least at the price most of them could afford.

So it was, then, that a large and (as it later proved out) agriculturally excellent portion of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota lagged behind less endowed areas of the prairies and plains in settlement and development. That this lag was caused by almost continuous adversity (e.g., the Indian disturbances, paucity of land available to the homeseeker, natural and economic catastrophies, etc.) seems probable. Whatever the causes, however, the study area was in an economically depressed state in early 1878 when the Close Brothers began their land buying operations in Crawford County, Iowa.

59 Gates, op. cit., Footnote 5, p. 75.  
60 Ibid.  
61 Shannon, op. cit., Footnote 25, pp. 51 and 52.
CHAPTER II

MID-CONTINENT ANTECEDENTS

The extent of the Close Brothers' land accumulations in Iowa and Minnesota beginning in the late 1870's and continuing through most of the next two decades, the source of their operating capital, and the methods by which they acquired and developed their huge holdings, were not unique to Mid-America settlement and development. Actually, similar ventures were conceived and carried out some seventy years before in the Illinois portion of the lower Ohio Valley and in other parts of Illinois and Western Indiana. Even before that, land companies such as the Ohio Associates, the Scioto Company, and the Connecticut Land Company operated along the upper Ohio Valley and northward.\(^1\) Accordingly, it seems appropriate to discuss briefly some of these earlier ventures into large-scale investments in land in order to obtain a better insight into the Close Brothers' activities that followed.

Foreign Investment in the Land

As Englishmen, the Close Brothers of course represented foreign capital, not only their own but that of their countrymen. The investment of foreign capital (particularly British capital) in the new and other lands of the expanding American frontier was not at all an unusual

occurrence. In fact it was "big business" in all parts of the United States after 1800, but especially on the mid-continent frontier. Indeed, foreign land holdings in America grew so huge during the nineteenth century, that in the spring of 1884 they became a matter of concern to the United States Congress. At least two congressmen (neither from Iowa or Minnesota) spoke out against, and demanded investigation into, the rapid growth in number of great "princely landed estates" owned by foreigners. To emphasize their point, both congressmen entered into the Congressional Record almost identical lists of either twenty-nine or thirty-two names (depending on one or the other list) of foreign "leviathan squatters" who owned nearly 21,000,000 acres of mid-continent and other United States land. Although neither congressman revealed the source of his information, it was most likely reasonably correct—at least at an earlier date, if not in 1884.

There is no doubt that many (perhaps even most) of these "leviathan squatters" of 1884, were either the first-comer or the second-wave types

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3One probable error in both lists was the entry showing "An English Syndicate (Represented by the Close Bros.) in Wisconsin" owning 110,000 acres there. As far as is known by the author, the Close Brothers neither owned nor managed land in Wisconsin. Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 2, p. 269) felt that the Wisconsin land listed as owned by the Closes was actually their land in Iowa and Minnesota.
among the large-scale land speculators previously discussed (pages 2-4 above), i.e., those more interested in making quick resale profits than in improving or working the lands they purchased. There were some among them though, who were actually interested in improving their holdings and establishing large-scale commercial farming operations either by hired labor or through a tenancy arrangement. These were in the late-comer group of speculators discussed previously on page 4 above. The Close Brothers can be identified with this group—at least in the earlier years of their activities. In fact, not only were these English brothers interested initially in large-scale commercial farming, they became also colonists in a commercial sort of way. This later and other aspects of their enterprise are discussed and analyzed in detail in following sections and remaining chapters of this study.

The Genesis of Large-Scale Farming on the Prairie

The beginning of large-scale (more than one thousand acres) prairie farming can be traced at least to the central and eastern portion of the Grand Prairie of Illinois. A number of factors made it possible for farming of this kind to begin in this general area. First, and most important

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4 Paul W. Gates, "Large Scale Farming in Illinois, 1850 to 1870," *Agricultural History*, VI (April, 1932), p. 16. Large-scale commercial farming became most prevalent in nine Illinois counties: Vermilion, McLean, Morgan, Edgar, Grundy, Sangamon, Champaign, Christian, and Iroquois. The author has somewhat arbitrarily considered a large-scale farm to be more than one thousand acres. However, this size farm is convenient to use since this was the largest grouping of farm sizes in Federal and state censuses of 1880 and 1890.
was the prairie itself. It was here for the first time that the pioneer settler was confronted with broad, open, relatively flat untimbered areas. Once he had overcome his suspicion that such "barren" land was infertile and came to know of its agricultural richness, he abandoned the idea that 160 acres was the maximum size for viable farming operations and those who could afford to do so in the first place, began buying or contracting for as much land as their pocketbooks would permit.5

The Illinois Central Railroad Company was another important factor contributing to the building up of large farms in central and eastern Illinois. This company with some two and one-half million land grant acres at its disposal, sold off huge amounts of it on exceedingly generous credit terms (up to seven years to pay with frequent extensions) to those men of means who desired to try their hand at operating large farms. This generosity was, of course, as self-serving to the Illinois Central as it was helpful to the capitalist speculator because it not only hastened general settlement, but served to build up markets for the railroad.6

An equally important factor contributing to the beginning of large-scale farming in Illinois was the cattle industry (including its packing aspect in Chicago and environs). Many of the eventual large farm operators in Illinois began as small-time cattle dealers, buying small numbers of feeder cattle from local, out-state, and even out-of-state breeders,

5Ibid., p. 14.
6Ibid., p. 15.
driving them to their prairie farms, and fattening them for market on the rich grass of the open prairie. This proved to be a highly profitable operation which grew steadily. Eventually, due to the inevitable human population influx, these cattlemen ran out of open prairie on which to graze their cattle, but they were able to offset this problem by investing their considerable profits into land of their own, thus eventually building up the great farms of their "cattle kingdoms."  

The successful operation of these large grain and livestock farms was made possible by at least one other factor. That factor was the improvements of existing farm machinery and new farm inventions, most of which came about in the 1850's and 1860's. During these decades the reaper was perfected, new kinds of planters were introduced, the plow was adapted to more efficient use in the prairie soils, and the corn cutter and stocker, the circular harrow, the cultivator, and other labor-saving devices were introduced or improved upon. Even as early as 1864, one observer noted that the improvement in farm machinery made it possible to farm "practically double" the land they were able to farm a few years earlier.

It does not serve the purpose of this study to discuss, even briefly, all of the large-scale farming operations that had their beginning (and, for the most part, their ending) in Mid-America during the

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7 Ibid., p. 16.
8 Ibid., p. 17.
9 Ibid., citing Osborn to Heyworth, June 1, 1864, Osborn Letter Book, 1863-1865, Magazine Office, Illinois Central Station, Chicago.
nineteenth century. Suffice it to say that in 1860 there were 501 farms of more than a thousand acres in nine North Central states and territories. Illinois led these states with 194. In 1870 there were 635, with nearly all the gain in Illinois. But by 1880 the number of more-than-a-thousand-acre holdings in these North Central states had increased markedly to 2,990 with 1,621 located west of the Mississippi River.\footnote{Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer’s Last Frontier: Agriculture 1860–1897 (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945), pp. 154 and 155, citing the Eighth Census: Agriculture, p. 221; the Ninth Census: Industry and Wealth, pp. 345–366; and the Tenth Census: Agriculture, bottom folio, pp. 68–100.}

However, it should be pointed out that there were differences in these large operations. They differed not only in size, but often in the purpose for which begun, in the manner or under the system which they were operated (i.e., whether by hired labor or by some kind of tenancy arrangement), and in the kinds of cropping and methods of farming employed. Below are eight brief case studies thought to be reasonably representative of the types of nineteenth century large-scale farming operations. The locations of these eight operations are indicated (in a highly generalized way) in Figure 5 page 60.

\textbf{Different Types of Nineteenth Century Large-Scale Farming in Mid-America}

1. More than thirty years before the advent of the great grain and livestock farms of the Grand Prairie, one of the first and best known large farming operations in Illinois was that of George Flower and Morris Birkbeck, moderately well-to-do English writer and farmer respectively, who began their venture in 1817 along the Little Wabash in Southeastern
Illinois in what today is Edwards County. Whether their undertaking actually was a farming operation, a settlement, or a colony is a moot question. Ralph Brown preferred to call it a colony "... because it was an organized development, beginning with the deliberate selection of the site for community purposes, and continuing with its later occupation by Englishmen arriving in a body in 1818."¹¹ Paul Gates, on the other hand, stated that 4,000 of the 14,000 acres purchased by Birkbeck and Flower (and others) were "... developed into estates similar to those of rural England." The remaining 10,000 acres were set aside for "... other moderate capitalists they hoped would join their enterprise."¹² It would seem then, that the Birkbeck-Flower venture was at once a farming operation and a colony (or a settlement). In any case, there is little doubt that the villages of Albion (established by Flower) and less enduring Wanborough (established by Birkbeck), and most of Edwards County generally (which became widely known as the "English Prairie"), were anything more really than an organized enterprise created speculatively for profit. Beyond this, though, there is one interesting aspect of the Birkbeck-Flower venture that is worth noting. That aspect is the manner in which they publicized their Illinois venture abroad, especially in England. This is not to say that


advertising the benefits of particular tracts of land was not practiced by other individuals and land companies then or earlier. Actually the giant land development enterprises that had their beginnings in Eastern Ohio in the late 1790's and early 1800's (e.g., the Ohio Associates, the Scioto Company, and the Connecticut Land Company) did their share of advertising to attract immigrants. But their efforts were seemingly less concerted, or perhaps less refined, than they became a few years later, and certainly less frantic than they came to be as the frontier moved westward on to other prairies and the plains. As was more or less the general practice by 1817, Birkbeck and Flower published a series of pamphlets containing accounts of their experiences and "gilding the lily" relative to the advantages of farming on the prairies of Southeastern Illinois. These pamphlets were widely distributed, especially in England. One was even printed eleven times while another went through seven printings. The interesting thing about the Birkbeck-Flower pamphleteering is that the Close Brothers more than seventy years later employed almost exactly the same method to attract immigrants. In fact, a similar pamphlet (but probably a more honest one) published by William Close in 1880, went through at least three printings of a thousand copies each.

15 The pamphlet is William B. Close's Farming in North-Western Iowa, United States of America: A Pamphlet for Emigrants and a Guide to North-Western Iowa (Manchester, England: A. Ireland and Co., 1880). NOTE: Jacob Van Der Zee in The British in Iowa (op. cit., Footnote 2), referred often to this pamphlet. In fact he devoted all of two chapters (V and VI) and part of another (VII) to a specific discussion of it. His discourse was thorough and included frequent quotation from the pamphlet. While discussion of the Close pamphlet in this study is in less
2. Another of the "early prairie entrepreneurs" was Henry L. Ellsworth who, in the mid 1830's, bought 18,000 acres of land in the Wabash Valley around Lafayette, Indiana for himself and other investors. On part of this land he planned a modern tenant operation using the latest farm machinery and equipment. As Birkbeck and Flower before him, Ellsworth resorted to pamphleteering as a means of attracting settlers. In 1838 he published a 175-page pamphlet extolling the virtues of the Wabash Valley and "gilded the lily" even more than did Birkbeck and Flower. For example, in the pamphlet he advertised that there were "inexhaustible" coal deposits near Danville which proved to be greatly exaggerated. While the pamphlet attracted few settlers, it did accomplish its purpose which was to attract investment from eastern capitalists, some of whom became large-scale farm operators themselves.

After retiring from the office of Commissioner of Patents in 1845 (to which he had been appointed a decade earlier), Ellsworth began an extensive improvement program on the more than 100,000 acres of land he had acquired by then. He accomplished this program rather quickly through the shrewd use of tenants. On some of his land, tenants could acquire

detail, reference to it is fairly frequent especially in Chapter III. For the sake of clarity, therefore, only the Close pamphlet will be further cited in reference. Cross reference to Mr. Van Der Zee's book and other secondary sources will be omitted unless they are significant in a related way. Also, since Farming in North-Western Iowa is the only known publication of the Close Brothers, further references to it will be simply in the author's last name, page number, and specific comment if any.

17 Ibid., p. 191.
18 Ibid.
title to that which they occupied and had improved after giving Ellsworth a one-half share of their corn crop for three years. On the land he planned to retain for himself, Ellsworth erected buildings which he correctly believed would attract the tenants needed to improve the land. 19 Because he was prominent in developing the Patent Office's agricultural work, Ellsworth was widely known and "his activities in prairie farming were given much attention in farm journals." 20

3. During the 1850's the Scott family, who came from Kentucky, began buying Illinois and Iowa prairie land and eventually accumulated 63,000 acres. 21 Like Ellsworth, Scott rapidly developed a good deal of his land by using tenant labor, and by 1860 he had twenty tenants on his land. With some of his tenants (perhaps even with all) Scott had the kind of rental-sales agreement that was not uncommon in the Middle-West even at that time. Briefly, these agreements were that Scott would transfer title to the land sold only after the buyer had made specified improvements (e.g., had erected a barn or had broken a specified number of acres of land in a specified time limit, etc.) and had paid so much for a

19 Ibid. Gates did not elaborate on the kinds of buildings Ellsworth erected for his tenants. However, Harry J. Carmen, in "English Views of Middle Western Agriculture," Agricultural History, VIII (January, 1934), n. on p. 9, cited a pamphlet by one Sir James Caird entitled "Prairie Farming in America," (New York, 1859), p. 50, in which many contract-built houses on the Illinois Prairie during the late 1850's were described as: small, 18 x 24 feet, two rooms and a kitchen, with side posts 12 feet high, boarded, lathed and plastered and roofed with shingles. Cost (in 1858) was 40£ ($200.00). Even though this description is of contract houses erected in the late 1850's, it is entirely possible that the Ellsworth "buildings" of the 1840's included similar dwellings.


21 Ibid., p. 192.
specified number of years. The tender in the Scott contracts was corn in the amount of sixteen bushels per acre for a specified number of years ranging from six to nine. 22

4. Of the large single owner-operator farms in Illinois during the 1850's and 1860's were those of Michael Sullivant and John T. Alexander in East-Central Illinois. Sullivant purchased from the Government and the Illinois Central Railroad some 80,000 acres in four contiguous counties (Champaign, Ford, Piatt, and Livingston). Twenty-three thousand of these acres were in one block in Champaign County. 23 To develop this one block of land (which he called "Broadlands"), Sullivant employed a work force of between "... one to two hundred men, two hundred horses and mules, a large number of oxen and a great amount of agricultural machinery." 24 Sullivant apparently over extended himself because in 1868 he was forced to sell Broadlands. 25 Subsequently, however, he began farming another 40,000 acres of his land near Paxton in Ford County. Within five years on this tract he had 18,000 acres in corn and another 5,000 in other


25 Ibid., citing the Prairie Farmer, September 15, 1968.
crops, and in one year (probably 1871) he reportedly had a husked corn yield of 450,000 bushels.  

5. John Alexander bought Sullivant's Broadlands and by 1869 had increased its size by some 3,500 acres (to 26,500 acres). Being a cattleman, Alexander maintained Broadlands principally as a stock farm on which (in 1869) he grazed some 4,000 cattle and kept 500 hogs. In pasture and crops he had 150 acres in grass, 400 acres in wheat, 140 acres in oats, 120 acres in rye, and 5,000 acres in corn. During the year he employed 160 men and worked 120 yoke of oxen and 100 head of horses and mules. It was reported that he expected to make an overall net profit for the year of some $200,000.  

6. The most "eye-catching" of the large prairie landlords of the 1850's and 1860's was William Scully, a wealthy Irish immigrant who accumulated more than a quarter of a million acres of land in Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, and Louisiana. Paul Gates suggested that Scully was "perhaps the greatest impetus to tenant farming in the Middle West. . . ." He was no doubt referring in this respect to the fact that, of all the land acquired by Scully, most of it was broken up into 160 acre farmsteads and rented on a strictly cash basis. Much of this

26 Ibid.  
27 Ibid.  
28 Ibid., citing the Prairie Farmer, August 7, 1869.  
land remains today in the hands of the Scully family who still retain a considerable number of tenant farms in Illinois, Kansas, and Nebraska.  

7. Probably the best known of all the large-scale farming operations in Mid-America during the nineteenth century were the "bonanza farms," which began in present-day North Dakota in about 1873 and by 1878 had spread all along the two-hundred and fifty-mile length of the Red River Valley from south of Fargo northward to the Canadian border.  

The name associated most with the bonanza farms of Dakota was Oliver Dalrymple who, by the early 1870's had gained a considerable reputation as a successful wheat farmer in Minnesota. Because of his reputation Dalrymple was hired (in 1875) by a three-man partnership of executives of the financially troubled Northern Pacific Railroad who, in effort to encourage settlement (and thus improve railroad revenues), had traded some of their less valuable railroad bonds for eighteen sections of Red River Valley land in present-day North Dakota. The partners provided all of the capital and agreed to pay Dalrymple one-half the land, stock, and improvements, but only after their capital outlay had been

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31 Bogue, op. cit., Footnote 29, pp. 57 and 58. For a brief but interesting account of Scully's early years in America, see Homer E. Socolofsky, "William Scully: His Early Years in Illinois, 1850-1865," Journal of the West, IV (January, 1965), pp. 41-55. Socolofsky estimated (pp. 43 and 44) that Scully had already acquired more than 38,000 acres of land by the early 1850's, most of it "poorly drained" land in Logan County, Illinois.


33 Ibid.
recouped with interest. In addition, in 1877 Dalrymple was hired to manage the nearly one hundred sections of Red River Valley land purchased by the Grandin Brothers who had come from Pennsylvania and had acquired their land also in exchange for Northern Pacific securities. In time Dalrymple's land interests grew until he controlled some 100,000 acres.

Obviously Dalrymple-managed bonanza farms differed from the great farms of Illinois in that they were principally mono-crop (wheat) cash grain operations. But another important difference was in their organization and management. The Illinois farms of Sullivant and Alexander were single entities operated, by whatever labor and machinery required, from one more-or-less central location. On the other hand, Dalrymple (using one of his operations of 1880 as representative of the system) had about 25,000 acres in crop on separate large farms of about 6,000 acres. Each of these larger entities had its own superintendent and was subdivided into parcels of about 2,000 acres of plowed land with each of these subdivisions having its own farm buildings, boarding house, stables, blacksmith shop, and the like. The two thousand acres limit was considered the best size "for systematic management," whereas, if a larger operation, "... the men might have to travel too far from their work."

8. Colony-founding is still another example of large-scale farming operations in Mid-America during the nineteenth century, especially on

35 Ibid., p. 158.
36 Ibid., pp. 158 and 159, citing the Tenth Census: Agriculture, bottom folio, p. 454.
the frontier or in newly settled areas. Two types of this kind of agricultural group settlement were common: (1) those colonies established principally as commercial ventures, and (2) those colonies established principally for social or religious motives. Both types were ethnic in nature, with the social-religious colonies generally the more enduring probably because of their more purposeful underpinnings. There were, of course, many instances of social-religious oriented colonies throughout the Middle-West during the nineteenth century, e.g., the Amana colonies in Eastern Iowa, which were established around 1855 and flourish still today (albeit somewhat more commercially).

Of more interest to this study, however, are those colonies established in Mid-America during the nineteenth century as commercial ventures. Especially important are those of English (or British) origin that may have had some influence on the Close Brothers in their efforts to establish their own English colony in 1880. The previously discussed Birkbeck-Flower colony-like enterprise in Southern Illinois may have been one that influenced them. It seems more likely though, that if they were influenced at all in this respect, the later English colonizing efforts in Kansas during the early 1870's may have interested them more. One in particular that may have caught their eye was the Victoria Colony founded in Ellis County, Kansas in the spring of 1873 by one George Grant, an enterprising Scotsman. 37

37 Oscar O. Winther, "The English and Kansas, 1865-1890," in The Frontier Challenge: Responses to the Trans-Mississippi West, ed. by John G. Clark (Lawrence, Kans.: The University Press of Kansas, 1971), pp. 257 and 258. As did the Close Brothers, Grant also made the list of "leviathan squatters" entered into the 1884 Congressional Record. (See U.S. Congress, op. cit., Footnote 2.)
Grant was widely known not only for his business acumen as a silk merchant of London, but also (apparently) for his business, artistic, and cultural connections with Americans. These American connections perhaps led to his interest in Kansas land which was offered for sale at that time by the Kansas Pacific Railroad Company (the KP). In any event, in 1872 he purchased seventy sections of land (alternating sections totaling about 44,800 acres) of the KP's holdings in Ellis County, some eleven miles east of present-day Hays. For this land, Grant paid a relatively small sum of between forty cents and eighty cents an acre.

Grant intended, of course, to resell most of this land to "upper-class Britishers of means" and thereby establish a colony of affluent Englishmen and Scots. He also intended to establish for himself (and did) a large-scale ranching operation engaged in raising blooded stocks of cattle and sheep.

Upon arrival in Kansas in May 1873, Grant selected his own land and laid out the remainder "in assorted sizes" and placed them on sale. He established land sales offices in Edinburgh, London, and New York. Through these agencies, and aided by the KP, he began a concerted publicity campaign. Pamphleteering, planted news releases, and sponsored visitations by distinguished personages soon gave "zest and notoriety to these promotional activities." By the summer of 1873 his lands were

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38 Ibid., p. 258.
39 Ibid., p. 259.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., pp. 260-262.
widely advertised in England on terms of £1 to £3.10 ($5.00 to $15.20) an acre, with 20 percent down and the balance (at an interest rate of 6 percent) to be paid within four years.  

While Grant seemingly wanted to pursue his grandiose plan to make Victoria Colony "a haven for British Gentry," one large purchaser apparently had different ideas. This interloper, who had bought some seven sections of Grant's land, formulated a plan to resell the land in small parcels to "indigent English workingmen and farm laborers." This immediately aroused considerable interest in English labor circles. The plan never materialized but the Manchester Labourer's Union Chronicle later advertised that for one or two thousand pounds ($5,000 or $10,000) the Victoria Colony offered "a fine opening for the farmer... not simply as a vast field for healthy homes and farming enterprise, but the potentiality of vast fortunes...." Even though it seems highly unlikely that the average English laborer or farmhand could have afforded even one thousand pounds to invest in Kansas land, the Chronicle's statement does seem to indicate Grant's departure from his declared objectives.

The exact number of upper class and other Britishers that eventually emigrated to the Victoria Colony is not clear. Indications are that success with recruitment correlated with the crop success or failures of the 1870's. The greatest population probably was achieved in 1876 when

42 Ibid., p. 263. Apparently Grant made no improvements on his lands before offering them for sale.

43 Ibid., pp. 263 and 264, citing the Manchester Labourer's Union Chronicle, December 20, 1873.
an estimated 300 persons lived in Victoria and its surrounding area. However, crop failures, grasshopper plagues, and other natural disasters combined to cause the eventual demise of the colony. In 1880 the Federal Census counted only 128 British in all of Ellis County. Grant's sudden death in April of 1878 and the encroachment of "eager and energetic" Russian settlers from their adjoining Herzog Colony, hastened the colony's demise and by 1900 only 63 British remained.

\[44\] Ibid., p. 264.

GENERAL AREAS OF LARGE SCALE FARMING 1800 - 1880
IN THE NORTH CENTRAL STATES

N.D.A.
S.D.A.
WIS.
MINN.
MA.
ILL.
IND.
NEB.
MO.
KAN.

Generalized Locations (See text)

- Birkbeck's & Flower's "English Estates"
- Ellsworth holdings
- Scott, Sullivant, Alexander, & Scully holdings
- Dalrymple & other "bonanza" farms
- Grant's Victoria Colony

* Illinois holdings only

Figure 5
CHAPTER III

THE CLOSE BROTHERS IN IOWA

Why Choose Iowa?

William Brooks Close, the unofficial leader of the Close Brothers' land purchasing operations, was either responsible for initiating, or for perpetuating, a rather romanticized account of the fortuitous manner in which he and his brothers came to begin their venture in Iowa. The account began in Philadelphia in 1876.

William and his older brothers, John and James Close, were noted Cambridge oarsmen. It was for this reason that William (then age 23) was invited to Philadelphia to compete in its centennial rowing regatta. According to William Close's own account—while practicing one day for the event, the slide mechanism on his shell seat "became very stiff" resulting in such a bad bruise that he was unable to sit down with comfort. While resting his wound on the verandah of his lodgings, he struck up a conversation with a Mr. Daniel Paullin of Quincy, Illinois, who subsequently interested him in the vast amounts of good farmland available in Northwestern Iowa. Paullin invited Close to visit him in Quincy and

1. All four of the Close Brothers involved in this study (John, James, William, and Frederick) bore the middle name Brooks, which was their mother's maiden name. See Jacob Van Der Zee, The British in Iowa (Iowa City, Ia.: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1922), n. on p. 258.

2. Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 58 and 59, quoting from a William Close to Van Der Zee letter of November 30, 1921.
volunteered to lead an expedition into Western Iowa. Some two months
later William and his brother Frederick (who had been farming for some
time in Virginia) visited Paullin, and with one of Paullin's sons traveled the western counties of Iowa by horse and buggy for about a week. Upon their return to Quincy, William Close became engaged to (and in 1880 married) Paullin's eldest daughter. 3

The fact that William Close quickly became engaged to and later married Paullin's daughter seems scarcely significant to this study. It does, however, help explain William Close's apparent fondness for telling of the part that mere chance played in deciding his marriage partner and in the beginning of the Close enterprise in Iowa.

Before Philadelphia and Quincy, though, the Close family evidently had taken more than just a passing interest in the huge amounts of good, cheap land available in the United States. Such information certainly was not hard to come by, for the British Press was a veritable fountain of information (good and bad) about the opening lands of the American Mid-Continent Frontier. Moreover, land companies, railroad land office representatives (both American and British), and various state immigration representatives, had been active for years in Great Britain, "boom­ ing" their bargain lands from their offices and at public meetings as well as in the newspapers and other periodicals of the day. Concerning the role of the British Press in this respect, Oscar Winther wrote:

There were two receptive audiences to be reached in England: one, the affluent and better educated English gentry who expressed

3Ibid., p. 59.
interest in the American West as an area suitable for capital investment and for their often wayward sons; the other, indigent farm laborers and urban unemployed who, caught in the vise of adverse economic circumstance, sought escape through emigration. . . . 4

This English (British) receptiveness was no doubt one factor which perpetuated the sometimes frenzied land-sale activities of the land companies, railroads, and state immigration representatives.

With so much information and publicity available, it would seem inconsistent for the Closes not to have investigated or not to have had some prior knowledge of large-scale capital investment and farming on the prairies and plains of Mid-America before considering such an investment. It is even reasonable to assume they had beforehand knowledge of the earlier Birkbeck-Flower operation in Southern Illinois and Henry Ellsworth's early experiment with farm tenancy in the Wabash Valley, as well as other large-scale farming operations such as represented by Scott, Sullivant, Alexander, and Scully. There is no doubt they knew of Dalrymple's bonanza farms, 5 and most likely were very much aware of Grant's Victoria Colony in Kansas. 6 It is impossible, of course, to determine


5 William Close referred (negatively) to the Dalrymple operation by name, when writing about the Close "method of letting farms." See Close, p. 16. See also a brief discussion of the "Close System," pages 67-73, this study.

6 The likelihood that the Closes were aware of Grant's Kansas Colony is strongly supported by the fact that they bought (probably in 1884) some 100,000 acres of land in Trego County, Kansas. (See Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 117 and 118, quoting letter, William Close to Van Der Zee November 30, 1921.) Trego County is the next western neighbor of Ellis County where Grant established his colony.
the extent which earlier large-scale farming operations influenced the Closes. The fact that they practiced some of the same promotional and operational methods which were practiced by earlier large-scale operators (e.g., pamphleteering, tenancy, and colony-founding), suggests such influence, but the extent can be only a matter of conjecture.

There is little reason to doubt that William Close did meet and was influenced by Paullin under the circumstance he later related. It does seem though, that the Closes' interest in investing capital in American land was aroused some years before William's visit to Philadelphia in 1876. On the other hand, who is to say that William and his brothers would have chosen to begin in Iowa had it not been for Mr. Daniel Paullin and his eldest daughter? William Close's own words in 1879 are not only pertinent in this respect, but also reveal the upper-class English frame of mind of that day:

When I left Cambridge several years ago I had already made up my mind that if I left England and engaged in stock raising and farming generally, it was to the North American continent I should go. No other part of the world, it seemed to me, offered the same advantages; but the question as to what part of that continent to settle in, I thought it best to decide after I had taken an exploring trip through Canada and the States.

My sympathies naturally inclined me towards Canada, as being under the British flag, but dismissing from my mind all thoughts of settling in a country where "clearing" has to be done, and where the best portion of a man's life is spent in getting his farm fit for cultivation, I soon found that for stock raising and sheep farming Canada could not compete on equal terms with those States and territories where winters are shorter, and where maize or Indian corn is grown, in addition to swedes, turnips, peas, &c. Had I, however, intended to go in only for wheat growing, I should undoubtedly have chosen the Red River valley, in Manitoba, but as I was more bent on stock raising, I turned my back on Canada and went to look up a brother who had a small stock farm in the backwoods of the Alleghany [sic] Mountains, in Western Old Virginia. I did not stay long there—good lands were scarce and dear—and although more than fifty miles from a railroad, were held at £14 to £16 per acre [$70 to $80 per acre].
Nor did I stay long in the eastern part of the State. Virginia is, as the Yankees would say, "played out," tobacco has exhausted the soil, and I was offered some fine-looking estates with large trees and grand old mansions at a much less rate than good lands in the back woods. Also I formed a very bad opinion of the lower class of population; everywhere I went I saw far too much loafing about at the saloon doors, and the blacks would only work just sufficiently to keep themselves from actual starvation. So, with my brother, I turned towards the Western States, passing through and stopping in Pennsylvania, where, again, good lands are very highly priced, and in Illinois, which was too settled for my purpose. At Quincy, Illinois, I met a very well-informed American gentleman, who strongly advised me to visit North-Western Iowa, and informed me that when his two sons had finished their education at Harvard University he intended to settle them there. On our way we passed through the State of Missouri, a magnificent country, but cursed with a most wretched and shiftless population, and I then made up my mind I would have nothing further to do with the South and with its "low whites and coloured gentlemen." The eastern part of Kansas and Nebraska we liked more than any country we had yet seen, but fever and ague we found too prevalent in Kansas, and in Nebraska water was not as plentiful as it should be for stock; wells were frequently over 100 feet in depth.

We then moved into North-Western Iowa, and were at once enabled to endorse the favourable opinion given us by our friend in Illinois. After a long and careful investigation we made up our minds we would not spend more time and money in seeking for a better region for stock raising and sheep farming, North-Western Iowa combining it seemed to us every favourable circumstance. My brother at once resolved to leave Virginia, and, after settling matters at home, we bought lands in Crawford County, Iowa and have no hesitation in saying that neither of us have for a moment regretted our choice. We have since been joined by my brother James and many university and other men. 7

First Land Purchases

Beginning in May, 1877, William and Fred Close spent several months in Iowa not only in satisfying themselves that investing in land there would be safe and profitable, but in learning all they could about

7Close, p. 15. Extracted from an article by William Close which had been published initially in the British periodical Land and Water, November, 1879.
livestock raising in a prairie environment. Finally in February 1878, they purchased 2,593 acres in Northwestern Crawford County, Iowa near the present day town of Ricketts. They purchased an additional 480 acres in the southeastern part of the county that August. The cost per acre of these purchases was about $3.25 for the first and $2.75 for the second. While the two purchases involved more than 3,000 acres of land, they represented less than one percent of the total land in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota the Close Brothers were to acquire or manage during the next two decades. Indeed, by 1898 when their enterprise within the study area had pretty well ended, they had purchased for themselves and others or had managed for others at one time or another.

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8 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 59.

9 Crawford County, Iowa, "Transfer Book, Lands 1" and "Deed Record N and 0," (pp. 207 and 279-294 Record N, and p. 348 Record 0), Denison, Iowa. Actually this purchase was negotiated in August of 1877, but because of tax difficulties (see below) the deed was not filed until February 1878 and clear title to the land was not given to the Closes until May 1878. Accordingly, February 1878 seems the most accurate date to use for the purchase. Interestingly, the 2,593 acres of land the Closes purchased in February 1878 had belonged to the American Emigrant Company, a firm best known for its speculation in Iowa swamp lands. (See Allen G. Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century, Quadrangle Books (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 41, and Earle D. Ross, Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey (Iowa City, IA.: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1951), p. 65.) It is possible that the officers of the American Emigrant Company were among the "tired speculators" (discussed earlier on pages 4 and 35-37, Chapter I and in this chapter pages 73 and 74) who had been less than successful in making speculative profits on their land purchases and who were anxious to rid themselves of it because of sometimes excessively high taxes. In fact, there was a tax lien against this particular property (for two years delinquent taxes) which the Closes had to satisfy before obtaining title.

10 Ibid. Without divulging his source, Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 59) set the per acre cost somewhat higher at $3.50 for the two Crawford County purchases.
more than 344,500 acres of agricultural land in the thirteen counties comprising the study area. (See Appendix I for map showing the areal distribution of these Close purchased or managed lands.) The significant aspects of the Close Brothers' extensive land dealings are discussed in the remainder of this study.

The Close System

After purchasing their Crawford County lands, William and Fred Close took up residence in Denison of the same county and began immediately to divide their holdings into quarter sections (160 acre parcels). On each of the resulting twenty farmsteads, they contracted to erect buildings, to dig a well, and to break a certain amount of the virgin prairie sod. The buildings erected on most of the farmsteads were a small frame house "of the simplest and cheapest design" and a small barn or stable. The interior dimensions of the house were sixteen by twenty-two feet, with two rooms downstairs and two up. The downstairs rooms had eight-foot ceilings and the upstairs side-walls were four and one-half feet from the floor. These structures were "perfectly wind and water tight and warm," having two thicknesses of planking with air space between, boarded without and plastered within. The overall cost of the

11 The Close Brothers, individually and together, only occasionally bought and sold town lots and only once attempted to establish their own town. The one attempt was the town of Quorn in Southeastern Plymouth County, Iowa. (See Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 101 and 102, and also reference to in text and in Footnote 6, Chapter IV, page 92.) While the town-lot aspects of the Close enterprise were doubtlessly important, such land represented a relatively small portion of their overall enterprise. Accordingly only their agricultural lands are considered in this study.

12 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 63.
house and barn including a dug well was about $350, with the house the major expense costing between $225 and $250.13 (See Figure 6 for a drawing of the house and floor plan. See also Figure 2 and Appendices II and III respectively for: (1) an early photograph (circa 1890) of the William Farmer farmstead previously mentioned showing clearly the Close-built house which by 1900 had an added-on summer kitchen; (2) a relatively recent photograph (circa 1960) of a Close-built house which had been relegated to use as a granary at the time the photograph was taken; and (3) a Close-built house still very much in use as a home in 1972.)

As was the case with most large-scale tenant farm operations during the nineteenth century, the Closes experienced no problem in attracting tenants to their farms during all the years they were active in this respect in Iowa and Minnesota. The principal reason for the popularity of tenancy then was an ages old one in a contemporary setting--financial need. Many pioneer settlers simply could not muster the where-with-all to buy even government land at the minimum price, much less meet the cost of improving it in order to make it return a living. Even those having capital to invest had little hope of raising a paying crop within the first year, or the second or perhaps even the third year, if they were to purchase "raw lands." Thus, a tenancy arrangement on improved land such as the Closes offered was the answer for many, because the chance of raising a crop the first year was much greater while at the same time

13Close, pp. 12 and 16. There is a remarkable similarity between the contract houses built by the Closes and those built on the Illinois Prairie during the 1850's (described in Footnote 19, Chapter II, page 51 this study). This may suggest that the Closes were influenced by earlier (and perhaps contemporary) methods and styles of large-scale contract building of farm structures.
FLOOR PLAN OF A STANDARD CLOSE HOUSE
(From a drawing in Close, W. B. Farming in North-Western Iowa, p. 12)

Figure 6
the risks taken were considerably smaller. Probably contributing even more to the ease with which the Closes found willing tenants, was the generally depressed economy prevailing in the study area (and beyond) when the Closes came on the scene. These depressed conditions doubtless made for tighter money and credit because of the greater possibility of failure. Tenancy on Close land, of course, reduced the tenant's need for capital and diminished his risks in the event of crop failure. These advantages probably made sharecropping with the Closes most attractive to the newly arrived settler.

The relatively modest start that William and Fred Close had in Crawford County in 1878 proved to be a highly successful one by the end of 1879. One reason for their success was that 1879 was a good crop year for the county following a bad one. This fact coupled with general crop failures in Europe at about the same time, also made for higher prices. The Closes believed, though, that their success was due more to the system of large-scale tenant farming that they began in 1878 and perfected over the next several years. In this respect William Close wrote in 1880:

We came to the conclusion that, however good theoretically might be Dalrymple's system of farming a very large area, it would not pay in the end as well as letting the farms to the renters for an equal share of the crop—i.e., we provide the tenant with land ready for cultivation, a small but good house with rough stabling

\[\text{footnote text}\]

\[\text{footnote text}\]
or sheds, and also the seed for the crops, while the tenant provides everything else—labour, machinery, horses, etc., and puts our share of the crops into the granary, we having divided the crop, equally, bushel per bushel, as it comes from the thrashing-machine [sic]. Our agreements with the tenants are very strict, and we reserve the right to put other labour on at their exclusive charge if we are satisfied they are not doing their work in a proper way. By this system we can farm a very large area with a minimum of trouble, and are thus able at the same time to turn our attention to stock raising and sheep farming. We also noticed that the farmers, as a class, were extraordinarily careless in the way they looked after their own horses and machinery, and we naturally thought if they took so little care of their own property that they would take still less care of ours, and calculated that it would be more profitable to put into an increased quantity of lands the large amount of capital which on Dalrymple's system would be needed for horses, machinery, and perishable property. Even if we did not some years secure as large an average of returns as Dalrymple, we should be amply compensated by the greater amount of lands we held, and we felt confident that they would materially rise in value, as has been the case, and we also calculated that a bad year such as 1878, when wheat was struck with blight, would be a far less serious matter to us. We had no difficulty whatever in finding renters on our terms, and as new breaking is particularly adapted to wheat, we had by far the greater part of our land sown with that cereal.\(^\text{16}\)

If a tenant chose to raise some corn, the Closes simply charged a flat rate of $2.00 for every acre sown. This arrangement was apparently easier for the Closes because the relative bulkiness of corn made it too difficult and expensive to handle on a sharecrop basis.\(^\text{17}\)

The two Brothers were obviously pleased with their "system," for in 1880 they published a statement relative to the expenditures and receipts for the 1879 crop year on one of their Crawford County farms,

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\(^{16}\)Close, p. 16.

\(^{17}\)Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 66. Apparently the raising of wheat was an early Close preference as the principal crop during the first year of a new farm. However, they later came to prefer flax as the first crop on newly broken land, perhaps with some corn or wheat. But they soon recognized that corn was the most important crop after the first year. Wheat was also important to them, but "not as sure a crop as maize" (Close, p. 17).
"... the yield of which we have picked out as being nearest their total average." The farm selected was their "Soldier" farm occupying the Northwest quarter (160 acres) of Section fourteen in Soldier Township (see Appendix I). The statement contained the following information:

Expenses in 1878

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost of 160 acres of land @ $3.50 per acre</td>
<td>$560.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking of 90 acres @ $2.00 per acre</td>
<td>180.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of house, stable and well</td>
<td>346.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of seed (wheat)</td>
<td>82.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes on farm and buildings</td>
<td>18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total cost</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,187.25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Receipts in 1879

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yield from 90 acres of wheat (only crop)</td>
<td>1,373 Bu. (15% BPA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Brothers' half share of wheat crop</td>
<td>686.5 Bu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash return on wheat @ 93 cents per bushel &quot;at granary door&quot;</td>
<td>$1,276.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Brothers' share of cash return</td>
<td>$638.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus on one farm in 1879 the Closes made a net profit of 54 percent on their initial capital investment. If the net profit on an "average" Close farm in 1879 was 54 percent, then by extension one could presume that overall that year the Brothers made a net profit of nearly $13,000 (figuring that twenty 160-acre farms at an average cost of $1,187.25 each.

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18 Close, pp. 16 and 17.
would cost overall some $23,745.00, and that 54 percent of this overall cost is $12,922.30). Of course the Closes admitted that 1879 was a good crop year, but they estimated that their profit would have been 35 percent even in 1878 when the price of wheat was as low as it had ever been in that immediate area. 19

The Closes Extend Their Holdings 20

Having experienced immediate success with their first land venture, William and Fred Close were eager to extend their holdings. They probably would have bought again in Crawford County, but there was "... not an acre of good land to be had under 30s. [§7.50] per acre, the county having been rapidly settled up." 21 So the two Brothers turned their attention northward to the more recently settled Northwest Iowa counties where cheaper lands were available. They were of course aware of the depressed economic conditions which prevailed in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota, having both read and been told of them by their friends (Mr. Daniel Paullin probably among them) and acquaintances. They knew the homeseeking settler and speculator alike had been hard hit by recurring grasshopper infestations, drought, and the other adversities previously discussed (pages 23-41). Further, they knew that much of this land could be bought cheaply, especially from the "tired" speculator who

19 Close, p. 17.

20 The subtitle is borrowed from Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, title to Chapter III, p. 68.

21 Close, p. 17.
was burdened with sometimes excessive taxes on mostly unimproved land which he could neither sell nor rent. While the Closes doubtless bought some land from occupants, they preferred to buy land from absentee land owners ("non-residents" as William Close referred to them). The capitalist-speculator of course was the principal "non-resident" with whom the Closes dealt.

In June of 1879 with Mr. Paullin acting as their agent, the Closes bought their first land in Plymouth, Woodbury, and Cherokee Counties, Iowa. This purchase was from a single family, one John Bloodgood, his wife, and his (or her) sister, Louisa Stanton, widow. The land purchased involved (1) 9,640 acres in Southeastern Plymouth County in the vicinity of present day Kingsley and in the Northwestern portion of that county near Portlandville (presently Akron); (2) 6,000 acres in Woodbury County just south of Kingsley; and (3) 480 acres in the extreme south-central part of Cherokee County (see Appendix I). The total purchase amounted to 16,120 acres and cost the Closes $34,740 or about $2.15 an acre. Altogether the Close Brothers were to purchase eventually more than 34,000 acres of land in Plymouth and Woodbury counties, but the 480

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22 Close, p. 27.
acres of Bloodgood land they bought in Cherokee County in 1879 was the extent of their purchases in that county.

With the purchase of the Bloodgood lands the other two Close Brothers became caught up in the expanding American enterprise. James—who, with his older brother John, had been associated with their wealthy uncle, Sir William Cunliffe Brooks, in the banking business in England—joined his two brothers in Iowa.\(^25\) John, on the other hand, probably because of an established banking vocation and a family of his own, remained in England during all of the Close venture in America except for a reported visit to Iowa in the spring of 1881.\(^26\) Moreover, he apparently never became involved officially with the Close American land buying activities,\(^27\) even though he did furnish his brothers "... with a good deal of money to invest not only for himself but also for his English friends."\(^28\) However, because he invested in land himself and influenced his friends and others to invest also, his presence in England obviously was financially important to his brothers in America. It is for this reason that the author has included John Close in the study.

\(^{25}\) Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 69, citing letter, William B. Close to Van Der Zee November 30, 1921.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., n. on p. 259.

\(^{27}\) William Close (in Close, p. 2) wrote: "Our firm consists of Messrs. James, William, and Fred Brooks Close." Further, the several "Articles of Incorporation" found in the various county records contain the names of William, James, and Fred Close at one time or another, but none include John B. Close as a partner, officer, or agent.

\(^{28}\) Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 69.
Whether the Closes set up headquarters in Le Mars, Iowa just before or just after the Bloodgood purchase is not certain, nor is it important. What is important is the reason(s) they chose Le Mars. Van Der Zee suggested that Le Mars became the Closes' headquarters because it was a "natural gateway" not only to the new lands in the Northwestern Iowa counties which interested them but also because of its relative accessibility to markets (especially Chicago) via the several railroads already operable or planned. In this respect, the Illinois Central had operated for a number of years from Sioux City through Le Mars and eastward. The Sioux City and St. Paul (later to become the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha) traversed Plymouth, Sioux, O'Brien, and Osceola counties in Iowa, as well as Nobles and Jackson counties in Minnesota on its route from Sioux City to St. Paul. Via this latter road, connections could be made with the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul road scheduled then to soon begin operations across Sioux and O'Brien counties via Sheldon. (Railroad routes are shown in Appendix I.) That Le Mars was centrally located in Plymouth County itself and was a fairly large (with a reported population in 1880 of 1,895) and prosperous county seat town for that day in thinly settled Northwestern Iowa, were probably other reasons for the Closes locating their headquarters there. Whatever their reasons for choosing Le Mars, the town and the colony

29 Ibid., p. 72.

they began, with Le Mars as its focal point, are the best known (and by many, the only known) aspects of their enterprise in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota.

The Closes Promote a British Colony

It is not altogether certain that the Closes actually intended to establish a colony in Iowa, at least initially. However, with nearly 25,000 acres of land already bought and with plans to buy a great deal more in Plymouth, Woodbury, and other Northwestern Iowa counties plus a reasonable certainty that their investments were sound, the Closes sought to attract outside capital, particularly from England. By so doing they hoped to help develop Northwestern Iowa and thus create a demand for their improved lands by prospective tenants or buyers.

Taking full advantage of the general agriculturally depressed conditions which had been gripping Great Britain for some time, the Closes saw to it that their countrymen were made aware of the agricultural

\[31\] Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 74.

\[32\] These agriculturally depressed conditions were the product of mostly the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, but also a series of poor crop and livestock years due, to a greater extent, to inclimate weather and disease; a change in the pattern of British farming brought about principally by technological advances in farming methods and operations; and the lowering of Britain's agricultural import barriers. The technological changes decreased the need for farms and farm labor. Lower costs on foodstuffs (especially wheat) from America drove farmers from the land and further decreased the need for farms and farm labor. For one discussion on Britain's agricultural depression between 1870 and 1900, see J. A. R. Marrict, The English Land System: A Sketch of its Historical Evolution in its Bearing Upon National Wealth and National Welfare (London: John Murray, 1914), pp. 126-135. For a recent treatment of the subject, see J. T. Coppock, "Farming in an Industrial Age," The Geographical Magazine, XLIII, April, 1971, pp. 495-503.
opportunities in Iowa. It is not clear how they went about this in the beginning, but most likely it was done through personal correspondence with their family (brother John especially), friends, and business and other acquaintances. In the broader sense, of course, were the continuing efforts of state immigration boards, independent immigration societies, railroads, land companies and other individuals, as well as the numerous travelers abroad making profit of the insatiable British interest in the "American adventure" by writing of their observations and experiences. In any event, beginning probably in the spring of 1879, other Englishmen (and probably other Britishers) began arriving,\textsuperscript{33} and by November 1879 about "forty or fifty gentlemen," some with families, were settled in the vicinity of Le Mars. That same month it was reported that "... another installment of English capitalists reached Le Mars and are already on the look-out for lands" and that an estimated one hundred more would arrive in Northwestern Iowa by early 1880.\textsuperscript{34}

Following up on the initial influx of their countrymen into Le Mars and environs, William Glose wrote a number of letters extolling the virtues of and the profits to be made from farming in Northwestern Iowa. These letters included discourses on different aspects of farm operations, e.g., cattle raising, grain growing, etc. Apparently Glose intended his letters for the news media, but whether he did or not, they appeared in

\textsuperscript{33}Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 75 and 95. Mr. Van Der Zee gave full credit to the Closes for attracting the first British capitalists to Le Mars and Plymouth County (p. 94).

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., pp. 94 and 95, quoting from the Iowa Liberal (Le Mars), November 5, 1879.
the British magazine *Land and Water* and in Manchester and London newspapers. Other information about the Close Brothers' enterprise was often published too, (probably because of the considerable reputation of John, William, and James as former Cambridge oarsmen). In December of 1879, for example, the *London Times* reported that "... the Closes owned forty 160-acre wheat farms which they had let out to tenants, supplying land ready for cultivation, a house with rough sheds for stabling and necessary seed; while each tenant on his part provided labor, machinery and everything else" in return for a half share of the yearly crop.

There is little doubt that the relatively small group of British land-owning capitalists was taken in by the extensive and skillful propaganda about land-owning opportunities in America. It took no great imagination for the British "country gentleman" to see, in America, a solution to two of his most perplexing problems--"how to recover his rents and provide for his younger sons." With respect to rents, most land owners at that time in Great Britain were fortunate if they could realize an annual three percent return on their rented lands. In fact, in many instances their lands had either fallen into disuse altogether.

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35 Ibid., p. 75.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., pp. 75 and 76, in Van Der Zee's words citing the *London Times* article as republished in *The Iowa Liberal*, December 3, 1879.
39 Ibid., p. 77. See also Coppock, *op. cit.*, Footnote 32, pp. 495-503.
or tenants could not, or would not, pay their rents. What to do with one's younger sons was a problem that had plagued the landed gentry for decades but had become an even greater concern despite the fact that Great Britain had become the leading World power and was at the peak of her imperial expansion. Opportunities for second and later sons of the aristocracy always had been limited. But, as Great Britain expanded her foreign holdings, her home population greatly expanded too without an appreciable increase in the number of opportunities for the younger sons. Indeed, even positions in such traditional refuges as the military and clergy became difficult to come by. While most of these second and later sons could still depend on some sort of "remittance" to sustain them, there was virtually no chance at all for them to inherit titles and landed estates. Northwestern Iowa (and other parts of Mid-America and westward) therefore "... presented the opportunity for these blue-bloods to set up estates of their own and become landed gentry in a country where rich inexpensive land was still available."40

The intense interest of the very class of British that the Closes hoped to attract to Northwestern Iowa as investors, probably precipitated their decision to promote a British colony in Plymouth County. In any event, William Close returned to England during the late fall of 1879 (actually on his honeymoon, for he had married Daniel Paullin's daughter). While in England he, having earlier organized with his brothers the firm of Close Brothers and Company, established offices in

Manchester and London. From these offices he conducted the daily business of meeting with, or writing to, interested persons in effort to persuade them to emigrate to the Northwestern Iowa colony. From this promotional activity came the pamphlet *Farming in North-Western Iowa* written by William Close, several thousand copies of which were published and distributed throughout England in early 1880.

While portions of *Farming in North-Western Iowa* have already been discussed in considerable detail earlier in this study, the fact that the pamphlet was meant specifically to promote the Close Colony warrants further discussion of it relative to the firm's objectives, stated or otherwise.

Leaving little doubt as to the class of their countrymen they hoped to attract to Northwestern Iowa, the Closes began their pamphlet by simply stating that the objectives of their firm were "... to establish a colony of English people of the better class, and thus combine Western farming with some English Society, and to act as agents for these newcomers..." To emphasize their intent in this respect, they expressly dismissed "laborers without means" as prospects, since labor was "cheap"

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41 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 77. Probably because they needed additional capital to promote and support their colony venture, the Close Brothers and Company took on a new partner in early 1880. The new partner was an old friend, Constantine W. Benson, who, like the Closes, was a Cambridge man and oarsman. At about the same time, the new partnership also changed the name of the London end of their firm to Close, Benson and Company (Ibid., pp. 81 and 102).

42 See full citation in Footnote 15, Chapter II, pages 49 and 50.

43 See Chapter II, page 49, and this chapter, pages 63-74.
in Iowa and one of such class probably would end up being worse off there than in England. The firm also discouraged British artisans and mechanics unless they were "... able and willing to combine farming with their other occupations, as it [Northwestern Iowa] is purely an agricultural district." To further discourage the unwanted, even among the gentry, they stated:

Naturally the best class to emigrate are practical farmers, who are possessed of capital. They need lose no time in purchasing their farm and setting to work. An inexperienced man should not invest his money at once, but should board and lodge on some farm for at least a year. The more a man brings the quicker and greater will be the returns. £500 (£2,500) will enable a man to buy and equip a farm of 160 acres for growing grain, but will leave scarcely any margin for the purchase of stock. To succeed, settlers, unless provided with ample means, must begin by roughing it somewhat and do all the work themselves, employing as little labour as possible, either out-door or in-door. We wish to impress upon them the fact that they must make up their minds to hard work, probably harder than they have ever done before, but at the same time work of which they will directly reap the full return. Women and children must also help to keep down expenses by doing the house work, and looking after the dairy, poultry, &c.

For a man who is used to good living in England, and to a sedentary life, unaccustomed to roughing it, and inexperienced in farming, we consider £1,000 (£5,000) is not too much to bring out. Our experience is that, however willing he may be to rough it and save expenses, it takes time for him to work as a labourer, and thus save as much as possible each year to re-invest. Indeed it is the capital invested in live-stock over and above the first £500 (which is tied up in lands, buildings, &c.) that enables a man rapidly to increase his capital.  

Insofar as concerned their colonizing activities, the Close firm objectives did not include the selling of their own lands to prospective colonists. Neither were they interested in selling the lands of other

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44 Close, p. 2.
firms or persons. Their sole concern, they stated, was in acting as
land agents on commission for prospective colony investors in their (the
investors') interests to secure "the best bargains possible."<sup>46</sup>

For those qualified and interested in emigrating to the colony,
the Closes offered a number of attractive advantages. These included:
(1) special sea and train fares arranged by the Closes for "getting out"
to Iowa);<sup>47</sup> (2) the opportunity to select the best land at the least
price from descriptively accurate lists maintained by the Closes, there-
by avoiding the time and expense of looking for land on their own;<sup>48</sup>
(3) temporary and inexpensive room and board ($3.00 to $3.50 a week)
while deciding where or whether or not to buy, arranged by the firm with
town and nearby farm residents;<sup>49</sup> (4) the firm's offer to assist those
without farming experience by selecting a farm for them and permitting
them to live on it in exchange for work (perhaps at a salary), and thus

<sup>46</sup> <i>Ibid.</i>, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> <i>Ibid.</i>, pp. 27 and 28. The rates by steerage and emigrant trains
were under $55; those by intermediate class and emigrant trains were $65;
and those for "Saloon" class sailing and first class train ranged between
$75 and $95. For children under twelve, the fare was half in all in-
stances and free if under one. Cost of living and other personal expenses
for the twelve to fourteen day journey from Liverpool to Le Mars were an
estimated $15 to $20.

<sup>48</sup> <i>Ibid.</i>, pp. 3 and 27. The Close firm claimed that they could buy
land regularly for "three to four shillings" ($0.75 to $1.00) an acre less
than could other agents and that even more could be saved if they were to
buy for several purchasers at the same time. Prices quoted on first
class land within eight to ten miles of railroad stations were $3.75 to
$5.00 an acre for purchases up to 160 acres and $3.00 to $3.50 an acre
for purchases of two or three thousand acres at one time.

<sup>49</sup> <i>Ibid.</i>, p. 3.
gain practical experience before investing;\(^{50}\) (5) the firm's offer to buy in advance and improve farms for those unable to "go out" before the breaking season (early April);\(^{51}\) and (6) the close guarantee of clear title to lands purchased and their assurance of close assistance while "settling in" to include superintending of land improvements such as erecting buildings and "breaking."\(^{52}\) In connection with superintending improvements, the firm offered the advantage of wholesale costs for buildings built and wells dug for a number of purchasers at one time, and for farm machinery, implements, home furnishings, and the like bought in bulk lots.\(^{53}\)

For those interested in investing capital without "going out" to the colony, the firm offered either to (1) buy and improve lands, secure a sharecrop tenant for them, and attend to the land generally, or (2) act as agents for them in lending money on terms of 8 percent on the security of first mortgages against improved farms up to 25 percent of their value. The firm candidly recommended the former service over the latter because the investor not only was apt to get a good return for his share of the crop, but he would also gain from the ever increasing value of the land.\(^{54}\)

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 28.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., pp. 3 and 4.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 28.
Probably more in recognition of the "cadet" problem in Britain (pages 79 and 80), but still with an eye toward future profits, the firm offered also to take some "pupils" on their own stock farm at a small cost so that they could learn all aspects of Western farming and thus avoid many mistakes before investing their own money. 55

Excluding costs for pupils, the Close firm charged prospects for the "whole" of their services a commission of $250 if they actually purchased up to 160 acres of land. For purchases of more than 160 acres the firm charged a flat 5 percent of the purchase price of the excess acres. (The $250 fee actually was intended as a 5 percent charge, because that amount represented 5 percent of the $5,000 minimum capital they deemed necessary for a prospect to have before the firm would do business.) The firm also required that $125 be deposited with them as "honest money" even before the emigrant left England. The deposit was returnable in full, however, in the event the prospect was dissatisfied with arrangements and departed (presumably back to England) without buying land from the firm. Otherwise the deposit was applied to the commission charged. 56

The Close Brothers were aware, of course, that to make a success of their colony they had not only to make it attractive relative to initial

55Ibid. The firm did not give (in their pamphlet) the amount to be charged to board and train pupils. They simply stated that there would be a "fixed premium." However, two authors (Harnack, op. cit., Footnote 40, p. 12, and W. S. Freeman, ed., History of Plymouth County. Iowa: Her People, Industries and Institutions, I (Indianapolis, Ind.: B. F. Bowen and Co., Inc., 1917), p. 433) reported that $600 per pupil per year was the normal charge. See Chapter IV, page 102 for other Close charges for pupils.

56Ibid., p. 4.
"out-of-pocket" expenses, but to make Northwestern Iowa attractive both as a permanent home and as a continuing profitable investment. To this end they devoted much of their short pamphlet (thirty-five pages in all including an index and two maps) to pointing out the good points about Iowa and its northwestern counties. The subjects covered were many, but primarily they concerned: (1) favorable comments on the geography of Northwestern Iowa including its soils and climate; (2) Northwestern Iowa's principal kind of agriculture (corn, wheat, barley, oats, and flax, and cattle, hogs and sheep,--with corn described as the "great staple crop" of the State); (3) the State's rank among others in agricultural production, e.g., first in wheat and hogs, second in corn, etc.; (4) and a discourse on growing various crops and livestock, including probable initial costs on an average 160 acre farm as well as estimated average returns in each instance from the first through several years of farming. 57

Unlike most other capitalist-speculators whose promotional prospectuses on their respective American lands read like invitations to Eden, the Close firm was careful to point out some drawbacks of the country they were promoting. For example, beyond the normal hardships

57 Ibid., pp. 4-9 and 16-27. Some of the more important accolades about Northwestern Iowa's geography were: (1) the "remarkable" gently undulating topography of the region permitting maximum use of the land for agriculture; (2) the abundance of natural grass available for grazing livestock; (3) a "particularly healthy" climate with ample rainfall and moderate temperatures, rarely exceeding a range of 92 degrees in summer and 0 degrees in winter; (4) the abundance of pure water and lack of "swamps and morasses," thus reducing sharply the possibility of "fever and ague;" and (5) the enduring richness of the region's soil "unbroken by stumps, rocks, stones, or other obstructions."
expected in any new country, they warned that newcomers would have to contend with the still devastating grasshopper infestations (although they rightly predicted their cessation for the most part after new settlers had taken a better hold on the land). The firm pointed out too, the danger of prairie fires and the hazard that one's wheat crop might suffer from blight or pests. Regarding climate, the firm warned of hot (though dry) summers "when the glass is over 90 degrees," and cold winters accompanied by occasional blizzards and high winds. They stressed also the general lack of society in the new country, at least insofar as the women were concerned. They expected though that the problem would be solved "by the class and number of people going out," and the availability of servant girls furnished by arrangement from one of the better training schools in Scotland.58

As discussed earlier in this study, it would be most difficult to determine whether the Closes were influenced by any one or more of the earlier commercially oriented colonies. The limited research done on such colonies for this study seems to indicate that the Close Colony was similar in many respects to most of the earlier ventures. Indeed, one could even speculate that the Closes incorporated the better features of these forerunners as well as other earlier large-scale farming operations into their own colony concept. But again, any suggestion of this nature would be pure conjecture. On the other hand, it hardly seems likely that they, as astute young businessmen, were unaware of and were not influenced in some way by the countless promotional schemes (including

colony-founding) which bombarded the British citizen during that period, most of which were designed simply to make profits for their perpetrators. One needs to take into account only the content of the pamphlet, *Farming in North-Western Iowa*, to determine that the Close colonizing effort was simply a profit making scheme in the main. If the Brothers could, at the same time, make over a small portion of the Iowa prairie into a reasonable facsimile of the home country—a new England on the prairie as it were—then so much the better. Certainly such a social climate not only pleased them but it helped to attract the British capitalist "of the better class" they wanted in Northwestern Iowa.

In short, the Closes' colony-founding venture and their land buying operations on their own behalf, were actually two different, though related, aspects of their overall enterprise: (1) the colony idea was the promotional scheme to attract money to Northwestern Iowa in order to develop the country agriculturally; and (2) by so doing they hoped to create a demand for their own lands, not from sought after capitalists, but rather from among the many thousands of homeseekers (both American and foreign born) emigrating westward.
CHAPTER XV

THE COLONY, SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The Close Colony was an immediate though, as shall be seen, not an enduring success. For the Close Brothers it helped accomplish that which they sought most, i.e., it attracted the capital, which promoted agricultural growth of the region, which in turn created a market for their lands. To the capitalist investor (either the colony-joiner or the stay-at-home) it represented an opportunity for a greater return on money invested in land than had been the case in the United Kingdom; and, the colony was seen as a solution as to "what to do with the boys," i.e., what to do with the second and/or wayward sons of the British aristocracy who had little future in the home country.

For quite obvious reasons the citizens of Le Mars and environs were greatly pleased that British capitalists had expressed interest in the still vast amounts of unimproved land in and around their community and throughout the county. They were particularly happy that the Close Brothers had chosen Le Mars for their headquarters. Indeed, even before the colony idea had fully germinated in the Close Brothers' minds, a local newspaper editor wrote:

These gentlemen are improving vast quantities of land in this and adjacent counties; [Plymouth, Crawford, Woodbury and Cherokee] but what they have already done is only a small matter to what they will do in the future. They are giving employment to many worthy men; making it an easy matter for poor men to secure good farms, encouraging emigration hitherward, and are in fact busy all the
time doing something that advances the prosperity of Northwest Iowa. We . . . are gratified to have them locate in Le Mars.

Later, in January 1880, under the heading of "How We Grow," another local editor observed that because the Close enterprise had attracted a considerable number of "sturdy English farmers" to the region, "the prospects for Plymouth County never looked better."  

The Closes' decision to promote a colony with Le Mars as its center further heightened expectations, and the prediction of a bright future for Le Mars and Plymouth County was certainly a correct one. Response to the Close Colony prospectus was immediate and within less than a year after they had distributed their pamphlet in January and February 1880, it was reported that a total of 400 English (British) immigrants had taken up residence in Plymouth County.

The year 1880 was a relatively modest one insofar as concerned Close land buying activities. During the entire year they purchased only some 7,400 acres of land, approximately 5,300 acres of which were in Plymouth County. There may have been any number of reasons for this

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1. Jacob Van Der Zee, The British in Iowa (Iowa City, IA: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1922), p. 95, quoting The Iowa Liberal (Le Mars), November 5, 1879.

2. The Lemars Sentinel, January 1, 1880.


4. The Close firm also purchased a combined 2,110 acres in three other Iowa counties: 680 acres in Woodbury County; 960 acres in Sioux County; and 470 acres in Lyon County. Interestingly, the Closes sold nearly as much land in 1880 as they purchased but managed to keep much of it in the family. Of some 5,600 acres sold that year, 1,760 acres in Plymouth and Woodbury counties were sold to Daniel Puallin, William Close's father-in-law. (The information on these land purchases and sales was
relatively small amount of land buying activity, but probably colonizing commitments took up much of their time and effort that first year of the colony's existence. Certainly having to provide all the services guaranteed for several hundred newcomer colonists demanded much of their attention. Then too, there were their own personal farming interests to look after as well as the much greater task of superintending a great deal of construction and other improvements on a hundred or more farmsteads, many of which were being hewn out and improved simultaneously.  

The Close Brothers as individuals seemed to have taken a particular interest in farming (especially livestock) during most of the year 1880. Perhaps they recognized a need at that particular time to set an example compiled from the transfer and other records of the four counties.) Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 100), citing an article in The Dubuque Telegraph as republished in The Lemars Sentinel, September 29, 1881, wrote that the Closes purchased in 1880 an undisclosed amount of land in Worth and Taylor counties in North Central and Southwestern Iowa respectively, as well as other lands (location not given) in various amounts but totalling some 97,280 acres. Since Worth and Taylor counties are not within the study area, no attempt was made in the research relative to these purchases. As for the 97,280 acres, the various records of the study area counties indicate no Close purchases in 1880 even approaching such an amount. Perhaps Van Der Zee was referring to Close purchases in 1881 and later. However, even if these supposedly represent Close acquisitions in Southwestern Minnesota as well as in Northwestern Iowa, they do not square very well with the records of the concerned counties either in amounts or year acquired.

Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 121, citing The Monmouth Inquirer (New Jersey) as quoted in The Lemars Sentinel, February 3, 1881. The New Jersey editor had met with the Closes in early 1881 and later reported that they owned, then, some 28,000 acres in Plymouth County, 11,000 of which were already broken. He reported also that 150 houses had been built and that the cash outlay, for this much, totaled $100,000. According to county records checked during the study research, the Closes did own approximately 25,000 acres of land in Iowa at year's end in 1880, most of it (approximately 23,000 acres) in Plymouth and Woodbury counties and the remainder in Cherokee, Sioux and Lyon counties.
by joining in actively with the newcomers in order to help make a go of the new colony, or at least give that impression. In any event, along the West Fork of the Little Sioux River in Southeastern Plymouth County near the town of Quorn (see Figure 1) William Close owned a 2,000 acre stock farm. James and Fred Close together operated a "special" 960 acre stock farm near Le Mars. Cattle and sheep were raised on both farms. William, on his larger farm, kept some 2,000 sheep, "graded in from thoroughbred Cotswold," and 1,600 shorthorn cattle. Apparently the "special" aspects of James' and Fred's farm were that (in 1880) their flock of 800 sheep included 100 imported Leicester bucks and ewes, and they were experimenting with the raising of Berkshire and Poland China hogs keeping some 200 each of the two breeds. Concerning financial returns from their stock farms, the Closes reported (probably for the year 1881) that they were at least as large as returns from wheat farming—and surer even though slower and costlier.

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6Ibid., pp. 100 and 101. The town of Quorn was platted by the Close Brothers' firm in the fall of 1880, in anticipation that the Northwestern Railroad would establish its right-of-way through it. Instead, however, the Northwestern platted the town of Kingsley one mile to the east of Quorn and laid their rails accordingly. This effectively sealed the fate of Quorn which hung on, in name at least, for several years but was never incorporated.

7Ibid., pp. 131 and 132. William Close reportedly had a partner, one W. Roylance Court, Jr. That Court was half owner of the 2,000 acre farmstead is not certain. Insofar as land ownership is concerned, Plymouth County records show that Court jointly owned only 120 acres with Mr. Close.

8Ibid., p. 132. See also Ruth A. Gallaher, "The English Community in Iowa," Palimpsest, II (March, 1921), pp. 80-94.

9Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 132.
During the year of 1880, the first year of their colony, the Close Brothers diligently carried out their role as colony founders by helping the newcomers in every way possible as they had promised (a promise they kept, insofar as is known, during all of their enterprise). For example, to provide a central gathering place for the new arrivals which not only catered to their "peculiar" British needs but provided them a base from which to begin their search for their own land, the Closes purchased a local hotel in Le Mars and renamed it the "Albion House."\(^{10}\) Not surprisingly the Albion House soon became the focal point for much of the social activity of the colony. The Brothers also joined in with the social life of the colony, of course, particularly its sports activities, with horse racing and polo the most enjoyed.

Much could be written here concerning the social way-of-life and labors of the substantial numbers of British gentry who, mostly for reasons already given, chose to join the Close Colony. More than a few were as successful in the enterprise of mixed farming as were the Closes. Others joined in with the many small and large land buying speculators, not only in the immediate vicinity of Le Mars and Plymouth County but throughout all of Northwestern Iowa, Southwestern Minnesota and Eastern South Dakota. Still others engaged in such diverse vocations as insurance, banking, livestock shipping, and meat packing. One even became an importer of tea from the Orient. Another set up a steamship and travel

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 96, citing The Iowa Liberal (Le Mars), February 18, 1880. See also W. S. Freeman, ed., History of Plymouth County, Iowa: Her People, Industries and Institutions (Indianapolis, Ind.: B. F. Bowen and Company, 1917), pp. 433 and 434.
agency in Sibley, Iowa (see Figure 1) to handle the sizeable amount of immigrant, business, and even tourist travel from the east and from abroad (especially Great Britain) which had developed.¹¹

There were many other aspects of life in the Close Colony which at another time in another study would be well worth discussing, if for no other reason than to make interesting reading. There were, for example, the English style horse races, cricket, and polo; and English sounding tavern names such as the "House of Lords," the "House of Commons," and "Windsor Castle," where into one a young lad, probably bleary-eyed from grog, rode his horse in "true wild west style" and demanded service at the bar.¹² There were, of course, the more genteel aspects of the colony. There was, for instance, the "Prairie Club," which came to have a membership of nearly 300 Britishers.¹³ There were also many other social activities such as English-style dances and socials. The Church too was important to the British community, with regularly scheduled and frequent Anglican Church worship and other church activities.

Keys to Success--Publicity and the Pupil System

It would serve little purpose in this study to discuss these many social aspects and other anecdotes about this altogether intriguing


¹²Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 213.

¹³Ibid., n. on pp. 282-284. See also Freeman, op. cit., Footnote 10, pp. 431-433.
British colony so incongruously begun in rural Northwestern Iowa. There are, however, at least two aspects (or factors) of the colony and its British population which probably helped it grow and develop and even endure for a few years. These are discussed below.

The first important growth and perpetuating factor was the British themselves--their Oxford manner, love of sport, and other facets of the "better class" British way-of-life that they mingled with a life of crude pioneer farming in a mostly unsettled, Mid-American environment. The seeming heterogeneity of the situation quickly gained widespread fame for the colony, especially in Great Britain. The local and regional press, of course, were the most faithful in reporting every bit of "newsy" information about the colony and its inhabitants. Several even boasted of having mailing lists that included addresses not only throughout the United Kingdom but in France and Germany. With the colony's quickly spreading fame, other newspapers in Iowa and in other Midwestern states joined in further spreading publicity about the colony which was oftentimes exaggerated. For example, one editor wrote:

So great has become the importance of this exclusively English colony that an office both in Le Mars and London are necessary to conduct its business. The caste feeling is said to be very strong, and none are admitted but the pure bloods of wealth and character. Any number of Lords are now scattered over Plymouth and Sioux counties. If they all have the energy and vim of the Close Brothers they will make northwestern Iowa blossom like the rose.

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14 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 163.

15 Ibid., citing the Denison Bulletin, as quoted in The Iowa Liberal (Le Mars), January 5, 1881.
Another enthusiastically informed his readers:

A large proportion of the settlers are English—drawn from the great middle classes of the mother country—men of brawn and brains, of cash and credit, of labor and life. These people are settling here by scores, hundreds and thousands. They all have money, and are all enterprising, shrewd, and full of resources. In a short time they will own the whole country, and under their hands it will blossom like a garden. 16

Yet another more moderate editor wrote:

The English colony in town and country now numbers between four and five hundred against less than two hundred one year ago, and it is thought will reach a thousand before another year shall have expired. . . . The growth of this town is remarkable. Its population has increased over thirty per cent since the last government census was taken, and should it continue at this rate for another year, and, it is believed it will, the population will not fall short of four thousand. 17

In Minnesota the St. Paul Pioneer Press undertook to acquaint its readers with "the New England of the Northwest," taking special interest in Le Mars and its immigration of the "better class from old England." 18

Aside from the local and regional press, many other American and British newspapers and periodicals, recognizing "good-copy," published numerous articles about the colony. A number of prominent British and American journalists and agricultural experts visited the colony in its early years and most reported of its "undoubted success." One, the well known journalist, Portney Bigelow, wrote of his visit in an article for Harper's New Monthly Magazine. 19 While most of the Bigelow article was

16 Ibid., citing the Fonda Gazette, as quoted in The Iowa Liberal (Le Mars), August 3, 1881.

17 Ibid., citing the Dubuque Telegraph, May 21, 1881.

18 Ibid., p. 166.

merely an updated version of William Close's *Farming in North-Western Iowa*, relative to costs and returns on various kinds of farming operations, he did give his impressions of the people and life style he found there, alluding to the fine fox hunting enjoyed on "the rolling prairie with a creek here and there." He wrote too of the colonists' love of breeding horses for the steeple chase and other races, and of the "grand ball" held at the end of the racing season that brought partners from as far away as St. Paul "to grace the occasion."^20

While many of these national and international journalists seemed mainly enthralled with the social way-of-life of the Close Colony, a number of agricultural experts turned journalist were just as taken by the agricultural possibilities of the region that the colony was part of. In this respect one such agriculturalist wrote:

> I have just returned from a trip through the Western States of America. I was very favourably impressed with Southern Minnesota and North-western Iowa, especially the latter; and if my lease was run out here (Scotland), I would be very glad to put my capital into cattle and sheep in that State. In North-western Iowa good bottom land can be bought for from 6 to 7 dol. (25s. to 30s.) per acre, and there is no occasion to buy much—200 acres to grow winter keep, and to run up buildings, house, &c. on. There is free grazing for as many cattle as you care to keep, and the only expense is wintering, which does not come to much, as hay can be stacked for less than 1 dol. (4s. 2d.) per ton. I fully believe that, with fair knowledge of stock, capital, and perseverance, a large sum of money might be made in a few years. The country is pleasant enough for a free and easy life, and if one wants neighbors, there are plenty of families from the old country settled here and there through the northern part of the State.\(^21\)

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^20 Ibid., p. 764. See also reference to and quotations from the Bigelow article in Van Der Zee, *op. cit.*, Footnote 1, pp. 139 and 140 and nn. on pp. 258, 273, and 274.

The net effect of all this publicity was a sizeable influx of British immigrants, not only into Le Mars and Plymouth County but to some extent into the four most northwestern counties of Iowa (Sioux, O'Brien, Osceola, and Lyon) as well as into Rock, Nobles and Pipestone counties in the southwestern corner of Minnesota. To the mind's eye of the British at home in Great Britain though, the Close Colony and the town of Le Mars were one and the same, consequently the latter became well known. In fact, there were those in Le Mars who claimed that their town was better known in Great Britain than was any other city of the United States.22

A second factor equally important in popularizing the Close Colony and assuring its endurance for even a few years, was the practice of "pupil taking" begun by the Closes but carried on by many of the colonists. As previously discussed (pages 79 and 80), the better class of British "with means" saw in America generally, and in the Close Colony specifically, a solution to one of their most perplexing problems—what to do with their younger sons. Since the Close "pupil" idea was really nothing more than a form of apprenticeship, a custom which had been practiced among all classes in Great Britain for centuries, it had great appeal among the gentry.

The immediate popularity of the pupil system may have been the reason that caused the Closes to broaden their terms under which they would take on pupils. In any event, in addition to taking pupils on their personal stock farms as learners of Western farming in order to prepare them for farming their own land, they began taking pupils who had no intention

22 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 168.
to ever buy and farm their own land. Under their new terms the Closes offered this kind of pupil two alternatives. He could either hire out to an American farmer for board and perhaps a small wage, or he could board (in return for his labor) with "one of his own" in relative comfort and in the social atmosphere he was accustomed to.23 Needless to say the latter way-of-life was preferred. Whether many such pupils actually were placed on American farms cannot be ascertained with certainty. Early in 1881, however, it was reported that the Closes had "some three hundred boys under tuition for farming and stock raising."24 Since it is not likely that the Closes had more than a dozen or so pupils on their own farms at one time, and 300 seems a large number for boarding on British farms, one could suspect that a goodly number of these pupils under tuition were boarded on other than British farms, "American" or not.

The fact that the taking on of pupils was a popular practice among others of the Close Colony has been fairly well documented. Many accounts of them can be found in the press, especially the local press. To be sure most such accounts were about the raucous behavior of these "lads," like the tavern incident previously described (page 94). But then it was their behavior which made them newsworthy in the first place and provided the documentation now available.

Probably the best known and certainly the most newsworthy of the pupil keepers was one Captain Reynolds Moreton, a retired officer of the

23 Ibid., p. 142.
24 Ibid.
Royal Navy. Captain Moreton, a "salty," no-nonsense old sea dog "with an eye that would open an oyster at sixty paces," owned a farm of about 1,000 acres located a mile or so northwest of Le Mars. Along with the Closes and others, Moreton regularly had pupils (up to thirty) to help operate his farm, a practice he observed during most of the 1880 decade. Captain Moreton's pupils became widely known as "Moreton's pups," although the reason for the name is somewhat obscure. One explanation offered has been that Moreton was fond of raising thoroughbred dogs on his farm. It seemed only natural therefore that the pupils be lumped in with the dogs, presumably because the behavior among the former much resembled the behavior among the puppies of the latter.

A particularly good bit of documentation relative to the popularity of pupil taking in the Close Colony is contained in T. G. Mellersh's pamphlet, The English Colony in Iowa, U.S.A. Mellersh was in real estate in England and, whether on his own or in collaboration with the Closes, he wrote his pamphlet to attract farm buyers, pupils, and boarders to the Close Colony through his agency. As a selling point, he included in it extracts of a dozen or so letters he had received from farm owners of the Close Colony who desired to take on pupils. These extracts are extremely interesting in themselves. They not only help substantiate the

26Ibid., p. 23.
27Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, n. on p. 274.
28Mellersh, op. cit., Footnote 21, pp. 5-8. See also reference to and Quotations in Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 147-151.
early popularity of the pupil system in the Close Colony, but they point up the seeming preference among the colonists for mixed farming with emphasis on livestock raising. They also reveal how very much the colonists valued and carried on the best they could the social life and sports they had known in the home country. (NOTE: Because these extracts of letters reveal so much about the way-of-life that prevailed among the British in Northwestern Iowa, they are considered significant to this study. Accordingly, they have been in turn extracted from Mr. Mellersh's pamphlet and included as Appendix IV of this study.)

There seems to be little doubt that the presence of several hundred pupils in the Close Colony did much to bring prosperity to the region, especially in and around Le Mars. Most, if not all, of them were either the younger sons of nobility or were young men of the well-to-do British middle class and apparently all were provided with an ample supply of spending money from home. With all this "easy money" around Le Mars, it is little wonder the town experienced "a boom of no mean proportion." 29 New businesses sprang up to accommodate these "big spenders," as well as a rapidly increasing general population which had been in turn attracted by the immense amount of publicity accorded the Close Colony about its pupil system and its other "strange" ways. As a result of the boom, Le Mars was able to greatly extend its influence as a center of commerce throughout all of Northwestern Iowa. 30

29 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 155
30 Ibid., p. 156.
Ironically, while the popularity of pupil taking tended to perpetuate the Close Colony for a few years, the pupils themselves and the notoriety they gained probably hastened the colony's eventual demise and even the virtual disappearance of the British from all of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota.

Serious doubt as to the worth of the pupil taking practice among the Close colonists (and others of the region who had followed the colonists' lead) was not long in coming. The Close Brothers themselves were probably among the first, if not the first, to become disillusioned with the practice. It is not certain exactly when the Closes abandoned the pupil program on their farms. Jacob Van Der Zee believed that their involvement had ended by August 1882. The circumstances which culminated eventually in the demise of the pupil taking practice in the region are best summarized in William Close's own words:

I offered for the sum of £25 to give all advice in England as to going out; to get cheap first-class transportation by the White Star Line (and I may mention the rate was £12 in those days); that my brothers Fred and James would meet the newcomer at Le Mars, find him a place on a farm where he could learn something about the conditions in the country; and to buy 160 acres of land for him without any commission if required, engaging to see that he got good land and title.

I was young and I did not know what I was doing, for although we had some splendid fellows join us, yet a number of parents seized the opportunity of loading on to us sons and relatives that were an embarrassment to them here, and who never would make good, so we had our hands full, as you may imagine. In addition we took some pupils on a stock farm we had, but never had any trouble with those boys. Amongst others who came there was Almeric Paget, now Lord Queenborough, who married Miss Whitney of New York, William Farquhar, Sir Basil Thompson, and others.

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31 Ibid., p. 153.
Some of the £25 boys behaved very badly indeed. They got money from their parents, spent it in riotous living, and then to shield themselves, wrote home that Close Brothers had invested their money and lost it. A Bishop's son was the worst among them. The consequence was that I found that stories affecting our credit were being spread about in England. I had great difficulty in hunting up the source of these stories, and we had an unhappy time. The Field Newspaper having heard some of these rumours, and doubting anyone of our standing could be doing what rumours said we were doing, sent out a correspondent of theirs who knew the West of America, Mr. Townsend [sic] who wrote for their paper as "St. Kames". He arrived at Le Mars one day without disclosing his identity. He mixed with the boys at the Club [probably the Prairie Club], and he asked about [the] Close Brothers, but could get nothing definite. He spent two weeks in trying to follow up any clew [sic] as to our not having acted fairly with the boys.

I did not even know he was there making inquiries, when one day he walked into our office, asked to see me, told me who he was, told me the reason he had come, and said he could find not a single thing to back up the wicked rumours that had been spread in England by those two or three wretched boys, and he wrote a long article to the Field describing the whole colony, and saying that if he formed a colony as he thought he might, he would follow on the precise lines of Close Brothers and Company.  

The article referred to by Mr. Close was written by one S. Nugent Townshend for the London published Field magazine which, as indicated by its subtitle—The Country Gentleman's Newspaper—was intended for a British gentry readership. Actually Townshend had come to Iowa from Kansas where he had been visiting and writing for some time about the British upper-class settlers for the readers of Field. In his article about the alleged pupil problem in the Close Colony, Townshend wrote of his visit

32 Ibid., pp. 142-144, quoting a letter, William Close to Van Der Zee, 1921 probably in November.

33 Ibid., p. 144. See also Oscar O. Winther, "The English and Kansas," in The Frontier Challenge: Responses to the Trans-Mississippi West, ed. by John G. Clark (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1971), pp. 238 and 239. Winther's reference to Townshend in a different respect corroborates Van Der Zee's statement relative to the full identity of Mr. Townshend and the fact that Townshend had been in Kansas before coming to Iowa.
to several farms having pupils on them. One such farm was that of the colorful Captain Moreton, the home of "Moreton's pups." According to Townshend, Moreton admitted that there was some breakdown in the pupil system but that half of the instances were due to "drink and bad food." Townshend did not elaborate on the drinking problem but apparently was quoting or paraphrasing Captain Moreton on the bad food situation when he wrote: "No young English gentleman could work hard on a diet of beans and bacon, such as he gets in the house of the Western American farmer."\(^{34}\)

Almost from its beginning in Northwestern Iowa the pupil system had its critics in Great Britain. Most often heard was the complaint about the tuition charged by American farmers. Even though it was only half that charged in England, they considered the amount "ridiculous, dishonest, and unjustified" because they believed that most of these pupils actually worked hard enough to warrant their board and room without paying for it.\(^{35}\) The "Americans" answered their critics quite as could be expected, with criticism of their own. They asserted that many of the newly arrived pupils had never done a day's work in their lives, were soft, and did not possess even rudimentary knowledge on how to perform a farm task. Nor, as they maintained, did these pupils really want

\(^{34}\)Mellersh, op. cit., Footnote 21, p. 3. See also quotation of Townshend in Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 144-147), as quoted in Mellersh, pp. 3 and 4. "Drink" was a problem among the young British "bluebloods" in Iowa even before the Closes began their colony. That the problem concerned the Closes is evidenced by the fact that William Close in Farming in North-Western Iowa (p. 2) warned that unless one was willing to forego drink "he had better stay in England . . . for he would no more succeed in Iowa . . . ."

\(^{35}\)Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 152.
to work even after they had been instructed in farming methods. Most, they insisted, were perfectly content to do just as little work as they could get by with, and even in a most haphazard manner and at great risk to crops, animals, and machinery.\textsuperscript{36}

S. Nugent Townshend's favorable report on the pupil system in the Close Colony apparently did little to abate the conflict between the pupils themselves (and their parents or guardians) and the owners or operators of the farms to whom they had been apprenticed. As the situation persisted, wariness set in on both sides resulting finally in the polarization of the two positions and failure of the pupil system in the Close Colony.

Of the many hundreds of Britishers who joined the Closes and their colony between 1879 and 1882, nearly all had disappeared by the turn of the century. Exactly why has never been answered to the full satisfaction of all. Perhaps it was that, unlike the more clannish German, Scandinavian and Dutch, the British because of a common language with the English-speaking Americans were able to more easily diffuse and assimilate into the whole of the American community. While a common language did make it easier for the average British immigrant to assimilate, it seems to be a too simple answer insofar as concerns the Close Colony. Jacob Van Der Zee touched on the common language possibility, but only in the sense that the British-born immigrant anywhere in America was less conspicuous than those of a foreign tongue.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 153-155.
\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 53.
Van Der Zee suggested though, that there were probably four reasons why the Close Colony and the British did not survive for long in Northwestern Iowa as a viable entity. 38

(1) Most of the British who invested in land were from the well-to-do middle class who lacked experience, at least in the "doing" part of farming. Consequently they had to depend on hired labor which was not generally available. Accustomed to a sedentary life, most could not make a living from farming on their own. Even taking on pupils (most of whom were also used to the sedentary life) did little to help, and they soon lost their farms to the mortgage takers and either returned to the home country or migrated elsewhere.

(2) At the time the Close Brothers first began to promote their colony and for several years afterwards, stock farming on that part of the Iowa Prairie was especially attractive because of generally free pasturage. Under the generous herd laws then in effect, fencing was generally not required, thus saving the stock farmer a considerable amount of money. As the region was rapidly settled up over the next ten years, however, free pasturage was gradually cut off. The increased costs of fencing with attendant costs of confining livestock feeding, made profits more difficult to come by and impossible for many.

(3) Many of the immigrants to the Close Colony and Northwestern Iowa failed to buy land. Principal (but not solely) among the

38 Ibid., pp. 245-247.
group was the notorious pupil set. After dissipating their "remittances" without materially bettering their lot or themselves, most wandered off to "greener pastures" or returned to Great Britain voluntarily and otherwise.

A sizeable number of the colonists simply suffered from homesickness. Despite their valiant efforts to carry their own life style on to the prairies of Iowa, many simply could not bring it off, at least to the degree they were used to at home in Britain. After a period of trying, many of the immigrants grew so intensely homesick that they packed up and left for "home" never to return.

Another suggested possibility as to why the Close Colony failed after only a few years was stated this way:

The failure of the wealthy British settlers to stick to their Iowa farms brings out the [inherent] strength of the pioneer farm family which developed the state of Iowa. The back-breaking job of making a farm out of virgin prairie was accomplished most successfully as a family task [author's underline]. No corporation or capitalist could compete with the individual farmer and his family in developing a farm. Hired labor was too expensive and was almost nonexistent because any laborer soon saw it was to his best interest to develop a farm of his own.

All of the foregoing causative factors appear to be valid to some extent in explaining why the Close Colony, which began with such seeming promise, faded away after only some twenty years. But two more possible factors which may help explain this paradox are suggested.

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39 Staff, Iowa State College and Iowa Agriculture Experiment Station, A Century of Farming in Iowa: 1846-1946 (Ames, Ia.: The Iowa State College Press, 1946), pp. 9 and 10.
First, the Close Colony was never really a true colony, at least in the sense that its inhabitants were united by some strong bond such as religion, a language difference, or a unique political belief. While it is true that the colony fit loosely into the generally accepted definition of a colony—a number of individuals with common characteristics or interests grouped together in close association—40— it simply lacked a strong unifying "cause" found in the more enduring colonizing efforts such as in the case of the early "separatists" of New England.

As indicated above (pages 56, 87 and 88), the Closes began their colony principally with financial profit in mind. This may have been a "great cause" to them and their backers, but it certainly was not one conducive to perpetuating a colony. Even though they alluded to the necessity of cooperation—they with the newcomer colonists and the colonists with one another—41—the cooperation was seemingly mostly on the Close Brothers' part and then only to carry out their obligations to those who invested in their enterprise.

Even so, there were certain other unifying factors which tended to hold the colony together for a few years. Probably most important of these were the camaraderie the colonists found in their own British sports and their enjoyment of other social activities including their own "Prairie Club" and their Anglican church. But also, a common bond was enjoyed in the raising and showing of livestock. They even shared in the experience of pupil taking and all the problems that became associated

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41 Close, p. 3.
with the practice. All these factors combined, however, were simply not strong enough to offset the adversities enumerated.

Still another factor contributing to the failure of the Close Colony could well have been the Close Brothers themselves. First of all, it will be remembered that the Closes were the first, or among the first, to abandon the practice of pupil taking. Others soon followed their lead in this respect, and the result was that the flow of pupils simply dried up. Thus ceased the most important source of newcomers for the colony.

Probably more important than their abandoning the pupil system however, was the fact that the Close Brothers also abandoned the colony. That is to say, they abandoned ranch life in Plymouth County to concentrate their efforts on the ever increasing size of their land holdings northward in Iowa and Minnesota. In fact, while they were to retain their own personal farms in Plymouth County and even an office in Le Mars for some time yet to come, they were never again active as leaders of the Plymouth County British community. With the departure of the Close dynamism, the colony lost a major asset which, when added to such other beginning adversities as the loss of free grazing land, the scarcity of hired labor with the attendant drop of farm prices, and the failure of the pupil system, began the demoralizing trend that ended in the colony's demise.
CHAPTER V

MORE LAND AND NEW HORIZONS

The Pivotal Years—1880 and 1881

As pointed out in Chapter IV, the year 1880 was a relatively modest one for the Close Brothers insofar as new land purchases were concerned. This is not to say that they neglected their ambitions in this respect. Quite to the contrary, it appears that most of their activities that year were carried on expressly with their own land interests foremost in mind. Indeed, 1880 was probably one of the most active of their twenty-year enterprise in the study area. Several hundred contractual obligations to new colonists had to be met that year, a hundred and more new farmsteads of their own had to be laid out, buildings needed to be built with some of the land broken, and their own personal stock farms needed to be improved and developed. Whether by design or not, the manner in which the Closes went about fulfilling these obligations, the speed with which they made improvements on their own land, and their demonstrated interest in farming gained for them a considerable reputation as honest and astute businessmen which they were to enjoy during all of their enterprise in America and which no doubt contributed to their overall success.

Besides busying themselves in consolidating their land holdings and related business activities, it seems that the Closes were just as busy during the year of 1880 in negotiating for new land purchases as well as for additional operating capital. To this end they sought to buy more
land farther north in Western Iowa and in Southwestern Minnesota, and
from Great Britain they sought the additional capital with which to buy
it.

According to William Close, the reason that he and his brothers
looked northward for new land was simply a matter of cost. The rapid
influx of colonists and others to their Plymouth County Colony and envi­
rons had driven up the price of land in Crawford, Plymouth, Woodbury, and
Sioux counties in Iowa where the Closes had centered their operations
during their first two years of operations.¹ Some idea of the increasing
land values in these counties can be gained from Table 5, which shows
William Close's estimates of the rise in value between 1878 and 1881 of
Close-owned land.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iowa County(s)</th>
<th>Year of Close Pur.</th>
<th>Per Acre Cost at Pur.</th>
<th>Value Per Acre in Early 1881 If Unimproved</th>
<th>If Improved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crawford</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>$2.75 to 3.25</td>
<td>$10.00 to 15.00</td>
<td>$15.00 to 25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodbury and Plymouth</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>2.25 to 3.50</td>
<td>7.00 to 10.00</td>
<td>15.00 to 20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodbury and Plymouth</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>3.00 to 4.00</td>
<td>6.00 to 10.00</td>
<td>12.00 to 15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth and Sioux</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>4.00 to 6.00</td>
<td>6.00 to 10.00</td>
<td>12.00 to 15.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Van Der Zee, The British in Iowa, n. on p. 264, citing Macmil­
lan's Magazine, XLIV, May-October, 1881, p. 68.

¹Jacob Van Der Zee, The British in Iowa (Iowa City, la.: The State
Historical Society of Iowa, 1922), p. 101, citing Macmillan's Magazine,
XLIV, Pay-October, 1881, p. 68.
The most important of the Closes’ land buying negotiations in 1880 were with E. F. Drake, land commissioner of the Sioux City and St. Paul Railroad Company (the S. C. & St. P.). These negotiations resulted in a contract with the S. C. & St. P. whereby the Closes’ original colonizing and other land buying plans were “enlarged to a scale of importance more fruitful . . . than any colonizing scheme hitherto inaugurated in the northwest.” All in all the amount of land within the study area that the Closes eventually purchased from the S. C. & St. P. either for themselves, their own firms, or for a firm they represented, came to over 96,000 acres. Moreover, these same negotiations with the S. C. & St. P. in the summer of 1880, probably precipitated in two other important developments affecting the Close Brothers’ firm. First, they probably led directly to the firm’s appointment effective in April, 1881 as sole agent for the sale of S. C. & St. P. excess lands. Second, they most likely influenced the formation of the Iowa Land Company, Limited, a British firm of which the Close firm was to be designated as manager.

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2 Ibid., p. 100, citing the St. Paul Pioneer Press, July 31, 1881, as quoted in The Lemars Sentinel, August 4, 1881.

3 The Lemars Sentinel, June 23, 1881 (one of several public notices in). See also Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 101. According to Van Der Zee (n. on p. 264), the manager of the Close firm in 1921 (J. W. Probert) maintained that the Closes never actually acted as agents for the S. C. & St. P. Rather, they merely bought up all of the S. C. & St. P. unsold lands, having plenty of English capital to do so. There seems to be little doubt that the Closes commanded the necessary capital (their own and that of others), but the 96,000 or so acres of the S. C. & St. P. land they were eventually to buy was not all of the railroad’s excess land (Iowa Land Company purchases in Nobles County, Minnesota are further discussed in Chapter VI, page 148).

4 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 103.
Whether the Close firm was named as the sole land agent of the S. C. & St. P. to attract the British capital of the Iowa Land Company or was designated to manage the latter because of being sole land agent of the former, is a moot question. In any case, it was a neat arrangement and one that apparently was highly profitable to all concerned.

Just as the year 1880 marked a stage of the Close Brothers' enterprise in America, so did the year 1881. That is, the consolidating and negotiating stage of 1880 prepared the way for the beginning in 1881 of the firm's large-scale land buying, developing, and selling operations stage, as reflected in Table 6 below. The table shows, for example, that the Close firm purchased, or was involved in the purchase of, 74,300 acres of land within the Iowa portion of the study area, about 80 percent of which was obtained from just two sources—the S. C. & St. P. and a group of Illinois land speculators. From the Illinois speculators the Close firm purchased the "Larchwood Estate" (so named for the original entryman) near the town of Larchwood in Northwestern Lyon County, Iowa (see Appendix I). The Larchwood purchase was made in January, 1881 and amounted to some 19,000 acres, for which it was reported that a sum of about $90,000 (approximately $4.74 an acre) was paid.5

All of the land purchased from the S. C. & St. P. in 1881 lay in Osceola County, Iowa (see Appendix I). Some 42,700 acres were involved, all of which were purchased by the Close firm for the Iowa Land Company. Several separate sales agreements with the S. C. & St. P. were made for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>For the CLOSE BROS. b</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>For the IOWA LAND CO.</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>For the WESTERN LAND CO. (Close Controlled)</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Totals for Years Indicated</th>
<th>Acres</th>
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</table>

a Compiled from land transfer and other official records of the eight Iowa counties in the study area. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 100 acres.

b Includes land purchased by the individual Close Brothers in their respective names or by their two firms: Close Brothers and Company and Close Benson and Company.

c Most of this land sold in 1883 and in subsequent years was first sold or transferred to the Western Land Company before finally being disposed of to "outsiders." The sales are credited to the "Close Bros." column, however, to avoid confusion and duplication.

d Represents only land for which there is a record of sale in the years 1878-1898. Land sales after 1898 have not been included.

e Represents only the amount of land bought and sold in Iowa by the Iowa Land Company between 1881 and 1884 when the Close Brothers actually managed the Iowa Land Company or influenced its land buying business.
this land, but most of it was acquired by a single purchase in July, 1881. This one purchase amounted to 40,630.47 acres of land for which a sum of about $6.50 an acre was paid.6

In addition to the Larchwood and S. C. & St. P. purchases in 1881, the Close firm was involved also in the purchase of some 14,700 additional acres within the study area. About 8,000 acres of this additional land was in Lyon and Osceola counties too, but the remainder of it was widely scattered in five other counties—about 4,600 acres in the three northwestern Iowa counties of Woodbury, Plymouth, and Sioux, and some 2,100 acres in the extreme southwestern Minnesota border counties of Rock and Nobles. Actually all but 160 acres of these latter 2,100 acres were in the southern half of Rock County (see Appendix I).7

As was their practice during all the years of their enterprise in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota, the Closes also sold a great deal of land in 1881. Sales that year were some 24,700 acres (of which all but 600 acres were in Iowa).8 This was considerably more land than the firm sold during the previous year of 1880 (see Table 6 above and Footnote 4, Chapter IV, page 90), but much of that sold in 1881 was

6 Osceola County, Iowa, "Deed Record 5," Sibley, Ia., p. 30.

7 Compiled from land transfer and other official county records of the seven counties. The approximate number of acres purchased in each of these seven counties in 1881 (including the Larchwood and S. C. & St. P. purchases) were: Woodbury County, 840 acres; Plymouth County, 2,880 acres; Sioux County, 880 acres; Lyon County, 23,475 acres; Osceola County, 46,213 acres; Rock County (Minn.), 1,960 acres; and Nobles County (Minn.), 160 acres.

8 Compiled from land transfer and other official county records of the study area counties.
the resale within just ten months after purchase of over 15,500 acres of the "Larchwood Estate."  

The Iowa Land Company

Jacob Van Der Zee was inclined to believe that the Close Brothers were instrumental in the formation of the Iowa Land Company. But apparently he was never certain due to the paucity of information, even in 1922, about the inner workings of the Close firm. Even if not instrumental, however, there seems little doubt that the Closes had at least some influence in this respect. In any event, like many other land speculation enterprises operating on the mid-continent frontier during the last half of the nineteenth century, the Iowa Land Company was an English enterprise. The company was organized and incorporated as the "Iowa Land Company, Limited" in London, England in May, 1881 by seven London businessmen. The working capital of the company was £500,000 ($2,500,000) divided into 25,000 shares of £20 ($100) each.

The principal objectives of the Iowa Land Company were: (1) the purchase or acquisition of land in Iowa, or elsewhere in the United States of America or in the Canadian Dominion; (2) the managing, farming,  

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9Lyon County, Iowa, "Deed Record E," Rock Rapids, Ia., pp. 203 and 204. The Close firm sold 15,543.48 acres of the "Larchwood Estate" to one Richard Sykes of Stockport, Chester County, England on November 26, 1881. The sale price was $85,489.14 or about $5.50 per acre.

10Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 99 and 104.


12Ibid., p. 334.
improving, selling, leasing, mortgaging, or otherwise disposing of any land belonging to the company; and (3) the lending of money at interest on the security of land or farming stock, or other property of any kind in Iowa or elsewhere in the United States or in the Canadian Dominion.  

Since information on the inner workings of the Close firm is sketchy at best, any influence that the Closes may have had on the formation of the Iowa Land Company is a matter of conjecture. From a certain amount of "circumstantial evidence" available however, it would seem that the Closes probably were very much involved, if not instrumental, in its organization. The circumstantial evidence pointing to Close involvement takes form in a sequence of events that began in the summer of 1880 with the negotiations between the land commissioner of the S. C. & St. P. and the Close Brothers and Company over the sale of the former's excess lands. From subsequent events, it becomes apparent why these negotiations were reported as resulting in a contract between the two parties more important than any previous land buying and developing plan in the "Northwest."

Exactly all that the "contract" between the Closes and the S. C. & St. P. entailed will probably forever remain a mystery, but it more than likely included some manner of agreement relative to the investment of British capital in the excess S. C. & St. P. lands. (It should be kept in mind that William, James, and John Close were well known in all of Great Britain, but especially in England, for their exploits as oarsmen of the Cambridge crew.) In any case, in January of 1881 the Close firm's London

13 Ibid.
office notified the Close Brothers in Iowa and the land commissioner of the S. C. & St. P. that the Duke of Sutherland, reportedly one of the wealthiest peers of England, and other notables planned a tour of the Middle West that spring. Through the efforts of the Close firm and the S. C. & St. P., the Duke and his party were persuaded to journey from Omaha (enroute to Chicago) over the tracks of the S. C. & St. P. to St. Paul, Minnesota. This the Duke and his party did in May, 1881, stopping off at Sibley in Osceola County, Iowa (see Figure 1), where William Close conducted a two-hour sightseeing tour of the surrounding prairie for the ducal party.

Interestingly, in April, 1881, just one month prior to the Duke of Sutherland's visit to Iowa, the S. C. & St. P. saw fit to appoint the Close firm as sole agent for disposing of its excess land. This seems to indicate either that the S. C. & St. P. felt that the Closes already had the confidence of the Duke and had aroused his interest in the study area, or that they (the Closes) could influence him to invest in S. C. & St. P. excess land after he had had the opportunity to see some of it.

Following closely the Close firm's designation as land agent for the S. C. & St. P., the Iowa Land Company was organized in London in May of 1881, the same month that the Duke of Sutherland visited Northwestern Iowa. These events were followed almost immediately by the previously mentioned Iowa Land Company purchase of 42,700 acres of S. C. & St. P. excess land in Osceola County, Iowa. So much land buying activity carried

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14 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 103.

15 Ibid.
on in the same area at the same time by English investors led to widespread speculation (especially in the regional press) over a seeming tripartite agreement involving the Close firm, the Iowa Land Company, and the Duke of Sutherland. For example, The Lemars Sentinel reported that the Iowa Land Company already owned (in July, 1881) nearly 100,000 acres of land within the study area and that the Close Brothers were the firm's "American agents." It was reported further that the Duke of Sutherland was the principal investor in the Iowa Land Company. Actually most of the speculation about the three parties was just that—pure speculation. In the first place, county records show that the Iowa Land Company purchased only 42,700 acres of land in all of 1881, not the 100,000 acres reported in July, 1881. Also, while there seems to be little doubt that the Closes were involved in the land negotiations between the S. C. & St. P. and the Iowa Land Company, records show that they were not designated officially as the American agents for the latter until March 10, 1882, some ten months after the Iowa Land Company had purchased the aforementioned 42,700 acres of S. C. & St. P. land in Osceola County.

Insofar as concerns the Duke of Sutherland's investment in the stock of the Iowa Land Company, he invested not a shilling, a fact

16 The Lemars Sentinel, July 14, 1881.
17 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 104 and n. on p. 265.
18 Record of Power of Attorney in Plymouth County, Iowa, "Miscellaneous Record E," Le Mars, Ia., pp. 103 and 104.
confirmed by William Close in a letter to Jacob Van Der Zee many years later.19

That the Iowa Land Company had a profound effect on the Close Brothers' overall land investment enterprise in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota cannot be seriously challenged. During the two years and ten months (May, 1881-March, 1884) that the Closes were involved with the Iowa Land Company, they acquired in excess of 115,000 acres of land, approximately 75,000 acres of which were purchased (72,000 acres in Iowa and 3,000 acres in Minnesota) for the Iowa Land Company.20 It seems highly unlikely that the Closes could have managed the purchase of more than 40,000 acres of additional land for themselves and their own firms during this period, had it not been for the prestige and the profits they gained from association with the Iowa Land Company.

In closing these few paragraphs about the Iowa Land Company, it should be pointed out that the firm did not cease to operate within the study area and elsewhere after the Closes relinquished management in late March, 1884.21 Indeed, county records indicate that the company was very

19 Even Van Der Zee was taken in by newspaper accounts of the alleged relationship between the Duke of Sutherland and the Iowa Land Company. It was not until after his book, The British in Iowa, was published in 1922 that he learned different. In a letter from England dated January 10, 1923, William B. Close informed Van Der Zee that his (Van Der Zee's) book was in error in this respect. He wrote: "... the Duke of Sutherland did not back the Iowa Land Company. We fully expected him to do so, but I think somebody else on his journeys got him to invest elsewhere." The cited letter is presently in the possession of Jacob Van Der Zee's son, Robert Vander Zee of Sioux City, Iowa.

20 Compiled from land transfer and other official county records of the study area counties.

active in most of the study area counties for at least another thirteen years. Later it closed out its Iowa interests and moved to St. Paul, Minnesota where it was known to be doing business as late as 1914.22

"It Blossoms Like The Rose"23

Having negotiated a lucrative contract with the S. C. & St. P. in April, 1881, and convinced (apparently) that their future lay northward in Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota, the Closes opened offices in Rock Rapids and Sibley, the new county seats of Lyon County and Osceola County, Iowa respectively (see Figure 1), in May, 1881.24

With expectations of adding much more to their already immense real estate interests, the Closes found it necessary in early 1881 to take on a full-time attorney to handle the often "delicate" questions of titles, transfers, leases, and sales. To this end they engaged one C. J. C. Ball and located him and an assistant in their Sibley office to handle the expected "intricacies of the land situation in that region."25 At the time that Ball was engaged full-time by the Closes, he was certainly no


23 Borrowed from an article which first appeared in the Denison Bulletin (Denison, Ia.) and later quoted in The Iowa Liberal (Le Mars), January 5, 1881. See a partial quote of this article in Chapter IV, page 95, this study.

24 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 102.

25 Ibid.
stranger to them. Indicative of their discerning business practices for which they were already becoming well known, the Closes had been making good use of Ball's talents and position on a part-time basis during the previous two years to handle the firm's legal business—while he served at the same time in the influential position of attorney for Plymouth County, Iowa.

Also in 1881, the Close firm began to change and broaden its scope of operations in several respects. Probably as important as any among the several changes made over the next several years was the firm's involvement in the land abstract business. The first venture into this "side line" was the purchase of a complete abstract of all the land titles in Plymouth County. Of course involvement in the land abstract business was not only a profitable venture in itself, but it also offered a means by which the Closes could always be on top of the land situation throughout the entire area of their activity. It was quite natural then for them to make it a practice to purchase abstracts of land titles in other counties as they extended and expanded their operations northward in the study area.

To attract tenants for the ever increasing number of farmsteads they were opening up, the Closes continually broadened their basic "system" for improving, renting, and ultimately selling them. It will be

26 Ibid.
28 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 102.
recalled that the initial Close "system" which they began in Crawford County, Iowa in 1879, was quite simple in concept. That is, in exchange for one-half of the crop, the Closes provided their tenant farmers with a simple farmstead (most often 160 acres) ready for cultivation, on which they had already built a house, a barn or stable, dug a well, and had broken a few acres. In most instances, too, they provided seed for the first crop (see pages 67-71 and 79, Chapter III, for a more detailed discussion of the initial Close system). In early 1881, however, a sale provision was added to the system wherein it became possible for a tenant to buy the farm he operated "after fifteen months of development." Later, as will be seen, the Close firm turned increasingly toward farm mortgages and sales until finally this was their principal business.

In 1881, though, they were still primarily interested in renting out their farms on a sharecrop basis. The rapidity with which they were creating new farmsteads for this purpose that year is reflected in the fact that they were advertising in early April for 180 tenant farmers (probably for new farms in Sioux and Lyon counties, Iowa). Their terms were even more liberal than before. Now, in return for half the crop (flax in this instance), the tenant: (1) was paid the going rate of $2.25 an acre for breaking ten acres or more of sod; (2) was furnished the flaxseed by the Close firm; (3) paid only half of the threshing bill.

29 Ibid., citing The Lemars Sentinel, February 24, 1881, and a letter of C. W. Benson (Close firm partner) to the Manchester Courier (English) written January 20, 1881, and republished in The Lemars Sentinel, March 3, 1881. The Closes apparently sold several of their farmsteads before this date but, insofar as can be determined, these earlier sales were made to assist or as a favor to those who had emigrated from Great Britain specifically to join the Close colony.
with the Close firm paying the other half; (4) was paid "a good price" by the firm for back setting the flax stubble in preparation for the next year's crop of corn or wheat; and (5) was not required to pay rent for, or even remain after, the first year. Under such liberal terms, of course, the Closes had no trouble at all in renting out their farmsteads as soon as they opened them. (See further discussion on pages 127-129 below.)

Later in 1881, the Closes began to improve the standard farmhouse they were building on about every fourth 160-acre farmstead. Their first efforts were rustic affairs (already described in Chapter III, pages 67 and 68), but later some were plastered. By 1881 many had interior improvements such as ceilings of matched lumber and, beginning in 1882, their overall dimensions were somewhat enlarged.

Probably one of the greatest and lasting benefits accruing to most of the counties in which the Closes purchased land, were the many thousands of trees they planted. Exactly how many in all were planted throughout the study area by the Closes cannot be determined, but it was reported at various times in 1881 that a single horticulturalist from Sioux City received contracts "to set out thousands of acres of trees upon Close and other lands throughout Northwestern Iowa." One report, for example, referred to a contract to plant 325 acres of trees and another cited a contract for 400 acres. Still later in 1882, it was reported that this same horticulturist signed a contract to plant 1,000

30 Ibid., p. 124.
31 Ibid., p. 122.
acres of trees. As was the case throughout all of Northwestern Iowa in those days, the kinds of trees planted under these specifically mentioned contracts were cottonwood and elm for the most part, with "a liberal sprinkling of ash, box-elder and maple."  

Of course tree planting by the Closes and others was done primarily (but not solely) as a means of property tax relief. In this respect, the Iowa State Legislature passed a law as early as 1868 allowing a $100 property tax exemption for ten years on the taxable value of a farm for every acre of timber planted on it. Moreover, for every acre of fruit trees planted a $50 exemption was allowed. This was a powerful incentive to plant trees, one which the Closes and others simply could not afford to let pass. Regardless of what motivated them, however, the benefits derived from these tree plantings by succeeding generations, e.g., fuel, fencing (mainly posts), human and animal protective wind-breaks, water and soil erosion inhibitors, foodstuff (from fruit trees), and just plain beauty, is incalculable.

Unfortunately, little record of the Close firms' inner business operations remain, if indeed there ever was much of a formal record in the first place. Actually the only record of their operations discovered

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32 Ibid., p. 125, citing The Iowa Liberal (Le Mars), February 9, 1881, and The Lemars Sentinel, February 10, April 21, June 9, and August 11, 1881. The horticulturist was George H. Wright, who apparently began planting trees for the Closes and others in about 1879 or 1880 in Woodbury and Plymouth counties, Iowa.

33 Ibid.

by the author were several file boxes of land contracts stored in a basement vault of the Pipestone County Courthouse at Pipestone, Minnesota. Further discussion of these contracts may be found in Chapter VI, pages 166-168.

Adding to the problem of missing or nonexisting records of the Close firm(s) is the lack of certain kinds of county records. In Iowa, for example, tax assessment records and tax lists are among those county records which Iowa Law permits the counties to destroy after ten years from the year they were created. While Minnesota has no similar law, these records are lacking in several of the study area counties in that state. However, when they were available during the research, they proved useful in determining the kind of land taxed as well as the improvements made on it (and when), including structures such as farmhouses, barns, stables, cribs, wells, etc.

The general paucity of records makes it impossible to determine with any accuracy the total number of farmsteads eventually opened up by the Closes in the study area for themselves and others. Insofar as the author can determine, all the written record remaining in this respect are the newspaper accounts of that time. The problem with this kind of record, of course, is one of inaccuracy or exaggeration resulting in conflict among them. However, the very frequency of the accounts of the Close Brothers' operations would make it difficult not to accept them.

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35 Iowa Code, 332.15, 1971. See also reference to on page 16, Chapter I, this study.

36 Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 122) found the same problem even in 1921.
collectively as generally true. By sorting out the conflicts and the obvious errors among these accounts, one can easily conclude that the number of farmsteads opened by the Closes—many with farmhouses and other buildings, wells, etc.—certainly numbered in the hundreds. Indeed, it is possible that the number could have been a thousand or more.

As is generally the case during the initial and "fleshing out" settlement of any new area, a sizeable number of the newcomers are those who furnish goods and services to the settlers taking up the land. The actual number of lawyers, doctors, bankers, merchants, tradesmen, laborers, and the like the Close colonists and other homeseekers drew to the study area cannot even be estimated in this respect. However, considering only the Close Brothers, the support requirements for their operations were evidently considerable. Not only did materials and supplies for their farmsteads have to be procured, but building expertise and labor of various kinds had to be engaged. These needs brought into the region a great number of builders and contractors, merchants, carpenters, masons, plasterers, blacksmiths, and just plain laborers.

Some idea of the extent to which their building endeavors influenced both rural and urban growth in the study area in 1881 and 1882, are reflected in the following selected contemporary and historical statements, reports, and other accounts.

In the early spring of 1881, a fairly accurate testament to the Close Brothers' accomplishments and their integrity as businessmen appeared in The Lemars Sentinel as follows:

... The Close Brothers and Company own extensive tracts in the three counties named [Plymouth, Sioux and Lyon counties, Iowa] and
The firm is composed of energetic English capitalists and during the past two years they have been the means of bringing to northwestern Iowa upwards of four hundred young men from the best families in England [as Close colonists]. They last year, broke some 20,000 acres of raw prairie. During the present year they will break 40,000 acres and build a corresponding number of houses. . . . They have an office over Dent's Bank [in Le Mars] and whatever information they give to inquiries may be implicitly accepted as correct.37

In his report of 1881 to the Iowa Agricultural Society, the Northwestern Iowa District representative wrote that:

. . . . The district presents a good opening for the immigrant.
An English Colony [sic] has commenced operations in Lyon and Osceola counties. They have opened up many new farms, have erected 300 substantial houses and barns and rent these farms on easy terms.38

Jacob Van Der Zee, without divulging his source of information, asserted that in June of 1881 "upwards of two hundred houses of uniform size and style and as many barns were reported in course of construction." Ninety of these were reportedly in Lyon and Osceola counties and were to be completed by that autumn or the next spring.39 Van Der Zee also cited several newspaper accounts in declaring that:

The Close brothers are credited with having made the first and greatest improvements in Osceola County when in January 1882 they had completed about one hundred houses in Viola, Wilson, Holman, Gilman, and Goewey townships.40

37The Lemars Sentinel, April 7, 1881.
38Iowa State Agricultural Society, Report: Report of the Northwestern Iowa District, 1881, p. 409. The Northwestern Iowa District, with headquarters at Sheldon, Iowa in O'Brien County, was comprised of Lyon, Osceola, Dickinson, Sioux, and O'Brien counties. The "English Colony" referred to in the district report was most probably the Close Brothers' firm. Many believed then that the colony and the firm were one and the same.
39Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 122.
40Ibid., p. 123.
Concerning the overall effect that the Closes had in attracting new settlers to Northwestern Iowa, Van Der Zee commented:

Through their untiring energy and perseverance the Close brothers succeeded in attracting not only a large number of their countrymen to locate on farms of their own but also hundreds of tenants to work on the farms belonging to the Iowa Land Company of London. In the years 1880 and 1881 the Close farms could have been let twice over...41

Of course judicious advertising, as suggested by Van Der Zee, did materially help the Closes attract tenants for their own and other's land.42 The following Close advertisement in The Lemars Sentinel in 1881 is indicative of the kind of appeal that their offer had to have had to the land hungry homeseeker:

500 RENTERS WANTED — Lyon and Osceola counties in Northwest Iowa are conceded to be the most beautiful and fertile in the State. This summer we have opened upwards to 300 new farms, sinking a well, building a convenient house and roomy barn, and breaking from 60 to 100 acres on each farm. These farms are to be let on terms that no industrious man can fail to make profitable. Immediate possession given. We will, if needed, furnish seed for next years crop. We will also furnish breaking to be done, for which we will pay the regular price. Tenants not having teams enough to break with, will be supplied with a horse or horses for that purpose, at market price and pay taken in breaking. These farms are all well situated a few miles of the railroad. Apply personally or by letter to CLOSE BROTHERS & CO., Sibley, Osceola County, Iowa.43

41Ibid., p. 126.

42Ibid.

43The Lemars Sentinel, August 18, 1881. This advertisement appeared in at least four other editions of the Sentinel and probably in other area and eastern newspapers.
As to the extent that the Close Brothers' farm openings involved builders, merchantmen, laborers, and the like, Van Der Zee had these comments:

... For a number of years S. B. Sawyer, Wm. McKay and George Warner, builders and contractors, seem to have been busy following the pace of the Close Brothers in their purchases of lands. Whenever new farms were laid out, these artisans made bids and received contracts to put up the necessary buildings in Plymouth, Woodbury, Sioux, Lyon and Osceola counties. ... during this year [1881] they are said to have spent $100,000 with Lyon County merchants, carpenters, blacksmiths and common laborers.

Besides carpenters, masons and plasterers, laborers with teams and plows had no dearth of work for several spring seasons: breaking the virgin prairie or shallow plowing of the tough sod became their principal occupation for many years to come. In 1881, a typical year, contracts were let for 12,000 acres in Plymouth County at $2.25 per acre and 30,000 acres in Lyon and Osceola counties--at the end of the year about 26,000 acres having been actually broken up. Not only professional "breakers" but tenants were engaged for this important work.

Many other accounts from different sources further point up the immensity of the Close enterprise in the early years of the 1880 decade. Probably as significant as any among them was the report made in 1882 by the Osceola County representative of the Iowa Agricultural Society. Under the heading of "Advantages and Inducements to Immigration" he wrote:

Our lands are gently rolling prairies, well watered, and in their natural state are covered with thick grasses. To show advancement we append these items: Close Bros. & Co., operating in Plymouth county in 1880, saw the advantages of Osceola lands, and purchased of the S. C. & St. Paul Railroad Company several thousand acres. In 1881 they commenced improving these lands, and

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44 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 122.


46 Ibid., p. 124.
during that year had broke 11,000 acres, opened ninety-six farms, and built on each a good and substantial dwelling-house, barn, granaries, and cribs. During the winter of 1881 and 1882 they advertised for renters, and the result is fifty-five have come from Illinois, one from England, thirty from eastern Iowa, and ten from Wisconsin and other states. During the past year they have had 9,000 acres broken, opened up sixty-five more farms, with all the necessary buildings on each, giving an opportunity for sixty-five more renters. They intend to have 11,000 acres broken in 1883, and open up 100 more farms, with all the wants of buildings for each. They have made $60,000 worth of improvements in Sibley during the past year.47... 

Perhaps the most revealing of the newspaper accounts about the Close operations during these pivotal years of their American venture was published in The Lemars Sentinel in the summer of 1881. The account was written by an "outsider" correspondent for the Rural New Yorker under the title of "Beautiful Iowa: What the Close Brothers are doing for Plymouth, Sioux, Lyon, and Osceola counties, Iowa." While some literary license has been taken to rearrange it for better reading, the account is quoted below in part as originally written.

We have travelled extensively in these counties and do not believe there are 160 acres of waste land in the entire area... and the variety of surface enhances its value for diversified agriculture and renders stock raising and dairying most profitable. boys. Iowa beef is at a premium in the grazing season as well as in the feeding when the yield of 50 to 60 bushels of corn per acre is turned into beef for domestic and export trade. Not only is it estimated that the stock interest of these counties is increasing fully 50 per cent in quantity per annum but effort is continually made to raise the grade and improve the quality. Shorthorns are the favorite breed of cattle. Poland-China and Berkshire hogs; and Cotswold and other coarser grades of wool sheep [are also preferred].

New life has been instilled in these counties by English colonization and enterprise under the management of Messrs. Close Brothers and Co. of Lemars, Iowa... As representatives of English capital they have this spring purchased about 40,000 acres, sold about 20,000 and are still purchasing for parties abroad.

In Lyon County they are managing over 20,000 acres one-half of which was broken and seeded the past spring. This land is divided into 100 or more farms on which are over 100 houses and barns and as many American tenants. In Osceola County the breaking will amount to nearly 10,000 acres and the houses built will number 100 in 1881. The firm also controls the sale of over 100,000 acres of railroad lands in these and adjacent lands. The exact opposite of Dalrymple is that pursued by these gentlemen [the Closes], as with them those who till the soil have an interest in the proceeds. They pay $2.25 cash per acre for breaking and, when desired, furnish flax for seeding on the sod. Also the herd law is the poor man's friend and helps many a one to get a start in this who could not afford to fence the land.

Many Englishmen are settling in Northwestern Iowa through this agency [the Close firm], purchasing and improving homesteads, in size and manner according to their tastes and means. We did not meet these gentlemen but we have been informed by those who know, that they have been the means for bringing over $600,000 of money into this part of the state within the past two years and developing large stock farms as individuals in Plymouth and Woodbury counties. Their average price is $6.00 per acre. Taxes are doubtless higher here than the East, literally stated, but in fact they are much lower, when you estimate the difference valuation—upon which, of course, the taxes are levied.

While some of the statistical and other information given above are not wholly accurate, the account does reveal in capsule form the general scope of the Close operations in Northwestern Iowa. For example, not only does it suggest the great amount of land controlled and improved by the Closes, but it also reflects on the two distinct aspects of their enterprise—their promotion of a British Colony in the region and the making of their own farmsteads for rent and sale. Revealing too, is the discussion about the kind of agriculture carried on at that time. It is

48 The Lemars Sentinel, July 14, 1881. This particular account also asserted that the Closes managed more than 46,000 acres, (7,000 acres of which were under cultivation) in Sioux County, Iowa. According to the land transfer and other records of Sioux County, however, this aspect of the account is erroneous. Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 1, pp. 97 and 123), used excerpts from this same newspaper account including the apparently erroneous statistics concerning Sioux County.
evident that mixed cash-grain and livestock farming prevailed in the region and profitably so. As previously stated, this is not meant to imply that the Closes introduced the concept of mixed farming to the region. Indeed, the already settled American farmers and other immigrants from Europe (especially the German and Dutch) probably really deserve most of the credit in this respect. It seems fairly certain however, that the Closes, as well as other of their more affluent countrymen, did much to raise the level of agriculture in the region through more scientific farming methods and better breeds and grades of livestock. In this respect, one report on agricultural development submitted by the Osceola County representative of the Iowa State Agricultural Society declared:

The older settlers are adopting a system of mixed husbandry, and very many are becoming the owners of choice herds of cattle and hogs. Holsteins and Jerseys are reared for their milk and butter qualities. There are some very fine stallions of the Clydesdale and Norman breeds, and thorough-bred running stallions have been imported by J. B. Close, of the English firm of Close Bros, & Co. These importations by crossing have made a marked improvement in the condition of horses.49

Another report submitted by the Plymouth County representative asserted:

The methods of farming are improving through the immigration of a better class of farmers, with larger capital and experience. Notably [sic] is the rotation of crops, a better cultivation of the soil, the saving of straw and manure, the seeding down of tame grass pastures, and the general improvement in farm yards and buildings.50


Representative of historical accounts of the Close Brothers' activities in Northwestern Iowa, is the following from an early published history of Osceola County concerning the Iowa Land Company when the Close Brothers were its managers:

... This company without question has advanced the town [Sibley] and the settlement of the county. They have opened up farms, brought settlers in, and given opportunities to men without means to work and raise crops and become land owners themselves. During their business career here they have foreclosed only one mortgage, and this was for the purpose of settling title, in which the mortgagee himself had an interest. They have erected substantial brick buildings in the town, and their investments have been a benefit to all as well as profitable to themselves.  

Even though the above citations and quotes indicate a great deal of building activity by the Closes in 1881 and 1882, it is difficult to determine the exact number of farms opened up by them during the two years. For the single year of 1881, however, Van Der Zee estimated that 319 were opened, and only about thirty were still unoccupied in February, 1882.  

So it was then, that the years of 1881 and 1882 were the truly pivotal years for the Closes. Pivotal in that they saw a transition in the Closes' American enterprise from a comparatively modest endeavor to one rivaling in size some of the largest capitalist land speculators then operating on the mid-continent frontier and elsewhere in the United States. By the end of 1882 the Close Brothers and Company had: (1) acquired a


52 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 127, citing The Lemars Sentinel, February 24, 1881 and February 2, 1882.
total of 135,200 acres of land (in Iowa and Minnesota) for themselves and others; \(53\) (2) hewn out hundreds of farmsteads from the virgin prairie; (3) broken thousands of acres of tough prairie sod; (4) planted thousands of trees; and (5) built a countless number of houses, barns, and other structures. In fact, the holdings controlled by the Closes eventually became so numerous in Iowa alone, that they found it necessary to appoint stewards to help superintend their farms. Each steward appointed was responsible on the average for about forty farms. \(54\) But there was still more to be accomplished in Iowa and in Southwestern Minnesota.

**The Western Land Company**

It is not known for what reason or reasons the Closes decided to form another land company in the fall of 1882. It would appear that they already had all they could handle with their own Close Brothers and Company which in turn was not only the sole land agent for the S. C. & St. P., but had taken over, that very year, the management of the Iowa Land Company. Perhaps they were motivated simply by the possibility of still greater financial gain for themselves. After all, it seemingly would have meant more profit for them to own some of the S. C. & St. P. land they were buying for the Iowa Land Company. They may have had insufficient capital of their own, though, to compete with their employer

\[53\] See Table 6, page 114, Table 7, page 147, and Table 8, page 170, this study. These tables indicate also that the Closes sold nearly 39,000 acres of land (mostly their own) by 1882. However, over 15,500 of these acres were the single "Larchwood Estate" sale in November, 1881.

\[54\] Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 128.
and saw a way to become competitive by forming a new company with new partners who could command the additional capital needed. Whatever their reasons, however, on October 17, 1882, James and Fred Close together with four others formed the Western Land Company, with James Close as its president and its place of business designated as Sibley in Osceola County. Interestingly, two of the six partners in the new firm had already been associated closely with the Closes. One, Constantine W. Benson, it will be remembered, was a partner; and another, C. J. C. Ball, had been the firm's legal authority for two years. The other two new partners (Frances Marek and J. H. Swan—both Englishmen) had been active land buyers and sellers in the same region for a number of years. The six partners comprising the officers of the firm gave it a sound foundation in both experience and in capital.

The stated objectives of the newly organized Western Land Company included two new aspects which heretofore had not been objectives of the Closes—or at least not stated objectives. These were that the Western Land Company would "convey" and "mortgage" farmland, i.e., act as agent for other sellers or renters and loan out money for this purpose.


56 While William Close was not a partner in the Western Land Company, he doubtlessly was involved with it from its inception. In fact, in the spring of 1885 the Close Brothers and Company in which William Close was a partner, took over management of the newer firm.

57 Public copy of Articles of Incorporation, The Western Land Company, op. cit., Footnote 55, p. 171. The firm declared a capital stock of $1,000,000.
Specifically, the incorporating articles declared that the nature of business of the Western Land Company would be:

... the buying taking and holding lands, real estate and personal property in any of the United States and Territories of the United States and the Dominion of Canada; and selling, conveying, mortgaging, leasing or otherwise disposing of such property and for improving and cultivating all or portions of such lands as the said Company may at any time own or contract; [and] promoting emigration, loaning money on real estate and other security in any of the United States or Territories or [in] the Dominion of Canada. 58

Strangely, the Western Land Company's real estate activities during the first three years or so of its operation was something less than spectacular. Indeed, after more than a year from the date of its organization, the firm had purchased only about 3,500 acres of land, fully one-third of which had belonged to the two new Close partners, Marek and Swan. The firm's purchases in 1884 were also only a modest 5,760 acres (mostly in Minnesota), and in 1885 they were almost nil, amounting to a mere 167 acres. 59 There seems to be no logical explanation for such a limited amount of land acquisition in those years except in support of the idea that the new firm was organized specifically to purchase and resell (or improve and rent out) excess railroad land, especially that which lay in Osceola and O'Brien counties. However, when most of the remaining railroad land in these two counties turned out to be unavailable for more than four years yet to come due to a dispute over title (see below), the newly organized company simply had to mark time. It would seem that the new partners were fairly certain that a large part of this land would eventually be available to them and perhaps this is

58 Ibid.

59 Compiled from land transfer and other official county records of the study area counties.
the principal reason for the relatively small amount of land purchased between 1882 and 1886 by that company.

The Close Brothers themselves and their older firm of Close Brothers and Company also had their problems in buying these disputed railroad lands in Osceola and O'Brien counties. It will be remembered that in the summer of 1881 the Iowa Land Company began buying up S. C. & St. P. excess land in Osceola County. During the next several years, while under Close management, this same firm bought at least another 27,000 acres from the S. C. & St. P. in Osceola, Lyon and Sioux counties, Iowa, and in Nobles County, Minnesota. During these same years, the Closes themselves (as individuals or through their older firm of Close Brothers and Company) purchased more than 24,000 acres of S. C. & St. P. land, most of which (some 22,000 acres) was in Rock County, Minnesota. While the Closes also bought a great deal of other land in 1881 and 1882 both for themselves and for the Iowa Land Company, they bought no land at all in O'Brien County until the fall of 1884 and only undisputed railroad land in Osceola County. Moreover, the 1884 purchase in O'Brien County was a relatively small one of only three sections in the south-central part of that county near Paullina, made by William Close for his personal use (see Appendix I).

60 Compiled from land transfer and other official county records of the study area counties. According to Rock County, Minnesota, "Deed Record F," Luverne, Minn., pp. 145-150, the Close firm (specifically James Close) purchased 22,258.29 acres of S. C. & St. P. land on October 17, 1883 for which a sum of $120,197.56 (an average of $5.34 an acre) was paid.

61 O'Brien County, Iowa, "Transfer Book, Lands 1," Primghar, Ia. Paullina was named after its founder, D. Edward Paullin, a son of Daniel Paullin, who was William Close's father-in-law. (See Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, n. on p. 285, quoting The Lemars Sentinel, April 14, 1881.
The land title problem in the two counties (especially O'Brien) was a long-standing and hard-fought dispute over primary and "lieu" lands granted by the United States Congress (through the State of Iowa) to the S. C. & St. P. and the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad Company (the Milwaukee Road). As can be seen in Appendix I, the S. C. & St. P. with its tracks running north and south and the Milwaukee Road with its tracks running east and west, crossed one another in O'Brien County, Iowa at Sheldon. Since both roads had been granted the primary right to every odd section of land within a ten-mile limit on either side of their respective lines and up to twenty miles in "lieu" land rights, the dispute arose at points within a forty-mile square (roughly) with Sheldon at its center. Also involved in this particular dispute were a number of squatters who claimed rights to one or the other railroads' land they were occupying within the forty-mile-square area. All in all something on the order of 63,000 acres of land lying in four counties (Lyon, Osceola, Sioux, and O'Brien) were involved in the dispute.

The conflict between the two railroads remained a subject of litigation in the courts for more than twenty years before it was finally resolved in December of 1886 simply by an agreed upon partitioning of the disputed land. Insofar as squatter claims were concerned, final resolution did not come about until the fall of 1895. The resolution was in

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62 Peck, et al., op. cit., Footnote 22, pp. 86 and 87. Actually the dispute began in 1864, almost as soon as the government grants were made.

63 Ibid., p. 87.
favor of those squatters who were able to prove that they were indeed bona fide homeseekers. 64

Apparently many thousands of the acres of land claimed by the S. C. & St. P. at the time that road (represented by the Closes) was negotiating their sale with the Iowa Land Company in 1881, were also being claimed by the Milwaukee Road or by squatters. Van Der Zee alluded to this probability (even though he located most of the disputed land in Osceola County when in fact most of it was in O'Brien County). Also, according to Van Der Zee, since "... the attorneys of all the parties interested could not agree on the subject, a check for $160,653 was paid [by the Iowa Land Company] to the First National Bank of St. Paul as trustee pending final settlement of the question of title." 65

While the Iowa Land Company was to purchase many thousands more acres of land from the S. C. & St. P. over the next several years (both before and after the Closes gave up its management), it purchased none in O'Brien County from the S. C. & St. P., or anyone else. For that matter, the only railroad land bought by the Closes in O'Brien County was for the Western Land Company—and then from the Milwaukee Road rather than from the S. C. & St. P. The reason (or reasons) why neither the Iowa Land Company nor the Closes bought any of the S. C. & St. P.'s O'Brien County land during these years cannot be found. One could speculate that perhaps they simply lost interest or that the price was not right, or even that the still unsettled squatters' claims made purchase too risky.

64 Ibid., p. 86.

65 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 104, citing as authority Mr. J. W. Probert, Manager of the Close Brothers and Company in the 1920's.
It has been suggested above that the Closes probably had negotiated some sort of a purchase agreement with the Milwaukee Road for part of its lands in O'Brien and Osceola counties long before the Close-dominated Western Land Company actually began purchasing there in 1886. Indeed, the formation of the Western Land Company in the fall of 1882 would certainly seem to indicate that some large-scale land deal was in the offing at that time whether involving the S. C. & St. P. or the Milwaukee Road, or both. The evidence seems to point to an agreement with the Milwaukee Road. In fact, even before the dispute over land titles was finally resolved between the two railroads, the Western Land Company had begun buying up some of the Milwaukee Road's land. The Western Land Company's first purchase from the Milwaukee Road was made in March, 1886, fully eight months before the latter's differences with the S. C. & St. P. had been finally resolved. These purchases continued for the remainder of that year, and by the time the title dispute was settled in December, 1886 the Western Land Company had bought all the land from the Milwaukee Road that it was to buy. Altogether nearly 38,000 acres in Osceola and O'Brien counties exchanged hands, of which more than 33,000 acres were in O'Brien County alone (see Appendix I). 66

The nearly 38,000 acres of land purchased from the Milwaukee Road during 1886 marked the end of the Close Brothers' (and firms') land-buying activities in the state of Iowa. In fact, these purchases were the last large-scale land acquisitions made by the Close Brothers within the

66 Compiled from land transfer and other official records of Osceola and O'Brien counties.
study area either for themselves or for others. While they were still to purchase several thousand more acres of land in the Southwestern Minnesota portion of the study area, their efforts during the remainder of their venture in this region were concentrated mostly on managing land for others and on a growing farm mortgage business.

As the year 1886 came to an end, the Close Brothers could look back on an enterprise in land acquisition, tenancy, and sale that had brought them a long way from their relatively modest beginning in Crawford County less than a decade earlier. With the purchase of the Milwaukee Road's excess land in 1886, the brothers had acquired for themselves and for the firms they represented a total of more than 186,000 acres of land in eight Northwestern Iowa counties of the study area alone. (They had also purchased by then, more than 38,000 acres of land in Southwestern Minnesota. The Minnesota aspect of their enterprise is discussed in Chapter VI.) Moreover, discounting the some 72,000 acres of Iowa land owned by the Iowa Land Company at the time the Closes withdrew from its management in 1884, more than one-half of the remaining 114,000 acres purchased in Iowa between 1878 and 1886 was still in Close hands or under their control in 1886. The map shown in Appendix I graphically illustrates the mushrooming characteristics of the Closes' land-buying activities as they moved northward from their modest beginnings in Crawford County, Iowa. Table 6 (page 114) also reflects this same mushrooming effect of the Close land-buying enterprise from 1878 through 1886. In addition,

67 Compiled from land transfer and other official records of the eight Iowa counties comprising the study area.
the table reflects another aspect of their land-buying operations not discernible in Appendix I—the unevenness in the yearly amounts of their land purchases.
CHAPTER VI

THE CLOSE BROTHERS IN MINNESOTA

Early Close and Other British Interests

Very early in their American venture the Close Brothers showed considerable interest in expanding their land holdings within and beyond the limits of the study area. It will be recalled that in the same region but outside the area of this study, they purchased an undisclosed amount of land in Worth and Taylor counties in North Central and Southwestern Iowa in early 1880.\(^1\) Also in 1880 they became interested in the border land of eastern Dakota Territory. While they apparently looked at a great deal of land in this area, the land transfer records of the eastern counties of present day South Dakota reveal that they purchased only a number of town lots in Canton, a railroad town just inside the South Dakota border about twenty-five miles west and south of Rock Rapids, Iowa (see Figure 1).\(^2\)

\(^1\) Jacob Van Der Zee, *The British in Iowa* (Iowa City, IA.: the State Historical Society of Iowa, 1922), pp. 117 and 118. As previously mentioned in Footnote 6, Chapter III, page 63, this study, the Closes also purchased 100,000 acres of land in Trego County, Kansas. This later purchase as well as another of 100,000 acres in the Panhandle of Texas, were most likely made around 1885 after the Closes had become truly large-scale land buyers.

\(^2\) Lincoln County, South Dakota, Deed Records "H," pp. 606-608; "K," p. 60; "M," p. 566; "O," p. 387; and "Q," p. 482, Canton, S. Dak. These town lots were purchased in six separate parcels totaling 653 acres. The first purchase was made in July, 1881 and the last was made in October, 1885.
Within the study area itself, the Closes' early interest in and purchase of land in the two most northwestern counties of Iowa (Lyon County in 1880 and Osceola County in 1881), has been discussed in Chapter V. Even earlier, though, they seemingly showed more than a passing interest in buying land in Southwestern Minnesota. According to the historian, Arthur Rose, as early as the summer of 1879 they were exploring the agricultural possibilities of Pipestone County, Minnesota (see Figure 1). Concerning their interests in this county, Rose wrote:

The decision to invest in Pipestone County lands was brought about by representations of a few pioneer settlers of the county who broached the subject to the partners [Close Brothers and Company] and a very brief visit by James E. Close in 1879. He secured samples of corn raised in the county (when there were only three cornfields in the whole of Pipestone County) and sent them to England. As a result the English capitalists back of the Close Bros. gave their authority for the purchase of the Milwaukee [Railroad Company] lands in Pipestone Co.3

Even though Rose's account of the Closes' involvement in Pipestone County is inaccurate with respect to their purchasing the Milwaukee Road's excess lands, they probably had a great deal to do with the eventual agricultural land development of the county. They (as individuals and through their firms, Close Brothers and Company and the Western Land Company) eventually bought about 2,700 acres of land in Pipestone County, but not a single acre had belonged to the Milwaukee Road. Rose's confusion in this respect probably came about from the fact that the Closes later managed these railroad lands for two other buyers. Moreover, there were so many large-scale British land buyers (including the Close

Brothers) operating in Southwestern Minnesota during the early 1880's, that often there was an interrelation of vested interests among them. So much so, in fact, that it requires a careful analysis of the rather sparse records to ascertain who owned what, when. And even then one cannot be absolutely sure. It is little wonder, therefore, that the Close Brothers' role in these intricate land "deals" within the study area was often confused by "outsiders" not intimately involved.

The Extent of Close Minnesota Holdings

While by most any standard the Close Brothers acquired a considerable amount of land in Southwestern Minnesota, the extent of their land buying activity in that state was far less than in Northwestern Iowa. From their first purchase in 1881 they were to acquire in all some 48,400 acres of land in the five Minnesota counties comprising the study area. Table 7 below shows that all but 3,000 acres of this land was purchased either by the Close Brothers (and firms bearing their name) or by the Close controlled Western Land Company. The 3,000 acres shown in Table 7 as purchased for the Iowa Land Company in 1882, is the Minnesota land referred to earlier in this study (Chapter V, page 120). (NOTE: Since Table 7 reflects only land actually purchased, and later sold, by the Closes themselves, the more than 110,000 acres of Pipestone County land they managed for other buyers has not been included in the table but is reflected in Appendix I.)

By far the greatest concentration of Close land buying activity in Minnesota was centered in the four northeastern townships of Rock County (see Appendix I). As previously stated, most of this land (22,258 acres)
TABLE 7

LAND PURCHASED AND LATER SOLD BY THE CLOSE BROTHERS
IN SOUTHWESTERN MINNESOTA, 1881-1898a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>For the CLOSE BROS.</th>
<th>For the IOWA LAND CO.</th>
<th>For the WESTERN LAND CO. (Close Controlled)</th>
<th>Totals for Years Indicated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>2,100 600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,100 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>24,300 1,900c</td>
<td>24,300 1,900</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>3,800 1,000</td>
<td>6,000 200</td>
<td>9,800 1,200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>400 2,200</td>
<td>200 1,800</td>
<td>600 4,000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>300 800</td>
<td>300 800</td>
<td>600 1,600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>200 700</td>
<td>2,400 4,200</td>
<td>2,600 4,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>200 800</td>
<td>900 2,100</td>
<td>1,100 2,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>200 14,300</td>
<td>900 200</td>
<td>1,100 14,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-98</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>3,200 2,800</td>
<td>3,200 4,700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>31,500</td>
<td>24,200d 3,000e</td>
<td>13,900 12,100d</td>
<td>48,400 36,300d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Compiled from land transfer and other official records of the five Minnesota counties in the study area. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 100 acres.

b Includes land purchased by the individual Close Brothers in their respective names or by their two firms: Close Brothers and Company and Close Benson and Company.

c Most of this land sold in 1883 and in subsequent years was first sold or transferred to the Western Land Company before finally being disposed of to "outsiders." The sales are credited to the "Close Bros." column, however, to avoid confusion and duplication.

d Represents only land for which there is a record of sale in the years 1881-1898. Land sales after 1898 have not been included.

e Represents only the amount of land bought in Minnesota by the Iowa Land Company between 1881 and 1884 when the Close Brothers actually managed the Iowa Land Company or influenced its land buying business. None of the land shown as "purchased" was sold by the Close Brothers while they managed the Iowa Land Company.
had belonged to the S. C. & St. P. Railroad when the Closes purchased it in October, 1883. This purchase, of course, was part of the overall land deal that the Closes had negotiated in the summer of 1880 with E. F. Drake, land commissioner of the S. C. & St. P. Railroad.4

The Closes' land buying activities in Nobles and Murray counties were small by comparison. In all they purchased only 3,680 acres in the two counties. Of the 1,760 acres they acquired in Murray County, all but 160 of them were purchased from the S. C. & St. P.5 As can be seen in Appendix I, Close purchases in Nobles County (a total of 1,920 acres) were widely scattered and mostly in the western two tiers of townships of the county.6 While the Iowa Land Company eventually purchased a considerable amount of S. C. & St. P. land along the road's right-of-way in the southeastern part of Nobles County, Table 7 and Appendix I reflect only the S. C. & St. P. land purchased for the Iowa Land Company by the Close Brothers prior to their relinquishing its control in March of 1884.

The last locale in which the Closes were active as land buyers within the study area was in Jackson County. Here the Close controlled

4See discussion of negotiations and purchase in Chapter V, pages 112 and 113, 115, and 117, this study.

5Except in one instance, no attempt has been made in this study to determine how the various land grant railroads acquired their grants within the study area since such information did not seem pertinent. The one pertinent instance referred to was the dispute between the S. C. & St. P. and the Milwaukee Road over rights to land in the region of Sheldon in O''Brien County, Iowa (see discussion in Chapter V, pages 139 and 140, this study). This dispute delayed until 1886 the Close Brothers' initial intent to purchase land in O'Brien County in 1882.

6The number of acres of land acquired by the Close Brothers in both Nobles and Murray counties was compiled from land transfer records of the two counties.
Western Land Company was the most active, buying up more than 12,000 of the some 13,500 acres eventually purchased in the county (see Appendix I).  

There are two unusual aspects of the Jackson County purchases worth mentioning. First, there is the fact that all but a few hundred acres of this land was purchased from the State of Minnesota, making this the only county within the study area where a substantial amount of land was purchased from a governmental source. Second, the time span over which the Closes acquired their Jackson County holdings was very much out-of-step with the sometimes hectic pace with which they purchased land elsewhere. It will be recalled that the Closes purchased all the land they were to acquire in Iowa by 1886. Moreover, all 186,000 acres of Iowa land acquired was purchased between 1878 and 1886, a period of only nine years (see Table 6).

Except for isolated instances, all the land eventually acquired by the Closes in four of the five Minnesota counties of the study area (Rock, Nobles, Pipestone, and Murray) was purchased for the most part during an even less number of years. In Rock County all but 200 acres of more than 25,000 acres purchased was acquired between May, 1881 and November, 1884, with most of it (more than 22,000 acres) purchased from the S. C. & St. P. Railroad in 1883. In Nobles County the Closes

7 Jackson County, Minnesota, "General Indexes of Deeds Grantee," Books B, C, and D, Jackson, Minn.

8 According to Rock County, Minnesota, "Abstracts of Deeds," Luverne, Minn., the 200 acres purchased after 1884 were a 160-acre parcel acquired in January, 1885 and a 40-acre parcel acquired in October, 1888.
operated for even a shorter time. They bought their first land there in July, 1881, and the last (for the Iowa Land Company) in March, 1884. However, the fact that they gave up control of the Iowa Land Company in late March, 1884 may have had something to do with curtailing their activities within that county.

Insofar as concerns their own land purchasing, Close activities in the next northern counties of Pipestone and Murray, Minnesota were also of relatively short duration. In fact, in Murray County they purchased all the land they were to acquire there (1,760 acres) during a two-month period between November, 1884 and January, 1885. As land buyers, the Closes operated somewhat longer in Pipestone County than in Rock, Nobles, or Murray counties. Even so, except in a single instance when William Close purchased a half section of land from the South Minnesota Land Company in 1898, all 2,700 acres or so of land they purchased for themselves, Close Brothers and Company, and the Western Land Company, was acquired during the seven years between 1883 and 1889.

In contrast to the above four Minnesota counties, either the Closes themselves or the Western Land Company were active land buyers in Jackson County in every year but three between 1884 and 1898. The three years during which they purchased no land in the county were 1894, 1895, and 1897. In every year they bought land, though, at least a quarter section (160 acres) was involved, and in each of three of these years they

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10 Pipestone County, Minnesota, "Deed Book 8," Pipestone, Minn., p. 348.
purchased more than 1,000 acres—5,640 acres in 1884, 2,320 acres in 1887, and 1,360 acres in 1890.\footnote{11}

Why the Closes should continue to buy land in Jackson County and not elsewhere within the study area, or even beyond in Minnesota and Dakota, cannot be determined with any certainty. Perhaps it was simply a matter of rising land prices. After all, this was one reason they had previously given for moving their activities steadily northward, out of Iowa into Minnesota. But then, Jackson County records indicate that the Closes probably paid no more (and probably often less) than $6 an acre for any of the land they acquired in the county.\footnote{12} This was certainly not an unusual price for virgin land in this general geographic region in those years. Actually $6 an acre seems to have been about the upper limit of the average per acre cost of all 235,000 or so acres of land the Closes themselves purchased within the study area during the twenty odd years of their enterprise.\footnote{13}

It is pure conjecture to suggest, but it would seem that a more logical explanation of continued Close land buying activity in Jackson County after it had closed for all practical purposes in other parts of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Ibid.
\item[13] This average cost is estimated as ranging between $4 and $6 an acre. A more exact per acre average cost doubtlessly could be obtained by an extensive examination of the several thousand records of Warranty Deeds involved with the Close transactions. However, the records of a sufficient number of these deeds were actually examined during the research, which, together with other pertinent county records (e.g., numerous instances in land transfer records where the sale price of the particular parcel has been annotated in a column provided, or in the margin of the record) permit at least the foregoing estimate.
\end{footnotes}
the study area, would be the changed nature of their operations after 1886. This is the year, it will be recalled, during which they made the last of their truly large-scale land purchases by acquiring more than 38,000 acres of the Milwaukee Road's excess lands in Iowa. After that they, by comparison, only "dabbled" in land buying. In fact, Table 8 below (page 170) indicates that they purchased only 8,000 acres of land during the intervening twelve years from 1886 until the end of their enterprise for all practical purposes within the study area in 1898. Moreover, virtually all of this land (approximately 7,500 acres) lay in Jackson County.

The development which appears to have changed the Closes' method of operation was their venture into Pipestone County. It is impossible to determine now, whether this change was a calculated one or one that they were forced to make. In any event, beginning in early 1883 they seemed to become more and more involved in their own land mortgage business, and especially as managing land agents for two large-scale, profit-taking capitalist speculators of the variety described at the beginning of this study (Chapter I, pages 2 and 3). Indeed, the Close Brothers' activities were so much different in Pipestone County than in other counties of the study area that this aspect of their enterprise warrants separate discussion.

The Pipestone County Venture

As has been the case with so many of the Close Brothers' activities and land dealings, exactly what motivated them to become involved in the land of Pipestone County and to what degree they influenced others to
do the same, is obscure at best. What little in the way of documentation that is available, however, seems to point to a deep involvement, even though they themselves apparently made no heavy capital investment in the county either as individuals or through their firms. Several accounts and documents are available which seem to indicate this deep Close involvement. First there is Arthur Rose's account cited above, which had James Close investigating the agricultural possibilities of Pipestone County as early as 1879. The English backers that Rose alluded to were most probably wealthy friends or acquaintances for whom the Closes, along with their own interests, were investigating and making inquiries about the available land in the county. While, as Rose suggested, these Englishmen could have been capitalists whom the Closes hoped to induce to back the Close firm, later developments point to the "friend and acquaintance" hypothesis as the more correct one. They obviously secured little or no backing for their own interests since their land purchases within the county amounted in all to less than 3,000 acres which, in light of their record in most other counties, was small-scale indeed.

That there was a close-knit relationship among the British capitalist speculators operating in the study area during the 1880's cannot be seriously challenged. The most striking evidence of this was the involvement of one Robert H. (or R. H.) Benson in Close affairs that began at least as early as the spring of 1881, and very likely much earlier. Robert Benson was the brother of Constantine W. Benson (the same Constantine W. Benson who became a partner in the Close firm in early
In the spring of 1881 Robert Benson wrote a short article for the British published *Macmillan's Magazine*, extolling the accomplishments of William Close and his brothers during "four years of labour" which culminated in the Close English Colony in Iowa. Though Benson did not allude to knowing personally the Closes at the time, his article certainly implied that he did, and reasonably well.

The next time that the name of Robert H. Benson is known to have been associated with the Close Brothers' operations was in Pipestone County in 1883. The following account of how this came about is demonstrative of the close interrelations of the several English land buying firms and individuals abroad in Southwestern Minnesota and Northwestern Iowa at the time:

(1) In September, 1882, the Southern Minnesota Railway Extension Company (later the Milwaukee Road) sold approximately 110,000 acres of its land to C. J. C. Ball. This is the same gentleman who had been engaged by the Closes just a year or so

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14 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, n. on p. 277. (The fact of Constantine Benson's partnership in the Close firm is mentioned in Footnote 41, Chapter III, page 81, this study.)

15 Robert Benson, "The English Community in Iowa," *Macmillan's Magazine*, XLIV, May-October, 1881, pp. 65-69. This same article was cited several times by Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 1), but he cited only the publication, page, and volume number, leaving out the article's title and the author's name. See reference to the Van Der Zee citation in Footnote 38, Chapter III, page 79, this study.

16 The following sequence of land transfer actions relating to the disposal of Southern Minnesota Railway land was culled from the currently used standard "Abstracts of Title" (two separate abstracts—one for the "Northern Half" and one for the "Southern Half" of Pipestone County). These standard abstracts, prepared by the Pipestone County Register of Deeds, are designed to facilitate new title transfer actions involving these old railroad land grants within the county.
earlier to handle the "intricacies" of the Close firm's legal business. He is also the same land entrepreneur who became a partner in the Close controlled Western Land Company in October, 1882 (see previous reference to these events in Chapter V, pages 121 and 136 respectively).

(2) Less than five months after he purchased this land, C. J. C. Ball resold it in early January, 1883 to Robert H. Benson.

(3) Upon purchasing these lands, Robert Benson promptly designated the Close firm as sole agent to handle their development and/or sale. He also designated his brother, Constantine, as his personal attorney. Since Constantine was already a partner in the Close firm, brother Robert's act placed him (Constantine) in the enviable position of representing both owner and agent.

(4) Some ten months later in September, 1883, Robert Benson sold a large portion of these "railroad lands" to the South Minnesota Land Company, a newly organized English firm of which he had been designated a director.17 (Another officer of the

17 Rose, op. cit., Footnote 3, p. 285. Rose indicated that the South Minnesota Land Company was incorporated in England with a capital stock of $1,250,000 and, according to the articles of incorporation, was formed specifically "for the purpose of taking over and reselling 102,773 acres of land in Pipestone County, 1,642 acres of land in Rock County and 105,000 acres of other land owned by the Sioux City and St. Paul Land Company." With regard to the Sioux City and St. Paul Land Company, the research failed to reveal either that a company of this name was doing business at the time in any of the study area counties or that the South Minnesota Land Company transacted business with a company of that name. There was, of course, the Sioux City and St. Paul Railroad Company which may have had still (in 1883) this amount of land on hand. However, since this possibility did not seem relevant to this study, further inquiry was not pursued.
South Minnesota Land Company was Ker D. Dunlop, the firm's secretary. Dunlop, Constantine Benson, and another partner took over the management of the Iowa Land Company after the Close firm had relinquished its management in March, 1884.) Finally in October, 1883, the South Minnesota Land Company designated the Close firm (first with Constantine Benson as a partner, later with Samuel Graves, an old Close friend, as a partner) as sole agent. This arrangement turned out to be one that was to last at least until the turn of the century.

From the foregoing it is easy to understand why historian Rose, and even many contemporaries of the Closes, were confused about the extent of Close involvement in early Pipestone County land deals. Moreover, the record left behind by the principals then involved does little to dispel the confusion. But there is enough record remaining to lend some credence to the earlier suggestion in this chapter that the Closes were deeply involved and contributed more than incidentally to the agricultural settlement and development of the county. By sorting out the known facts and applying a little logic, the picture of Close involvement can be somewhat more clearly perceived.

First, the taking on of Constantine Benson as a partner in the Close firm in early 1880 seems to have some significance, especially since this occurred within six months after James Close's investigative visit to Pipestone County in the summer of 1879. Obviously Constantine Benson

had the capital (or could get it from brother Robert and elsewhere) the
Closes needed for their expanding land speculation activities. The pos­
sibilities existing in Pipestone County could well have been the bait
by which to attract Benson money to the enterprise.

Having secured for themselves in early 1883 a potentially lucra­
tive power of attorney from Robert Benson to sell all the land that
Benson owned in Minnesota, and probably aware that a similar authority
was likely to come from the South Minnesota Land Company later that same
year,19 the Closes moved to establish themselves as land developers and
promoters "extra ordinaire."

Apparently to establish themselves and their reputation in the
county, they signed an agreement in April, 1883 with the fathers of Pipe­
stone City, county seat of that county and centrally located therein
(see Figure 1). The agreement stipulated that in exchange for ninety­
nine town lots in Pipestone City and a half interest in about 200 acres
north of the town, the Closes would: (1) "establish, keep and maintain"
their headquarters at Pipestone City for transacting their business in
the county; (2) "exert all their influence and endeavor" to secure addi­
tional railroad lines to serve the city; (3) place any improvements on
lands in Pipestone County controlled by them first "around or tributary
to Pipestone City"; and (4) build a "good and suitable" hotel in Pipe­
stone City at a cost "not less than $11,000" to be completed no later
than January, 1884, unless prevented by "unforeseen materials, contract,
or labor problems," whereupon up to a year's delay would be authorized.

19Abstract of Title (Southern Half), op. cit., Footnote 16, Trans­
actions No. 9 and No. 11 respectively.
Failure of the Closes to meet any one of these four conditions would void the agreement. The official records do not reveal whether or not the agreement was carried out to the mutual satisfaction of both parties, but they do reveal that the Closes did indeed receive title to the Pipestone town lots and other land stipulated in the agreement. Historian Rose, in his account of the agreement, maintained that its terms were "fulfilled entirely."

In any event, the Closes did move the major part of their operation to Pipestone City, and there followed an initial flurry and then steady flow of Close promotional activity to publicize Pipestone County and the some 110,000 acres of "raw lands" they eventually managed in the county for Robert Benson and the South Minnesota Land Company. According to a more recent accounting of the Closes' efforts in this respect, they undertook a large advertising campaign to attract settlers to the county, sending out "tons of advertising and bringing in special train loads of lumber on which were displayed large banners boosting the county." Earlier, Historian Rose wrote that the first train load of lumber for the Close Brothers' building enterprise arrived in Pipestone City on

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20. Pipestone County, Minnesota, "Deed Record C," Pipestone, Minn., pp. 82-84.

21. Rose, op. cit., Footnote 3, p. 286. Rose's version of the agreement between the Closes and Pipestone City officials differed only slightly from the record copy of the agreement. The most significant difference was that Rose was specific about the number of farmsteads the Closes agreed to erect in the county (40), whereas the actual agreement was worded substantially as indicated herein.

22. Works Progress Administration, Inventory of County Archives of Minnesota, No. 59, Pipestone County (St. Paul: Historical Records Survey, 1939), p. 16, citing the Pipestone County Star, June 21, 1929, citing the Star of June 10, 1884.
July 1, 1883. During the next year of 1884 it was estimated that the Closes' advertising amounted to eight tons of reading material distributed throughout the United States and foreign countries (especially Great Britain). Also, several banner-covered train loads of lumber arrived in the county that same year.

There is little doubt that the Closes had the full support of the Pipestone City and County officials and citizenry, including the county's newspaper, the Pipestone County Star (or Pipestone County Semi-Weekly Star). With respect to the extensive promotional campaign engaged in by the Close firm, the newspaper's editor in June, 1884 rather expansively wrote:

If anyone thinks that Pipestone is not well advertised, let him ride from here to Chicago over the Milwaukee Road. There is not a train but what bears circulars describing the beauties of this glorious county, and they are distributed far and wide. If people do not know where to find a good permanent home, in a land where milk and honey flow free to all who wish to partake, it will not be the fault of the great land firm of Close Brothers & Co., who have expended so far this season in the neighborhood of ten thousand dollars in printed matter.

Earlier in September, 1883, the Star editorialized:

Undoubtedly, Pipestone City and County owe the largest share of credit for their recent progress and present prosperity to Close Bros. & Co., the enterprising and well known land dealers. They have done ten times more than any single firm—and probably as much as all the [other] real estate firms combined—to get the rich lands of this splendid section in the market and attract settlers. Their plan is either to sell lands direct to purchasers, or to erect comfortable buildings and rent the farms to tenants.

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24 Ibid., p. 289.
25 Ibid., quoting the Pipestone County Semi-Weekly Star, June 10, 1884.
They transact a very extensive business and are doing a magnificent service in the work of development, attracting a desirable class of immigrants and bringing the lands into cultivation so that they may become taxable property. The Close Bros. will, inside of a few years, make the entire section a veritable garden spot. In Pipestone County alone, Close Bros. & Co. have 125,000 acres [sic] of the richest and most valuable land in Minnesota which they are preparing to open up. A large number of farm houses, barns etc., will be erected by the Close Bros. & Co., during the present summer and fall and several thousand acres of land will be broken up.26

It would seem that the foregoing editorial was a little premature in light of the fact that it was written only some four months after the Closes had signed their agreement with Pipestone officials. However, almost six years later the editor of the Star at least, still contributed much of Pipestone County's growth and prosperity to the Close Brothers. The following appeared in the Star's June 14, 1889 edition:

The firm [Close Bros. & Co.] has given Pipestone County and Pipestone City a push forward, such, we venture to say, as no other community in the west of the same age has enjoyed. The many thousands of dollars that they have spent in advertising alone, has had the effect to render the locality famous the country over, and a consequence is that a steady stream of immigration is now flowing into the country; homes are being created and the wilderness of a few years ago "blossoms like a rose."27

No hard evidence can be found indicating that the Close Brothers had any direct influence in bringing additional railroads to the county and Pipestone City, even though the number of lines in the county increased from only one in early 1880 (the South Minnesota Division of

26 Ibid., quoting the Pipestone County Semi-Weekly Star, September 20, 1883.

27 Ibid., quoting the Pipestone County Star, June 14, 1889.
the Milwaukee and St. Paul) to four by 1890. However, it would be hard to imagine that such sagacious businessmen as the Closes would have considered buying land so far away from a rail line as to make access to markets difficult. Since they dealt mostly in excess railroad lands, it is highly likely that the sales agreements they negotiated with the S. C. & St. P. and other railroad companies included some guarantee or understanding concerning scheduled rail service and future rail construction. In the case of Pipestone County, the land the Closes managed there had been originally land granted by the United States for railroad construction. In fact, there seems to be little doubt that the various railroad companies which owned the land first and the many large-scale land speculators who wanted to buy it later (including the Closes, C. J. C. Ball, Robert Benson, and the companies they owned or were directors in), cooperated in making sure that all parties profited from their investments. Indeed, some of the early land speculators later became also railroad men and vice versa. The Closes themselves at least dabbled in railroad building. In early 1882 they organized the


29 According to Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 1, in n. on p. 277), Robert Benson was among the land speculators who later became American rail magnates. He asserted that in the 1920's Benson and an American partner financed the Chicago and Great Western Railway system. Also, Dorothy R. Adler, British Investment in American Railways, 1834-1898, ed. by Muriel E. Hidy (Charlottesville, Va.: The University of Virginia Press, 1970), pp. 204-206, had Robert Benson involved also with the St. Paul, Pacific, and Pennsylvania, and several other American railroads.
Spirit Lake and Western Railway Company to construct a rail line running west from Spirit Lake, Iowa to Sibley, Iowa (a distance of about forty miles), and beyond. Apparently the Closes were not wholly serious about this venture but undertook it hoping that their actions would prompt other railroad companies to begin construction on much talked about east-west rail lines through that part of Northwestern Iowa. In this respect Constantine Benson (a partner in the Close firm at the time) was reported as stating that the Spirit Lake and Western was not a "paper line" and unless the other railroad companies began building soon, "English capital will construct the line . . . about seventy-five miles long and fully fifty miles of the distance will be run over the lands bought by the Close Brothers & Co. or their friends." At least one railroad, the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern, responded to the Close "threat" and laid the original tracks from Spirit Lake to Sibley (later, the line was taken over by the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway—see Appendix I). Interestingly, the Burlington was the same railroad which constructed the line from Luverne, Minnesota to Pipestone City and beyond in 1884, after the Closes had taken over management of Robert Benson's and other lands in Pipestone County. Moreover, at about the same time James Close became secretary of the Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls and Northwestern Town Lot Company, which was busily engaged in platting and "booming" new railroad towns in that part of Minnesota. Among the railroad towns the company platted was Trosky on the Burlington line

30 The Sibley Gazette, March 17, 1882.
between Luverne, Minnesota and Pipestone City.\textsuperscript{32} While the foregoing events are far from "proof" that there was at least cooperation and perhaps even collusion between the Closes and the several railroads operating or planning operations within the region, they seem to point to that probability.

The Closes De-emphasize Their "System"

From the beginning of their land buying operations within the study area in 1878 and continuing at least until they gave up management of the Iowa Land Company in 1884, the Closes emphasized the "Close System" in their land dealings. To reiterate, this system was to: (1) divide the land into farmsteads, usually of 160 acres each; (2) make improvements on every third or fourth farmstead, including erecting essential buildings, digging a well, breaking a portion of the land, and (later) planting a grove or two of trees; and (3) rent out the improved farmsteads for half of the crop produced.

As stated earlier in this study, it is manifestly impossible to determine with accuracy the actual number of farmsteads opened up, the number of buildings erected, etc., under the Close System. However, "hundreds" seems to be the one appropriate quantitative term to apply. While the number of improved farmsteads hewn out on Close owned or managed land could well have been much higher—perhaps even two thousand as earlier suggested—there is insufficient "hard" evidence to support these higher figures. In any case, there are bits of evidence and other

\textsuperscript{32}Rose, \textit{op. cit.}, Footnote 3, p. 384.
information available that seems to indicate that as the Close Brothers rapidly extended their holdings, they changed their methods of operation. Indeed, by 1886 they seem to have virtually abandoned their popular and seemingly profitable "system." In this respect, Rose, in his history of Pipestone County wrote: "At first the Closes preferred to rent their farms, later (in a short time) they began to more often sell—wild lands were sold for $8.00 to $10.00 an acre and improved lands were sold for $12.00 an acre."\(^{33}\) As with certain other of their operations, the reason (or reasons) for this change in their style cannot be factually determined. It appears highly likely, however, that the economics of their situation forced them to abandon their "system." In other words they began to acquire too much land too quickly to take the time to also improve it. To illustrate, in 1881 they purchased for themselves and the Iowa Land Company more than 76,000 acres of land, and even though they sold some 24,700 acres of land that same year they still had on hand at year's end more than 80,000 acres they had purchased in 1881 and early years. Their year-end holdings of owned and managed lands continued to rise rapidly over the next two years, reaching more than 96,000 acres in 1882 and nearly 238,000 acres in late 1883, the peak year of operations in terms of land on hand. (The 1883 figure includes the more than 110,000 acres of land in Pipestone County that the Closes began managing in 1883 for Robert Benson and the South Minnesota Land Company.) Indeed, this rapid accumulation of land in these two years was probably one of the major reasons why the Closes chose to give up the management of the Iowa

\(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 286.
Land Company in early 1884 (and thus the management of some 70,100 acres of land in that company's name at the time).

By the end of 1884 the Close Brothers and firms still owned or managed something like 170,000 acres of land, and about the same amount at year's end in 1885. But in 1886 they finally consummated the deal with the Milwaukee Road they had begun in 1881, to purchase the railroad's excess lands in O'Brien and Osceola Counties, Iowa (discussed above in Chapter V, pages 137-141). This purchase and others that year minus sales added a net of nearly 35,000 acres of land to their ownership or management, again raising the total land under their control at any one time to more than 200,000 acres. It is little wonder then, that by 1886 the Closes had abandoned their celebrated "system" and were concentrating instead mostly on selling the land they had on hand, much of which by that time was of the unimproved variety.

All the amounts of land shown on these pages to reflect year-end holdings have been arrived at by interpolating the yearly land purchases and sales reflected in Table 6 (page 114) and Table 7 (page 147) this study, together with the approximate 110,000 acres of land in Pipestone County, Minnesota managed by Close Brothers and Company for Robert Benson and the South Minnesota Land Company. The 170,000 acres and 200,000 acres of land indicated as owned or managed by the Closes in 1885 and 1886 respectively, squares fairly well with an advertisement that Close Brothers and Company placed in the Pipestone Semi-Weekly Star of June 19, 1885 and later editions. In this advertisement the firm offered "Over 200,000 Acres of choice Wild Land and Improved Farms in the Great Pipestone Region" and elsewhere for sale. (Interestingly, this particular advertisement made no mention of tenancy arrangements.)

The author's fairly comprehensive search of tax records on several of the study area counties revealed that in 1884 and later years the Close Brothers made virtually no improvements at all on the lands they purchased--at least no taxes were levied for same.
Selling the Land

By far the greatest amount of real evidence of the Close Brothers' land buying and selling activities within the study area can be found in a dusty basement vault of the Pipestone County, Minnesota courthouse. Here, in a dozen or so letter-size boxes marked "Close Brothers" are stored approximately 3,000 copies of land sales contracts, all of which were negotiated by the Close firm for their own (or their firm's) holdings or for those of individuals and firms they represented between the years 1883 and 1900. There is no way of determining whether these 3,000 contracts are all that the Closes were involved with during these years, but they certainly reflect in total the sale of a sizeable amount of land. Indeed, the land involved in only 140 of these contracts (approximately one in twenty closely examined by the author), amounted to more than 22,000 acres. By extrapolation, then, one could readily infer that 400,000 acres of land or more was involved in the total of these contracts.36

These land contracts, of course, give valuable information relative to the terms laid down in all Close negotiated sales, whether the land sold was within the study area or was in Kansas or Texas. There were variances, of course, but the overwhelming majority were typical of the sample shown in Figure 7, which, in this instance, was negotiated in

36 While even 400,000 acres is considerably more land than all that the Closes owned or controlled within the study area at one time or another, a large number of the contracts involved the previously mentioned Trego County, Kansas and the Texas land with which the Closes were involved (see Footnote 6, Chapter II, page 63, this study).
This Agreement, made this Thirtieth day of January, 18__

between

Henry Close, of the first part,

and

Adrian Bankston, of the second part, WITNESSETH That
in consideration of the stipulations hereinafter contained, and the payment to be made as is hereinafter specified, the first party hereby agrees to sell unto the second party, the

section No. — in Township No. ——, Range No. ——W of the 8th principal meridian, containing, according to the United States Survey, 1,000,000 acres, be the same more or less, for the sum DOLLARS, on which the said second party hath paid the sum of DOLLARS on account of the principal.

And the said second party, in consideration of the premises, hereby agrees to pay to the said first party, at the office of Close Bros. & Co., at Chicago, Ill., the following sums of principal and interest, as the several times named below:

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<tr>
<th>WEEK NO.</th>
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And it is further stipulated that no assignment of the premises shall be valid unless the same shall be endorsed hereto, or permanently attached hereto, and approved by the first party (for which purpose this contract must be sent to said office of Close Bros. & Co., Chicago, Ill., and that no agreements or conditions or relations between the second party and...

Witnesses

Henry Sande

Adrian Kanig

Fred Molda

Joseph Paulsen

Purchaser will be entitled to a deed when one-third of purchase money is paid, and notes secured by mortgage bearing interest at 6% per annum, payable annually, are given for the balance, said mortgage to be a first lien on the premises.

Figure 7.--A typical land contract used by the Close Brothers.
(Copy courtesy of the County Auditor, Pipestone County, Minn.)
January, 1891 by one Henry Bond, agent for the Close Brothers' firm. Most all these contracts were written for ten years and while the buyer's cost varied from $8 to $16 an acre, the most common price was $10 per acre if no improvements had been made, which was apparently the case on most of that sold. Other terms of these contracts most often required a $1 per acre down payment with ten equal yearly payments at 8 percent interest on the unpaid balance. The purchaser was usually entitled to the deed for the property when one-third (but sometimes one-half) of the cost had been paid. In some instances no down payment was required, and sometimes too the buyer had to agree to erect a certain number of buildings or "break" a certain number of acres of land by a certain time (most often within one year). Also, the buildings erected in the time frame specified had to have a certain assessed value which was usually specified as $400.

As 1883 marked the zenith of the Closes' land holdings at any one time (either by ownership or as managers), 1884 marked the end of the years in which they purchased more land than they sold. The single exception was 1886, when they finally closed their deal with the Milwaukee Road they had begun to negotiate in 1881. In 1885, though, they sold approximately 5,800 acres of land while buying only some 1,100. Even in 1886 when they finally bought the Milwaukee Road's land (about 32,800 acres), they acquired only about 900 acres of other land while selling more than 2,600 acres. Then, beginning in 1887 they consistently sold

37 This particular contract was selected as an example not only because it was a typical Close contract, but because it was more legible than most and it reflects a paid-up contract as agreed to by the buyer. (Note that by 1891 the Closes had established offices in Chicago.)
much more land each year than they purchased. In all, they sold some 84,800 acres of their own land between 1887 and 1898 while purchasing only 8,000 acres or so during the same period. Also during these years they sold a great many of the 110,000 acres of land in Pipestone County they managed for the South Minnesota Land Company and Robert Benson. Exactly how much of this latter land was actually sold cannot be accurately determined without an exhaustive search of Pipestone County records. However, of the Close Brothers' land contracts discussed above, about one in four was for land owned by either Benson or the South Minnesota Land Company. This indicates that nearly all of this land was probably sold by 1898 also.

So it was then, that in just twenty short years William, Frederick, and James Close in America, with brother John's financial assistance from England, built for themselves and sold again a sizeable land empire in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota. The extent of their feat relative to the amount of land they themselves purchased and later sold is tabulated in Table 8. Added to this is the approximate 110,000 acres of Pipestone County land they did not purchase but managed (sold) for Robert Benson and the South Minnesota Land Company, which brought the total amount of land they owned or controlled within the study area at one time or another during the twenty years of their enterprise to more than 344,500 acres. Of these huge holdings all but some 12,000 acres had been disposed of to several thousand other buyers by 1898.

From England years later William Close's own words probably best sum up the reasons for the somewhat sudden demise of the Close Brothers' American enterprise:
TABLE 8
ALL LAND PURCHASED AND LATER SOLD BY THE CLOSE BROTHERS
WITHIN THE STUDY AREA, 1878-1898

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>For the CLOSE BROS. b</th>
<th>For the IOWA LAND CO.</th>
<th>For the WESTERN LAND CO. (Close Controlled)</th>
<th>Totals for Years Indicated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>24,100</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>7,400</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>33,700</td>
<td>24,700</td>
<td>42,700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>7,300</td>
<td>23,500</td>
<td>2,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>26,100</td>
<td>7,400</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>6,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>5,800</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>38,200</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>10,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4,400</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>5,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>17,200</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>5,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-98</td>
<td>11,300</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>24,300</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTALS 104,000 94,700 75,000 4,900 55,500 52,900 234,500 152,500

a Compiled from land transfer and other official records of the thirteen Iowa and Minnesota counties in the study area. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 100 acres.

b Includes land purchased by the individual Close Brothers in their respective names or by their two firms: Close Brothers and Company and Close Benson and Company.

c Most of this land sold in 1883 and in subsequent years was first sold or transferred to the Western Land Company before finally being disposed of to "outsiders." The sales are credited to the "Close Bros." column, however, to avoid confusion and duplication.

d Represents only land for which there is a record of sale in the years 1878-1898. Land sales after 1898 have not been included.

e Represents only the amount of land bought and sold in Iowa and Minnesota by the Iowa Land Company between 1881 and 1884 when the Close Brothers actually managed the Iowa Land Company or influenced its land buying business.
There had been rain for three years before we bought these lands [in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota] and we sold most of them off at double the price within a year; but unfortunately a period of drought set in and the lands, being sold on time reverted to our Company. We also bought another 100,000 acres on the Atchinson Road in Kansas near Colorado and another 100,000 of beautiful land in the Panhandle of Texas. But unfortunately a period of drought set in coinciding with a period of financial depression within the United States, and for a number of years there was no demand for these lands, and heavy taxes were paid each year, so that when a demand began to spring up, our friends here urged us to sell, get what money we could back out of the investment, and stop paying taxes. Had these lands been held for a year longer when the secrets of dry-farming were being discovered, there would have been a large fortune waiting for the investment instead of which we did not get the whole of our money back. 38

In a later letter still, William Close gives the definite impression that the Close firm would have continued indefinitely, at least in the farm mortgage business in America, had it not been for the First World War. In this respect he wrote in 1923:

It [the Close firm] is ... not doing any active business, because the past business was the investment of English money in America, English money before the War being obtainable at a lower rate of interest than we could lend to farmers out West, but the War has changed all that, and the rate of exchange of course obviates any chance of our doing a mortgage or land business. 39

38 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 118, quoting from a William Close to Van Der Zee letter, November 30, 1921. William Close's reference to the "secrets of dry-farming" probably pertained more to their Kansas and Texas lands. In alluding to "a period of drought" and a "period of financial depression," Close probably was referring respectively to (1) the mid 1890's (especially 1894) when the western prairies and the eastern plains experienced very dry conditions, and (2) the early to mid 1890's when a glut of American farm products drove prices for such commodities sharply down, thus contributing at least partially to the depression of 1893.

39 Letter, William Close to Jacob Van Der Zee, January 10, 1923. Letter is presently in the possession of Jacob Van Der Zee's son, Robert Vander Zee of Sioux City, Iowa.
Only a biographical footnote can be added here about the four brothers "who did so much to promote the settlement and up-building" of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota. Frederick Brooks Close died tragically in June, 1890, as the result of an accident which occurred while he was playing in a polo match at Sioux City, Iowa. James Brooks Close died in England on July 31, 1910. John Brooks Close, who stayed in England and supplied the Close firm with capital, died on March 20, 1914. William Close, the unofficial leader of the Close Brothers' American enterprise, lived on in relatively good health in London until September 25, 1923, when he passed away after only a short illness.

40 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 1, p. 119.

41 Letter, J. W. Probert (then the American Manager of Close Bros. & Co.) to Van Der Zee, September 26, 1923. Letter is presently in the possession of Jacob Van Der Zee's son, Robert Vander Zee of Sioux City, Iowa.
CHAPTER VII

CAPITALIST LAND SPECULATORS OR COMMUNITY BUILDERS?

Review and Analysis

The consensus among scholars of the American frontier is that the white settlement of the continental United States was anything but a simple process. In fact, many authorities support Carl Sauer's contention that no part of the frontier was the same type as another, nor did any part of it develop in a "uniform series of stages." Sauer contended further that "the nature of the cultural succession that was initiated in any frontier area was determined by the physical character of the country, by the civilization that was brought in, and by the moment in history that was involved."¹

While Professor Sauer may have been correct insofar as concerns cultural succession, men of many persuasions pervaded every frontier and often in the same sequence. There is little doubt, for example, that the first white men to set foot in almost all the new areas of unsettled United States were explorers or hunters and trappers, or traders, followed or accompanied by soldiers, surveyors, Indian agents, and land speculators. Actually, a more accurate observation would seem to be that cultural succession on any given part of the frontier was not begun

until those who came, meant to stay, viz., the bona fide pioneer home-seeker whether native American or immigrant from abroad. These homeseeking pioneers were most often the "late-comers" to the American frontier. Late in the sense that many others with different motives invariably preceded them. Certainly not the least among the earlier comers were the land speculators. In fact, there are those who contend that all who were interested in land along the moving frontier were in fact land speculators, whether they were railroaders, other large-scale capitalist investors, squatters, or even the homeseeker who purchased more land than he could possibly use economically. Of the non-railroad capitalist investor who dealt speculatively in land on a large scale, two types were described early in this study (Chapter I, pages 3 and 4): (1) those individuals or firms who purchased large tracts of unimproved land (often as initial entrymen) solely for the purpose of reselling it unimproved for a profit; and (2) those individuals or firms who purchased or otherwise acquired their land mostly from initial entrymen (including "tired" speculators), land grant railroads, disillusioned or bankrupt first-wave homeseekers, with the intent of either reselling it unimproved for a profit or establishing large farming enterprises hoping for continuing profits from the commercial sale of crops and livestock. In the former instance, the large-scale land entrepreneurs were first or early comers to the westering frontier who purchased land on or out ahead of the frontier, gambling that settlement would soon or eventually

2 There were exceptions, of course. The Mormons' trek westward to Utah is probably the single best example of bona fide homeseekers being in the vanguard of western settlement.
overtake their land and thus greatly increase its value. In the latter instance the "frontier" had, for the most part, already passed beyond the region in which this type of speculator chose to operate, but the population there was still thinly spread and there was considerable unsettled and even unexplored land available at good prices.3

Examined in this study has been the case of one of the large-scale land speculative enterprises which, in the beginning at least, was of the type last described above, i.e., interested in establishing ongoing large-scale farming. The case in point is that of the Close Brothers of Manchester and London, England, who came to America in the late 1870's and in a short span of twenty years carved out for themselves a sizeable land empire and a reputation as homestead builders in a relatively small geographical study area of just thirteen rural counties lying in the extreme reaches of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota.

The objective of this study is to determine, if possible, whether or not the Close Brothers' large-scale land buying operations within this area influenced in any way the: (1) settlement (or resettlement) and agricultural development of the area; and (2) the type of agriculture carried on in the same area today.

In order to arrive at some tentative conclusions with respect to this two-pronged objective, a detailed inquiry into a number of more fundamental how, why, and what questions was necessary. The seven questions

3 Even though most of this land was purchased "secondhand," i.e., no longer owned by state or federal government at the time of purchase but held by the railroads, earlier speculators and other private corporations and individuals, much of it was totally unfamiliar to those who sold or forfeited it to these "second-wave" speculators.
stated in Chapter I, pages 16 and 17, seemed to be most fundamental to
the problem, consequently the thrust of the study has been toward
attempting to find answers to these questions. Unfortunately the
resultant investigation was not wholly successful. At the outset it
was discovered that there was little information about the inner work­
ings of the Closes' business operations available in any of the thirteen
counties of the study area. For example, no information could be found
relative to the payment or commission the Close firm received as land
agents for the S. C. & St. P. Railroad, or as managers of the Iowa Land
Company, the South Minnesota Land Company and Robert H. Benson's lands.
While the lack of such information was not fatal to the research, it
would have been useful if for no other reason than in helping to deter­
mine whether the Closes themselves were as shrewd businessmen as it
appears they were. Moreover, as earlier noted, there remains today
practically no physical evidence of the Close enterprise. True, there
is a Close-built house or barn or other building here and there or even
remnants of a grove of trees they may have planted, but nothing else.
There was enough "hard" evidence however, in the form of official Fed­
eral, state, and county records, as well as other information found in
the newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and other historical accounts,
which together with a good deal of conjecture to fill in the gaps pre­
sent a reasonably accurate account of the Closes' land enterprise in
Mid-America. There follows here an analysis and summary of that account
as narrated in the foregoing six chapters of this study. For convenience
sake, the analysis and summary is keyed to the same seven fundamental
questions formally stated in Chapter I and restated in full or in essence below as preambles to the analysis and summary of each.

1. To what extent were the Closes influenced by history and by prevailing conditions in choosing the study area to begin their operations in America? There appears to be little doubt that the Close Brothers, like most Britishers of the day, were greatly intrigued by the opportunities available on the burgeoning American frontier of the mid and late nineteenth century. After all, it seemed that there was something available there for every man wanting to take the risk (especially free or nearly free land), whether he was of the aristocracy looking for new or better investments, or what to do with his second and later sons; or a poor city slum dweller seeking a way out of his miserable way of life. Even though the last half of the nineteenth century was to witness Great Britain's ascendancy to World leadership, great problems at home accompanied her rise, especially after 1870. Particularly significant to this study were two developments: (1) a steady and precipitous rise in Great Britain's population after 1800; and (2) the near ruin of British agriculture brought on in the 1870's and 1880's mostly by the availability of cheap foodstuffs from America (especially wheat), and by some poor harvests at home.

One effect of Great Britain's rapid increase in population and her agricultural difficulties as it pertains to this study, was to drive many


5Ibid., pp. 672 and 673. See also W. A. Carrothers, Emigration From the British Isles (London: P. S. King & Son, Ltd., 1929), pp. 226 and 230.
farm workers off the land and into the cities and other urban areas. This exodus from the farm deprived the country gentleman or merchant land owner of his agricultural rents, and equally important, yet another niche (besides the military and clergy) for his second and other sons who often supervised these holdings in past years. Another related effect was the lack of good investment opportunities at home for the country gentleman or merchant. While the growing British Empire initially created a great demand for empire sustaining home enterprises in industry, mining, and transportation, such investments soon reached a point of diminishing returns to the investor, often producing only 2 or 3 percent. It gradually developed that the empire and the United States offered considerably more return (albeit at a greater risk) to the capitalist investor. Indeed, a 20 percent return was not uncommon for these foreign investments.

So it was that many of the aristocracy and others of the upper-class, the worker-class, and the landless farmer of Great Britain looked to North America and especially the United States, for new and better investment opportunities or a new beginning. Eager to accommodate them were just as many land brokers in America (and in Great Britain and on the Continent). As earlier discussed, these land merchants literally flooded Great Britain especially, but also the Scandinavian countries and Germany with promotional material about the land they wished to peddle. Competition was fierce among them with most claiming (too often falsely) that their land was the "garden spot" of America and offering
all sorts of benefits if only the immigrant would choose to buy their land on which to make his fortune or a new home.6

Aiding and abetting the land brokers were innumerable travelers, adventurers, and other visitors to America. The Briton abroad in the United States had always been a part of the American scene, the Revolution notwithstanding. But after the Civil War they became even more so and their numbers increased markedly, attracted mostly by the westering frontier of the United States. Even so, though, most of the earlier post-Civil War travelers and adventurers came mostly to satisfy a personal curiosity and to write about their experiences, whether to family and friends (or "letters to the editor") or professionally in books and journals. By the early 1870's their writings had caught the fancy of the British public at large and there developed in Great Britain an almost insatiable appetite for more and more information about the United States, especially its Middle West.

Recognizing the steadily increasing public interest, the British press began devoting considerable effort and space on the subject in their publications. Roving reporters were "sent out" in droves to witness and report on conditions all along the frontier. While most of these reporters were journalists who were adept at producing "good copy," there was no small number of agricultural specialists among them who

6Oscar O. Winther, "The English and Kansas, 1865-1890," in The Frontier Challenge: Responses to the Trans-Mississippi West, ed. by John G. Clark (Lawrence, Kans.: The University Press of Kansas, 1971), pp. 246 and 247, suggests two of the more common incentives used: (1) a bargain transportation price from England (or wherever) by ship and rail to the emigrant's new home in America and (2) improved land on which to begin anew with improvements often including a rudimentary house and barn, a well, and some land already "broken."
reported soberly and generally more factually on what they observed. These agriculturalists wrote mostly for the upper and educated classes in such catering journals as the Field and the *Agricultural Gazette.*

For the general public the British press functioned more as paid press agents for the land speculators. Planted news releases were common and the classified sections of these publications were replete with advertisements pertaining to land sales in America. Such publications as the Manchester's *Labourers' Union Chronicle* and *American News* and the London *Times* catered more to the interests of the general British public.

Somewhat different than the British press as a whole was London's *American Settler.* Established in 1872 as "A Guide to British Emigration to the United States" to promote "an intelligent emigration not an emigration of clods alike ignorant and hungry," the *Settler* was published exclusively to promote emigration. Besides keeping its readers informed of land opportunities in the United States, it also published a great deal of information concerning general farming methods (particularly pertaining to the raising of cattle and other livestock), soils, and climate.

Over and over again accounts of success with farming and ranching in America appeared in British newspapers, magazines, and other journals.

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7 *Ibid.*, pp. 239 and 240. While Winther's observations are concerned mostly with the degree of British interest in Kansas during the last half of the nineteenth century, this same degree of British interest prevailed at about the same time in other mid-continent states such as Texas, Nebraska, Dakota Territory, Iowa, and Minnesota.


Almost certainly of great interest to the well-to-do and educated classes were the accounts of successful large-scale farming operations of the type discussed in Chapter 11 of this study. And certainly the possibility of cheap land was most appealing to the land hungry British farmer and the destitute city dweller—especially if one could settle in the United States where there were many other Britons, perhaps even in one of the many colonies that had sprung up in all of the newer states.\textsuperscript{11}

As sons of a well-to-do merchant of Manchester as well as nephews of a prominent Manchester banker,\textsuperscript{12} it is not difficult to presume that the Close Brothers were just as intrigued with the American frontier and the many opportunities there for financially rewarding investments as were most others of the idle well-to-do. Indeed, that the Closes were interested in America for quite some time before they came is substantiated clearly in William Close's own words when he wrote in the British magazine, \textit{Land and Water} (November, 1879 issue), that long before he left Cambridge he had decided to pursue the vocation of farming and stock raising in North America, with the United States preferred over Canada because of the relatively milder winters.\textsuperscript{13} The youngest brother, Frederick, on the other hand, made his intentions clear even earlier,

\textsuperscript{11}A recent interesting and comprehensive discussion of British interests in America during the last half of the nineteenth century is in Philip Taylor's, \textit{The Distant Magnate} (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), Chapter Four, "News of America," pp. 66-90.

\textsuperscript{12}Venn's, \textit{Alumni Cantabrigiensis to 1900}, pp. 70 and 71; Manchester \textit{Faces and Places}, IV (where published and publisher unknown, 1893), pp. 133 and 134; Manchester \textit{Banks and Bankers} (where published and publisher unknown, 1878), pp. 197-217.

\textsuperscript{13}See Chapter III, pages 64 and 65, this study, for the actual quotation.
having chosen to emigrate to America rather than attend Cambridge. By 1872 he had taken up farming in Virginia while his brothers John, James, and William were at Cambridge.

While there appears to be little doubt that the Close Brothers' decision to try their fortune in America was greatly influenced by the British press and the numerous land merchants who swarmed in the cities and over the countryside as well as by the depressed economic conditions that had begun to pervade the home country, beginning their American venture in Northwestern Iowa was probably one of almost pure happenstance insofar as concerns their going there in the first place.

It will be recalled that in 1876 William Close had been invited to bring a "university four" to compete in the centennial regatta at Philadelphia and, as a result of an injury, was confined pretty much to his lodgings. While in this situation he struck up a conversation with one Daniel Paullin who told him of the availability of good land in Northwestern Iowa and of the potential of the region. Close was impressed enough to ask his brother Fred to accompany him on a journey to the western states, a journey that resulted in their choice of Northwestern Iowa as the place to begin. In true "for-want-of-a-nail" style, William Close many years later recalled those earlier days. In his

14 Jacob Van Der Zee, The British in Iowa (Iowa City, Ia.: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1922), p. 57 and n. on p. 258.

15 Venn's, op. cit., Footnote 12, pp. 70 and 71.
letter to Jacob Van Der Zee in November, 1921, he penned the above
detailed information and added:

... and here we may pause to note how very little events
turn the trend of one's life into a career that otherwise would not
have been followed. For if a man in Birmingham had not made a
faulty screw, and if the builder of our racing shell at Newcastle-
on-Tyne had not happened to put this faulty screw into the bars
supporting my slide, I should never have had the bruise; ... I
should never have met Mr. Daniel Paullin who well advised me as to
my business career; and I should never have married his daughter.16

As earlier suggested, the above account appears to be over simplified—
certainly romanticized. In fact, Paullin notwithstanding, William Close
evidently was not wholly sold in the beginning on settling in Western
Iowa and wanted to see other areas of Mid-America first. He and brother
Fred, it will be recalled, looked into the land buying possibilities in
many other states as they travelled westward from Virginia (where the
lands were "played out" and too expensive). Pennsylvania land was con-
sidered too expensive also; Illinois was too crowded; Missouri was
"magnificent country" but "cursed with a most wretched population";
Kansas and Nebraska looked good to the brothers, but they were bothered
by the prevalence of "fever" in Kansas and the lack of water in Nebraska.
On the other hand, upon their arrival in Northwestern Iowa, their initial
reaction (according to William Close several months later) was similar
to Brigham Young's, "this is the place," the words the great Mormon
leader uttered when he first saw the Valley of the Great Salt Lake in
1847. As soon as the two Close Brothers laid eyes upon Northwestern

16 Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 14, n. on p. 258, quoting from
William Close to Van Der Zee letter of November 30, 1921. See Chapter
III, pages 61 and 62, this study, for a more complete account of the
Close-Paullin Philadelphia conversation and its results.
Iowa, they "were at once enabled to endorse the favorable opinion given us by our friend in Illinois [Daniel Paullin]."\(^{17}\)

Even though the two brothers were favorably impressed at first sight with the potential of Northwestern Iowa for stock farming, it was only after a "long and careful investigation" that they decided to make their first purchase of land in Crawford County. The nature and scope of their investigation is not revealed, but it is reasonable to presume that, like prudent businessmen anywhere, they looked into the economic conditions that prevailed there at the time as well as the lay of the land and other pertinent details. They probably talked with a great many farmers and other land owners (e.g., railroads, speculators, etc.), as well as with farm implement and supply dealers and other businessmen as they travelled by buggy for about a week "from village to village taking in the general topography of the country."\(^{18}\) There is little doubt that their travels yielded a great deal of vital information not only with respect to the general topography of the several counties, but probably a great deal about the climate, the length of the growing season, the soils and what crops were best grown on them, and whether the land was suited to stock raising. Moreover, if they did not already know, they most likely became aware of the depressed economic conditions there, particularly in agriculture, which were brought on over the years by almost continuous adversity. This was especially the case during the mid-1870's, 

\(^{17}\) See Chapter III, pages 64 and 65, this study, for William Close's account of the Brothers' westward journey.

\(^{18}\) Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 14, p. 59, quoting from a William Close to Van Der Zee letter, November 30, 1921.
when a series of grasshopper infestations, dry summers, severe winters, and weak markets drove away many of the earlier settlers and left many others on the verge of bankruptcy. These same general economic conditions probably also had an adverse effect upon the railroads of the area. Earlier the railroad companies (or their affiliated land companies) had held from the market huge tracts in their land grants, anticipating a rise in land values as their new rail lines brought in settlers in greater numbers. When this did not occur (at least to the extent anticipated), the railroad companies too began to feel the pinch and were often obliged to sell their lands at less than the top dollar.¹⁹

In short, the evidence seems to indicate that the Close Brothers—in gaining adulthood during a difficult period of English history when immense social and economic changes affected all Britishers—were greatly attracted along with many of their countrymen of all social classes, by the cornucopia of everything in Canada and America, especially the latter. For the Closes and tens of thousands of others, opportunity lay in the land both as a good investment in itself and as a profit producing farming enterprise. Precisely what motivated them in this direction is not certain. But they like so many of their class were looking for

¹⁹ According to Earle D. Ross, Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey (Iowa City, Ia.: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1951), p. 70, the usual ceiling price on land in Northwestern Iowa throughout the 1870's was no more than $5 an acre and this price was not often the case. Whereas in the eastern more settled parts of the state, land prices ranged from $20 to $40 per acre with some sales near larger towns and cities as high as $60 an acre. The Closes themselves paid no more than $4 an acre for the land they bought in 1879 and early 1880 (see Table 5, Chapter V, page 111, this study). Even in 1881 they paid only about $6.50 an acre for land they acquired from the S. C. & St. P. Railroad.
their "niche," and it seems likely that they were influenced a great deal by the mountains of literature about America published in British newspapers, books, and journals. Perhaps they were also attracted by attending the numerous public meetings or visiting the offices of the land sellers who seemed to be everywhere. Or perhaps there were friends who had "been there" and had whetted the Closes' appetites to also give it a try. In any case, Fred first and then William Close, followed later by brother James, came to America to invest in the land and take up general farming and stock raising.

The Brothers' choice of Northwestern Iowa seems to have been a combination of happenstance, judgement and timing. First, they were steered to Northwestern Iowa by a chance meeting that William Close had with the prosperous Illinois farmer and land buyer, Daniel Paullin (and perhaps Paullin's daughter whom William later married). Second, it was William's and Frederick's judgement that not only were the several Northwestern Iowa counties well suited in terms of topography, soils, and moisture for general farming and stock raising, but that transportation (the Missouri River and several competing railroads) were accessible as were local and more distant markets, viz., Sioux City, Omaha/Council Bluffs, and Chicago. Finally, the economically depressed conditions they found probably influenced their final decision to begin there, since the cost of land (especially unimproved land) was generally less than elsewhere.

2. Was there anything unique about the Close Brothers' enterprise? If uniqueness in this instance is measured by comparing large-scale farming undertakings with the many thousands of one-man or one-family
operations on a section or less of land established in the Middle Western states during the last half of the nineteenth century, then the Close Brothers' enterprise was unique. This is not to say, however, that their enterprise was without precedent. Actually there were numerous instances of large-scale farming in Mid-America long before the Closes gave it a try. It will be recalled that Federal statistics reveal a sizeable increase in the number of large-scale farming operations (a thousand acres or more) in the Mid-Western states after the Civil War. In the decade of the 1870's, for example, the number of these thousand-acres-or-more operations increased nearly five-fold, with more than half of the total west of the Mississippi River. Moreover, a sizeable number of these large-scale operations were financed by (and also often operated by) foreign investors, many of whom were British.

In Chapter II, examples of eight different kinds of large-scale farming carried on in Mid-America during the nineteenth century were briefly discussed (see pages 47-60). The examples cited included: (1) ethnic agricultural colonies founded strictly as commercial ventures; (2) singly-owned enterprises of mixed farming (crops and cattle, hogs or sheep, or some combination of livestock) or cash-grain operations; (3) singly (or family)-owned farmsteads rented out to tenant farmers either on a cash or sharecrop or combination basis; and (4) singly (or corporation)-owned enterprises of single crop farming (Bonanza wheat farms). While the eight examples described were chosen mainly as representative of the various kinds of early large-scale

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See Chapter II, page 47, this study, for numbers of large-scale farms existing in the North Central States in 1860, 1870, and 1880.
farming carried on in Mid-America, one or more aspect of all eight were at one time or another practiced or deliberately shunned by the Close Brothers. For one thing, they resorted to similar means of promoting their ventures. Birkbeck and Flower, and Ellsworth for certain, and probably one or more of the others earlier discussed, distributed pamphlets in the United States and abroad describing the virtues of their land in order to attract immigrants to them. The Closes did the same.

Ellsworth, Scott, and Scully used for awhile or adopted permanently the practice of tenancy on their lands. Ellsworth and even Scott to some extent adopted the tenancy arrangement more in a transitory sense, i.e., to more rapidly develop their land into working farmsteads and thus improve its resale possibility. In both instances some kind of a rental-sales agreement was often made with the tenant, whereby after several years of renting (either for cash but more often for a share of the crop) the tenant could acquire the land. Scully, on the other hand, dealt strictly on a cash-rent basis with no intention of selling to the tenant or anyone else. This is probably one reason why much of the land purchased by Scully in Illinois, Kansas, and Nebraska is still held by the Scully heirs today.

The Close Brothers also used some kind of tenancy arrangement during most of the first decade of their twenty-year enterprise within the study area. In the beginning they resorted to a tenancy arrangement similar to Scully's. Unlike Scully, however, their rentals were
mostly on a sharecrop basis rather than cash. Later, as they rapidly expanded their holdings, they began using tenants mainly to improve and develop their farmsteads. More and more often they resorted to a kind of rental-sales agreement similar to those used earlier by Ellsworth, Scott, and others. But at the peak of their enterprise within the study area (in late 1884), they or their firms owned or managed so much quickly acquired land that they were obliged to phase out the time consuming practice of making farmsteads, even as simple and minimal as theirs were. Indeed, by 1886 they had become the other type of large-scale capitalist land speculator referred to earlier in this chapter (page 174), i.e., interested only in selling off (hopefully at a profit) the still unimproved land they had bought in earlier years and were yet to buy, or the land they managed for other large-scale investors.

Finally, the so-called "Close System" was far from unique even insofar as concerns the size and general kinds of structures they built on their farmsteads and the first breaking of the tough prairie sod. There are numerous earlier instances where large-scale operators erected farmhouses and outbuildings, helped their tenants "break" the land and provided them seed for their first crop. Ellsworth in the mid-1840's and the Scott family (in the 1850's) resorted to this kind of "system," as apparently did many others. It is likely that even the farmhouses of the kind constructed by the Close Brothers were very much

21 The Closes did not usually deal strictly on a sharecrop basis with their tenants. For example, they accepted a flat rate per acre cash rent for land planted in corn on the theory that the corn's bulkiness made it too cumbersome for them to handle profitably on a sharecrop basis (see Chapter II, page 71, this study).
like those constructed by the earlier prairie entrepreneurs. Indeed, an English traveler on the prairies during the late 1850’s described a house remarkably similar to the Close design as typical of those built in the region.  

3. Was the “Close System” of farming the right motivation at the right time to induce immigration to the region? There can be little question that the Close practice of making the virgin land they purchased over into farmsteads (even as rudimentary as they were) and offering them for sale or, more often at first, for rent on a sharecrop basis, was the right kind of motivation to attract homeseekers most of whom were of modest means and all too aware of the high costs of farm-making.

For the reasons stated above (page 186) and earlier in this study, their timing seems to have been right too. While they were able to purchase land in the region more cheaply than elsewhere, they evidently also saw there in 1878 the probability of a general economic resurgence of (or beginning for) the region due to the availability of markets via the Missouri River and the new railroads. Moreover, they correctly predicted that the westward press of immigration (not only from the East, including Eastern Iowa, but from across the Atlantic) had already begun and would soon overlap the western half of Iowa.  

See discussion of these farmhouse similarities in Chapter II, pages 51 and 52, and in Chapter III, page 68, this study.

With respect to the costs of farm-making, scholars concerned with the history of the American frontier have, in recent years, pretty well dispelled the persistent twentieth century myth that frontier farm-making required only a strong back and perseverance for the pioneer farmer to make himself a home on the virgin land he acquired for as little as $1.25 an acre. Even the agricultural literature of that day pointed out repeatedly that farm-making on the frontier was anything but inexpensive. It was expensive west of the Missouri River and in Minnesota where a considerable amount of land was open to homesteading after 1870, and even more expensive in Northwestern Iowa where much of the land had been taken up even before the Homestead Act was passed in 1862.  

Actually though, the price a settler paid for land, whether purchased from the government or from a private source, was often the least expensive part of farm-making. For example, in the 1870's a price of more than $10 was rarely paid for an acre of unimproved land. In fact, the cost of unimproved land in the counties of Northwestern Iowa averaged only about $5 an acre in 1876. On the other hand, the cost of breaking alone ranged between $1.50 and $5 per acre (with $2.25 the average). Couple this considerable expense with that of building shelter for man and beast, digging a well, buying draft animals and often

24 See discussion of the significance of the Homestead Act of 1862 on the settlement of Northwestern Iowa in Chapter I, pages 40 and 41, this study.


26 Close, p. 17.
machinery and supplies including seed for the first crop, the problem of farm-making costs which confronted the ordinary settler can be appreciated. Actually it has been difficult for most scholars to estimate these costs due to the variables that faced the individual settler. Professor Clarence H. Danhof, for example, cited estimates of the costs of farm-making carried in the various agricultural publications of that period. These estimates ranged up to $2,650 for a 160-acre spread (less livestock) on the Iowa frontier in 1857. But, since the conditions under which they were assumed vary so widely (i.e., from estimates of the cost of land only, to estimates of costs of the entire farming operation, including land, breaking, fencing, seeding, harvesting, livestock, provisions, and buildings), one can conclude only that substantial amounts of capital were essential to begin a farm of any size.

Interestingly, William Close calculated the cost for one of their early (1878) 160-acre farms in Crawford County, Iowa—including the breaking of 90 acres, a house, stable, well, and taxes—to be $1,187.25. This is a surprisingly low figure in light of the high-range cost estimate for thirty years earlier. Nearer to the earlier estimate, however, was the Close observation that it would cost the "ordinary settler" in the neighborhood of $2,275 to purchase a 160-acre farm "fully equipped and ready


28 Ibid., pp. 256, 258, and 259.

29 See earlier discussion in this respect in Chapter III, page 72, this study.
for cultivation." Close's estimate excluded the cost of breaking and
seed, but included a house, barn and stable, farm implements, draft
animals, wagons and harnesses, and even some furniture and a stove. 30
While the foregoing points up the wide variances, it also emphasizes
the inescapable fact that farm-making was expensive even on the frontier
where land was thought of as being free or nearly so.

Of course renting land, or better yet, renting a ready-made farm­
stead, was one way the average homeseeaking farmer/settler could reduce
the costs of farm-making and conserve his limited and often hard-gotten
savings. Consequently many, whether they wished to or not, entered into
some kind of a tenancy arrangement with the land holders. As already
discussed, tenancy was a fairly common practice on the frontier and had
been a way-of-life for many a settler on the Grand Prairie of Illinois.
In Iowa too, tenancy had followed close behind as the frontier moved
across the state. 31 The fact that the Close Brothers also made success­
ful use of tenancy on their land is simply demonstrative of their business
acumen. What could have been a stronger incentive to the average home­
seeker than to be able to rent a Close farmstead with a house and barn
already erected, a well dug, a portion of the sod broken, the first crop
seed furnished,—all without a cash outlay, and fully one-half of the
crop his own to keep?

30 Close, p. 17. Mr. Close's estimate of the number and the kind
of farm implements needed and the power to operate them was surprisingly
high. He included: two breaking plows, two stirring plows, two culti­
vators for corn, two harrows, a reaper, two wagons, and "six good heavy
farm horses."

31 Staff, Iowa State College, op. cit., Footnote 25, p. 12.
While the "Close System" was meant and apparently served well to induce many ordinary homeseekers (whether native American or foreign immigrant) to take up farming in Northwestern Iowa, the Brothers probably felt, or soon learned, that some other incentive would be needed to attract the "better class" from Great Britain. Their colony scheme seemed to be the answer. As earlier stated it would be difficult to pin down exactly what influenced them to try such a venture, but the times and the experience of others surely had something to do with it. Belonging themselves to the English gentry, they had to be fully familiar with all the social and economic problems that had plagued their class for decades. Moreover, colony founding of the kind contemplated had been tried before. In fact, there were a number of other English (or British) colonies begun on the prairies and plains during the same general period as the Close effort. One, the Grant Victoria Colony of Ellis County, Kansas, is discussed in some detail in this study (Chapter II, pages 56-59). Judging from the initial success of most of these colony schemes, the idea was the right motivation at the right
date.

32 These social and economic problems are referred to a number of times throughout this study. See specifically Chapter III, pages 77, 79, and 80, and Chapter IV, page 98.

33 With respect to other colonies, Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 14, p. 157, alluded to another English colony begun in Eastern Tennessee at Rugby about the same time, stating that it "resembled the Le Mars settlement at least in its plan." Ralph H. Brown, Historical Geography of the United States (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948), p. 344, made mention of several English colonies begun in Minnesota during the early 1870's including one in Martin County (at Fairmont), the county contiguous with Jackson County in Southern Minnesota. More recently, Winther, op. cit., Footnote 6, pp. 254-268, in addition to describing Grant's Victoria Colony, touched briefly on four other English colonies established in Kansas between 1869 and 1890, the most well known of which was Runnymede, founded in Harper County in the early 1880's.
time to persuade many Britishers to emigrate. For the "country gentle­men" they were the answer to low rents and other low returns on capital in the home country, as well as what to do with second and wayward sons. For the large-scale landowners in remote or underpopulated areas a colony was a way to attract inhabitants and capital which, in turn, would assure the general economic development of the region, especially in agriculture.

The fact that the Close Colony attracted some 400 well-to-do Britons and families and upwards to 300 pupils within two years of its inception, is indicative of the "rightness" of the scheme with respect to Northwestern Iowa. In fact, at least one writer contemporary with the times believed this to be true. He wrote that the depressed economic conditions in Great Britain during the late 1870's, especially in agriculture, made the period "singularly ripe" for emigration (to Northwestern Iowa and elsewhere in America) of the Briton, particularly the Briton of the upper classes.34

4. In addition to other British, what kind of settler did the Closes attract to their lands? Were they predominantly permanent home-seekers or was there a transient tendency among them? Very early in the research for this study it was learned that the foregoing question is faulty in one respect. It suggests that the Closes attracted many of their countrymen to their own lands. This was not the case, at least as concerns the "better class" of British to whom the Brothers directed their colonizing efforts. In fact, it will be remembered, they explicitly

34"Gentlemen Emigrants," Macmillan's Magazine, LVIII, May-October, 1888, pp. 32 and 34.
excluded their own land as being available for colonists. However, rather than rephrase the question where it first appears in this study (Chapter I, page 17) merely to reflect the true fact, a better purpose is served to let it stand as is and to simply reiterate it here. By doing so, it emphasizes again the two distinct aspects of the Close Brothers’ earlier real estate enterprise within the study area: (1) to carry on a continuing large-scale farming operation by converting the land they purchased into farmsteads and renting them out to tenants (other than colonists) for a half-share of the crops produced; and (2) promoting an ethnic colony of "better class" Britishers, a venture presumably motivated by the need to attract financial capital to the region in order to improve it agriculturally and thus its value.

With respect to the Britons that the Close Brothers attracted to their colony, we know of the two general types, viz., the middle or upper middle-class English (or other British) gentleman with capital and the younger or wayward sons of other well-to-do Britons including even a few from the nobility. But what of the ordinary settlers who became tenants on, and perhaps later bought, Close farmsteads? And what of the homeseekers to whom the Closes sold their farmsteads and other land outright? Was there anything different about them from the tens of thousands of other homeseeking pioneers migrating westward? Unfortunately the limited

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35 See Chapter III, pages 82 and 83, this study.

36 While there is really no "hard" evidence to support this hypothesis, there seems to be no other logical reason. Although a side benefit to be sure, it hardly seems that they would have worked so hard on their colonizing effort simply to establish a "bit of England" on the American prairie.
evidence now available makes it virtually impossible to answer these
questions authoritatively. Even as limited as the evidence is, however,
inferences can be drawn from it and from the historical record of the
settling up of other sparsely populated regions.

First, even though the research for this study failed to reveal
any information about tenants on Close farmsteads (no copies of rental
agreements, etc.), there is no reason to believe that they were much
different from the many thousands of other farm tenants who preceded and
followed them, i.e., tenants not often by choice but because they could
not afford to purchase and improve land of their own. Moreover, Close
tenants were likely just as unsettled and footloose as were tenants
everywhere in the newer states and territories. Unsettled in the sense
that a great many rented only so long as it took to raise enough capital
to buy a farm of their own and move on; or because they were the habitual
kind of tenant, never able to efficiently manage a farm and moving
from place to place because of the weakness.

With respect to those who bought Close-owned or Close-managed
farms and raw lands, the limited evidence indicates two things about
them: (1) that, as most authorities on the history of the American frontier
have long contended, they probably came mostly from states or

37 Allen G. Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois
and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century, Quadrangle Books

38 Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture 1860–
similar views are Bogue, op. cit., Footnote 37, pp. 14–18, Jack E. Eblen,
"An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Frontier Populations," Demography,
areas settled forty or fifty years earlier especially when the new areas were contiguous to the old, and (2) that many of them may have been of a migratory nature.

Concerning their origins, a review of 140 Close land contracts (about one in twenty-five of those found stored in the Pipestone County, Minnesota courthouse) revealed that in every case but three, buyers of Close owned or managed land came from the Midwestern states with Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois most often named. Even two of the remaining three could have been from one of these states, but their origin was not indicated. The one other buyer came from New York City.  

Further indication that new settlers arriving in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota were mostly American and from the Midwestern states, is contained in the Iowa Agricultural Society Report of 1882 in which the Osceola County Representative reported: "During the winter of 1881 and 1882 they [the Close Brothers] advertised for renters and the result is fifty-five have come from Illinois, one from England, thirty-five from eastern Iowa and ten from Wisconsin and other states."  

There is some indication too, that these freeholders of Close land were only slightly more permanent on the whole than were their tenants. 

39 Of the 140 land contracts examined, 24 dealt with land which the Closes owned or managed in Kansas. The remaining 116 concerned Close land within the study area. The states of origin and numbers of these 116 are as follows: Minnesota, 51; Iowa, 40; Illinois, 15; South Dakota, 3; Wisconsin, 2; Kansas, 1; Nebraska, 1; New York City, 1; Unknown, 2. (NOTE: the "back" migration from South Dakota, Kansas, and Nebraska.)  

The least permanent among them, of course, were the ever present speculators (sort of a "third-wave" variety by this time), who hoped to profit from rising land values as the land became more and more settled up.

For example, there was Richard Sykes who, in late 1881, purchased all but about 6,500 acres of the some 26,000 acres of Lyon County, Iowa land the Close Brothers had purchased for themselves earlier in 1881. And in Rock County, Minnesota another large-scale buyer and friend, Samuel Graves (who became a partner in the Close firm in late 1883), bought up in 1889 and 1890 about two-thirds of nearly 24,000 acres of land the Close Brothers had purchased for their own firm in that county in 1883.

While a few speculators and other large-scale operators bought up huge tracts of Close owned or managed land, there were many hundreds of homeseeking settlers who purchased land from the Closes in amounts ranging up to a section (640 acres) and even more but mostly in 160-acre parcels, which, on Close land, often offered the advantage of being a ready-made farm. During the research for this study the various county land transfer records of the study area counties revealed a considerable amount of turnover in land ownership during their "fleshing-out" years (roughly between 1870 and 1895). This was especially true with improved land, i.e., already established farmsteads. This fact squares pretty

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41 Sykes purchased much of the so-called "Larchwood estate." See earlier discussion, Chapter V, pages 113 and 116, this study.

42 Rock County, Minnesota, "Abstracts of Deeds," Luverne, Minn. It is not known why Samuel Graves purchased or otherwise acquired this land from the Close firm. One possibility is that since he became a partner about the time the Close firm had purchased it, his money was involved and he was simply taking what was his. Another possibility is that the Close firm, which was rapidly phasing out its holdings by 1889, had made Graves a good offer.
well with the contention of a number of frontier scholars that to every new area came many transient or migrating settlers, 50 to 80 percent of whom moved on within a decade.43 At least one earlier historian alluded to this transient quality among the settlers and added another dimension—that many were less than good citizens. In praising all that the Close Brothers and the Iowa Land Company had done for the good of Osceola County and its principal town Sibley, the author also observed that: "During those years, Sibley seemed to have a boom, but as a lot of the floating class of tenants [sic] moved on the merchants found that they were losing more from poor accounts than they had ever lost before."44

If the Closes did indeed attract such settlers to their land in any great numbers, one could infer that their (Close) contributions to the settling up and agricultural development of the region were less than it may otherwise appear. An analysis of land transfer actions in three widely separated townships within the study area (Garfield in Plymouth County, Iowa, Wilson in Osceola County, Iowa, and Elmer in Pipestone County, Minnesota) revealed that the average length of time first-buyers of Close owned or managed land held on to it, was only about seven years. (The Closes or the firms and persons they represented held


the land owned in the three townships an average of slightly more than eight years.\textsuperscript{45} However, it cannot be concluded from this analysis that all, or even the majority of Close land buyers were of the migratory type "who moved on within a decade."\textsuperscript{46} In the first place the sample is too small involving only some 14,300 acres of land in twenty-eight different sections, and seventy-three buyers. Moreover, the kind of first-buyer probably differed in one of the three townships. The one township is Garfield where the first-buyers appeared to be more permanent. This seems the case even though the period of time during which the twenty-five buyers of all or portions of nine sections held the land, ranged widely from just twenty days to seventy-three years and, in one instance, the land is still owned by heirs of the first buyer. First-buyers in Wilson Township (twenty-two of all or portions of eleven sections) and in Elmer Township (twenty-six buyers of all or portions of eight sections) showed more of a transient, perhaps even a speculative, tendency among the buyers. For example, of the forty-eight first-buyers involved, five resold the land either on the same or the following day. In six cases some of this same and other land was sold by second-buyers within

\textsuperscript{45} The townships may be located on the map in Appendix I of this study. Garfield Twp. in Plymouth Co., Ia. is at T90N-R43W; Wilson Twp. in Osceola Co., Ia. is at T100N, R41W; and Elmer Twp., Pipestone Co., Minn. is at T105N, R45W.

\textsuperscript{46} When these data were collected the author did not have in mind a sampling of this nature. His was an effort to determine if there was any difference in the kind of buyers of land in the township the Closes considered "home" (Garfield) and others randomly selected. The effort was, in itself, inconclusive.
about a year of its purchase. And in three other instances the land had been resold from three to six times by 1900.

Until, or unless, further study proves otherwise, the ordinary settlers who came to Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota in the 1880's and 1890's, whether tenant farmer or "his own man," appear to have been like most other settlers in new and burgeoning areas in at least one respect and perhaps in two—they were most often native American from states or areas settled during the previous forty or fifty years, especially if the older state or area was contiguous; and, just maybe, many were migrants stopping off within the study area until something better (to their minds) could be found.

5. The Closes were known to have preferred a stock farm operation on their personal properties. What may have influenced their preference? Did they, in turn, influence in any way the operations of their tenants or buyers? If so, to what extent? Actually the Closes' personal preference for mixed farming (livestock and grain) on their own farms, with emphasis on livestock raising was not an exclusive Close province. For years in Great Britain livestock raising had been emphasized over cash grain cropping, especially since feed for livestock could be purchased cheaply from American imports. Consequently most of the "country gentlemen" and the few more affluent, yeoman farmers attracted to the Close colony, brought with them this preference for

livestock raising in a mixed farming operation. Those with little or no farming experience most likely simply followed the lead of the Close Brothers and others of the same "bent." It should not be inferred, however, that the Closes and the colonists they influenced to emigrate from Great Britain were the first to practice mixed farming in Northwestern Iowa. On the contrary, mixed farming in Northwestern Iowa had become the normal practice almost as soon as the pioneer there had settled in, i.e., within a year or two of his arrival. In fact, by 1880 mixed farming had become the predominate farming method throughout the state of Iowa, and the south and western portions of Minnesota were not far behind. Corn, hogs, and cattle were the principal mixed enterprises on most Iowa farms, with emphasis on one or another as dictated by the market certainly, but also by topography, natural vegetation and soils. Compared to the "English way," though, the American farmers' methods in the more recently settled areas were "the roughest and rudest" according to William Close. He opined that there was "not much science in Western farming," but that "an Englishman farming with the best points of American farming will easily double the average yield [in crops and livestock]." On their own farms he and his brothers practiced what they preached. Aside from good blooded cattle, hogs, and sheep, the Closes took a great deal of interest in horses both the racing and coach variety. Indeed, the Close Brothers themselves and the Close colonists took

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48 This preference for stock raising was often reflected in the correspondence of these gentlemen farmers (see, for example, Appendix IV, this study).

49 Close, pp. 6 and 7.
so much interest and pride in raising blooded stock that they often won prizes in showings of their cattle, horses, sheep, and even poultry at county fairs.\textsuperscript{50} 

One important advantage of livestock farming in Northwestern Iowa in the early 1880's and one which the Closes played up in their colony prospectus, was that herd laws were still in force in that part of the state. The significance of this fact is that the fencing in of livestock was not generally required, thus one could save on "a great item of expense."\textsuperscript{51} Actually the herd laws per se did not preclude fencing. They were intended as stock confinement measures whether meant to fence in or fence out all livestock or merely to contain kinds, e.g., cattle or sheep. The extent of these laws were determined usually at township level by a vote of the people.\textsuperscript{52} The Close Colony prospectus pointed out that in most Northwestern Iowa communities the herd law required a herder (a boy would do), but stock could run at large and feed during the spring, summer, and early fall of the wild grasses on the open prairie, i.e., on government, railroad, and other absentee-owner-lands. The herder was required to keep the animals in his care away from cultivated areas (fenced or otherwise) and, unless the herd or flock was far away

\textsuperscript{50}Van Der Zee, \textit{op. cit.}, Footnote 14, pp. 137 and 138.\textsuperscript{51}Close, p. 20. Actually the sort of "open range" created by these herd laws impeded the development of first-class commercial livestock (especially cattle) simply because their quality could not be controlled without fencing to keep the purebred and "scrawny" kind apart (see Bogue, \textit{op. cit.}, Footnote 37, p. 82, in this respect).\textsuperscript{52}Bogue, \textit{op. cit.}, Footnote 37, pp. 81-83.
from farms, to pen them up at night in a temporary enclosure. Actually, the so-called "open range" under the herd laws was available for only a year or two after the Close Colony began, and even by then open grazing was permitted only along river and stream courses and in bluffs areas. The reason for such a rapid disappearance of the herd laws was simply due to the rapid settling up and fencing of the land. Foreseeing this eventuality the Closes shrewdly pointed out in their colony prospectus that as the country filled with settlers land values would rise but grazing land would become scarce. They advised accordingly that "... all the farmer has to do is to sell his farm, drive his stock further west, and begin again on a new farm, having cleared a handsome profit on the sale of his old farm."^54

While the Close Brothers and their British colonists cannot be credited with introducing mixed farming into the region, a reasonable case can be made that they probably contributed in some measure to the improvement in the quality and quantity of both crops and (especially) livestock in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota, and even in Eastern South Dakota. Already noted in this study has been the revealing account of the agricultural growth in Northwestern Iowa, and the Closes' contribution to it, carried in the Rural New Yorker in the summer of 1881, as well as several Iowa State Agricultural Society Reports on Close contributions to the general agricultural improvement of the region.^55

^53 Close, p. 20.
^54 Ibid., p. 24.
^55 See Chapter V, pages 131-135, this study.
In more recent years others have commented on the contributions made to
agricultural development of Northwestern Iowa by those who made up the
Close Colony. One, an Irishman and long-time leading citizen of Le Mars,
Iowa, whose grandfather had settled near there in the late 1860's,
recalled:

The English [sic] did much to raise the standards of live-
stock raising in Iowa. Captain Moreton imported sheep from Sussex
England—the famed Shropshire and Southdown. . . . He [also] im-
ported Yorkshire hogs. . . . and specialized in the best breeds of
horses and cattle. [His] venture did much to make the six counties
of Northwest Iowa the richest and best livestock producing section
in the state of Iowa.56

Even though the foregoing excerpt doubtless reflects regional pride of
accomplishment, the fact that it was written after many years of reflec-
tion by one who personally experienced rural life in Northwestern Iowa
during the period covered by this study lends considerable credence to
the statement.

William Houlette in a recent study about Iowa's pioneers, gave
credit to the Close Brothers and the English (British) capitalists of
the Close Colony for bringing to Northwestern Iowa unspecified "good
English breeds of livestock," which together with the improved methods
of farming they introduced contributed to the State's overall agricul-
tural development.57

56 James E. Walsh, Black Loam of Iowa (Lake Mills, Ia.: The Graphic
Publishing Co., Inc., 1963), p. 80. The Captain Moreton referred to is
the same Captain Moreton discussed in Chapter IV, pages 99 and 100, this
study.

57 William Houlette, Iowa: The Pioneer Heritage (Des Moines, Ia.: Wallece-Homestead Book Company, 1970), pp. 112 and 113. The "good Eng-
lish breeds of livestock" to which Houlette alluded were probably the
English Shorthorn breed of cattle, Berkshire or Yorkshire hogs, and
Cotswold or some other well known English breed of sheep.
Regardless of what the above cited and other authorities have written, however, it would be manifestly impossible to measure the extent that the Closes and their countrymen may have influenced farming methods and farm production within the study area. Certainly by comparing the various Federal and state censuses, one could ascertain rather quickly that from a statistical (numbers) point of view all aspects of agriculture within the study area improved markedly between 1875 and 1895. Considering only cattle (other than milk cows and oxen) there were only 31,400 head in all eight of the Northwestern Iowa counties of the study area in 1875. By 1880 the number there had more than doubled and had nearly doubled again by 1885. A decade later some 211,800 beef cattle were reported in the eight counties, more than six and one-half times as many as were reported just twenty years earlier. While these statistics reflect impressive increases in cattle production in Northwestern Iowa, increases in cattle production over the entire state were just as spectacular over a comparable period of time. To illustrate—between 1860 and 1870 the number of beef cattle in Iowa doubled. And during the ten years from 1870 to 1880 the number of beef cattle in the state nearly trebled, and nearly trebled again in the next decade reaching by 1890 nearly 3,400,000 head. It would appear then

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58 Census of Iowa for 1880. Historical and Comparative Census 1836-1880 (Des Moines, 1883), pp. 350-353; Census of Iowa for the Year 1885 (Des Moines, 1885), pp. 228-233; Census of Iowa for the Year 1895 (Des Moines, 1896), pp. 646-649.

that insofar as cattle production is concerned, the great increases in their numbers in Iowa between the years 1875 and 1895 were simply a reflection of spectacular state-wide increases and not attributable to any one person or small group of persons including the Close Brothers and their British brethren.

It seems just as unlikely though, that the Closes and the several hundred other Britons who joined them in Northwestern Iowa did not have some influence on the agricultural economy of the region. But in what way and to what extent? These are difficult questions to answer. The evidence decidedly indicates that the Closes as well as their countrymen were oriented almost en masse toward a mixed farming operation. But, as pointed out above, mixed farming came to Iowa right along with settlement, which occurred throughout most of the study area (even if sparsely) a decade or more before the Closes arrived there. This being the case then, who influenced whom? Who were the agricultural innovators of the region? Did they come from among the earlier settlers? Or were they among the "fleshing out" homeseekers many of whom were also large and small-scale land investors primarily, including the Close Brothers themselves and especially the Close colonists? It is suggested that both groups had their share of innovators and that they influenced one another.

But this two-way reciprocity was not the only agricultural influence abroad within region. Of considerable importance as sources of new ideas to any and all engaged in agriculture, were the local and agricultural press, the agricultural fairs, and the agricultural colleges.
(although the latter had little influence before 1880).  

Professors J. E. Spencer and Ronald J. Horvath refer to this mixture of influencing sources as the "farming mentality," a sort of psychological process which was operating during the settlement of all of the Corn Belt.  

With respect to the art of livestock raising (whether cattle, hogs, or sheep), this "farming mentality" in all probability originated in Europe. Doubtless it was developed in Colonial America and was further refined on the prairies and westward. Concerning cattle raising particularly, one authority wrote about the enterprise in Iowa in this same vein nearly a half-century ago. He said:

Most of the practices found in Iowa were transplanted from the older sections of the country farther east. It is necessary to regard the history of this farm enterprise in Iowa as a section of a larger and broader development which began in the earliest colonies of America, continuing to the present day without breaking off or starting anew. There was a constant modification by contemporary events which accelerated or retarded the operation of forces already present in the economic organization of the time, but very seldom added an influence altogether new.

With respect to individual innovators, Professor Bogue asserted that every prairie community had men who led in searching for ways to

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60 Bogue, op. cit., Footnote 37, pp. 193-215. The term "innovator" as used here has been used by a number of writers. In this case the term is borrowed from Professor Bogue and is used in about the same way he used it, i.e., to describe the purveyors and adopters of new or already proven agricultural methods and practices in prairie communities.


62 Hopkins, op. cit., Footnote 59, pp. 4 and 5. Though made in 1928, these observations still apply to cattle raising today.
improve farming efficiency such as the greater use of purebred or high quality stock, better use of the land, and better cultivation practices with respect to the crops. The Close Brothers themselves as well as many members of the British community they sponsored, could well have been the kind of innovator that Bogue had in mind. While the evidence is very much lacking, several of William Close's own statements concerning mixed farming practices seem to at least imply agricultural innovation, whether introduced by the Closes or by others. Take for example, the following comments in the Close Colony prospectus, Farming in North-Western Iowa, about livestock raising. With respect to cattle raising:

The principal we work on is to pick out the best native cows (originally Kentucky stock) and improve the breed with shorthorn bulls. . . .

The estimate . . . of the costs of keeping cattle per head is based on actual experience. I include every charge, viz., rent for use of farm, cost of their keep and labour, salt, medicine, and interest at six per cent on capital expended, and I also allow for the usual mortality; thus profits represent net profits.  

With respect to hog raising:

Pigs cost scarcely anything to keep and [they] fatten rapidly on what they pick up in the yard from the leavings of the cattle; one and a half hogs are counted to each head of cattle. The

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63 Bogue, op. cit., Footnote 37, p. 212.

64 Close, p. 21. Note that Mr. Close listed among his expenses for cattle raising "rent for use of farm." Since his estimate was probably for 1880, it is likely that the Brothers had not yet developed enough of their own land on which to begin a livestock operation. With respect to the estimate itself, Close used a basic herd of 50 cows and 1 bull, estimating that by the end of the third year (he was probably then in his second year) he would have on hand 71 cattle in his herd, 20 two-year old steers fattened for market, 40 yearling calves, and 70 new calves. He estimated his costs for the three years to be about $2,600 and the value of all his cattle to be about $5,020 or nearly double the costs.
profits are very great, but hogs are somewhat liable to an epi-
demic called ... hog cholera ... and for this reason I have
only allowed a litter of four pigs to each sow.65

With respect to sheep raising:

As I have only had sheep one year, I will give the experience
of some farmers from Holstein, who came over in '74 ... and are
now the most well-to-do of their class in their county, Crawford.
Having been brought up as shepherds, and to the business of rais-
ing and fattening sheep ... they have given their attention
exclusively to sheep farming. They preferred [sic] Cotswolds
... as affording both good wool and mutton. ... I investi-
gated their operations, and can vouch that the figures I give
... do not overstate their success.66

Of the three statements, the first seems to imply only the Close
perception of the way cattle should be raised (note the use of "we" and
"I"). It is emphasised, though, that the Close "way" may or may not
have been innovative in that area at that time, and it may or may not
have been accepted (adopted) by others. Considerably more investigation
would be required before one could draw any meaningful conclusions with
respect to whether or not the Close "way" was innovative in the first
place and if so, whether or not it was a Close innovation.

65 Ibid., p. 22. Mr. Close's expense estimate here was based on a
starting herd of 50 sows and 25 "young pigs" growing in three years to
an operation of 75 old hogs "fattened from grain fed to cattle" and 350
other pigs. Costs for the three years were estimated to be about $690
and the value of the herd was estimated to be about $1,665 or nearly
two and a half times the costs.

66 Ibid., pp. 22 and 23. The Holstein farmers' estimate was based
on a starting flock of 500 ewes and 15 rams expanding in about four and
a half years to 1,030 sheep (500 ewes "with lamb," 15 rams and 515 year-
lings. Total expenses for the period, including feed, attendance and
herding, medicine, salt, etc., were estimated at about $6,075 and total
returns including four years of "clipping" were estimated at $17,730 or
nearly three times the costs.
The second statement appears to imply Close acceptance of the general hog-raising practices of the region (the influence or innovation of others) and one Close innovation, viz., allowing a litter of four pigs to each sow. Again though, this is conjecture and is subject to further investigation.

The third statement clearly reflects Close acceptance (and probably adoption) of the ideas (influences or innovations) of others.

The three statements taken together somewhat reinforce the theories of those authorities herein referred to and quoted. The Closes were probably themselves innovators, at least with respect to livestock raising. But they were also adopters of the ideas of others. Being both innovators (probably) and adopters (certainly) fit them into the "farming mentality" of the region of this study. Notwithstanding this probability and a profusion of contemporary newspaper and later accounts, though, there is simply not enough evidence available today to support conclusively the contention by many that the Close Brothers and other members of the British community contributed in great measure to the agricultural development of the region. Moreover, there is no evidence at all (even in the newspapers of the day) that the Closes influenced the farming methods and practices of their buyers and tenants. One can only speculate that they probably did.

6. Were the Closes intelligent land buyers? That is, were they deliberate in selecting land that had a high potential for raising crops and livestock? Or did they simply buy any land that was available at the right price? Or both? These questions are at once relatively easy to answer in one sense and difficult to answer in another. In a general
sense, none of the land the Closes bought can be considered as poor simply because there is little really poor land in the entire study area. On the other hand, when considering the vast amounts of land acquired by the Close Brothers over the twenty-year period of the study, some of it was doubtless below average for the region just as some of it was above average. To determine what amounts fall in one category or another would require a detailed examination of at least the soil surveys of the various counties which, in some instances, are incomplete and in most instances vary widely with respect to year taken, making correlation difficult. Even so though, some general observations are possible regarding the general pattern and quality of Closes' land acquisitions from the time they began in Crawford County, Iowa in 1878 until their last purchase in Jackson County, Minnesota in 1898.

Before continuing a discussion of the kind of land the Closes purchased, it is appropriate for a better understanding to first briefly review the general physical geography of the study area and the geographic region within which it lies with respect to the three main physical factors affecting agriculture—topography, climate, and soils.

Ranging south to north for about 160 miles in Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota, the thirteen counties of the study area lie mostly within the Missouri Slope. The one exception is the northeastern portion in Minnesota. Here the crest of the Coteau des Prairies (edge of the prairies) stretches somewhat unevenly in a southeasterly direction from the northeastern corner of Pipestone County, through the southwestern portion of Murray County and west-central Nobles County, finally levelling out into a till plain in Northeastern Osceola County,
Generally, the land lying east of the Coteau des Prairies is drained by tributaries of the Mississippi River. All other land within the study area is drained by tributaries of the Missouri River.

The surface of the study area is generally uniform throughout and contains some of the higher elevations found in either of the two states. As can be surmised, the aforementioned Coteau des Prairies is the highest elevation in the Minnesota portion of the study area ranging up to more than 1,900 feet above sea level in Pipestone and Murray counties. In Iowa, the highest elevation is in Northeast Osceola County near Ocheyedan (Ocheyedan Mound), where it is nearly 1,700 feet above sea level. The lowest elevation within the study area is, of course, the Missouri River bottomland along the western margin of Woodbury County, Iowa below Sioux City where the elevation is about 1,050 feet. Between the height of land in the northeast and the river


bottomland on Woodbury County's western border, there is a fall in elevation of only a little more than 800 feet. This is indicative of the overall gentle westward slope of most of the study area.

With respect to overall topography, the description "gently rolling or undulating" (2 to 6 percent of slope) seems to be the most appropriate term to use in describing the study area, even though the extremes of "level to nearly level" (0 to 2 percent of slope) and "very steep" (over 25 or 9-30+ percent of slope) can be found frequently in local topography. General the rough, steep to very steep, and often heavily truncated land is found along stream beds, especially in the

71 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Soil Survey Information and Interpretations, Pipestone County, Minnesota (Lincoln, Neb.: USDA-SCS, 1970), p. 86. There seems to be a general lack of precision among authorities in reporting on slope including those authorities in Iowa and Minnesota. The slope percentages and categories used in this particular instance are "hybrids" of the ones used in the above cited Pipestone County Survey and in Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Department of Agronomy, Principal Soils of Iowa, Special Report No. 42 (Ames, Ia.: Iowa State University and Technology, Cooperative Extension Service, 1965), pp. 8 and 9 and Figure 11 facing p. 38. The two separate classifications compared are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Slope</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent of Slope</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Level and nearly level</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Nearly level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>Gently sloping or undulating</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>Nearly level to gently sloping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Sloping or rolling</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>Gently sloping to moderately sloping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-18</td>
<td>Moderately steep</td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>Gently sloping to strongly sloping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>Steep</td>
<td>9-30+</td>
<td>Strongly sloping to steep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>Very steep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Calculated on the number of feet of fall per 100 feet of horizontal distance.
loess-mantled, river bluffs areas of the westernmost Iowa counties.
Most of the level to nearly level land within the limits of the study
area lies in the northwest quadrant, especially in Osceola County, Iowa
and in portions or all of the Minnesota counties lying east of the
Coteau des Prairies (Jackson, Nobles, Murray, and a small portion of
Pipestone). These counties are wholly or partially, or border on, the
wet prairie areas of the two states. Specifically, the Iowa counties
of Osceola (all), O'Brien (most), and Cherokee (about the east half) are
included within the wet prairie and are classified naturally as one-
tenth to one-fourth poorly drained or worse. The "worse" with respect
to these counties is land which is naturally one-fourth to one-half
poorly drained. Included in this category are the northeast half of
Osceola County and a small area in the southeast corner of O'Brien
County.

Climate, of course, had a great deal to do with the general topog­
raphy of the region as well as with the soils which have developed there
(see discussion below). However, other than what has been noted already
about how glaciation affected the general topography of the region, and
what will be noted later about how glaciation together with wind and
water affected its soils, the discussion of climate will be limited in
this study to only a few paragraphs about its general nature. A nature
which has been fairly constant since long before the first white set-
tlers came.

72 Leslie Hewes, "The Northern Wet Prairie of the United States:
Nature, Sources of Information, and Extent," Annals, Association of
American Geographers, XLI (December, 1951), pp. 314 and 319.

73 Ibid., p. 319.
In the regional context, both Iowa and Minnesota have a marked continental climate characterized by wide variations in seasonal temperatures (cold winters and hot summers), limited winter precipitation, and normally ample annual rainfall. Within the areal extent of the study area, annual precipitation ranges from nearly always sufficient for all crops in the southeasternmost county (Crawford) to usually sufficient for most crops in one of the two northwesternmost counties (Murray). Expressed in inches, this average annual precipitation is twenty-eight and twenty-two and one-half inches respectively with warm weather season averages of twenty-two and eighteen inches respectively.\(^7\)

Concerning the average number of frost free days and average summertime temperatures (June-August), all of the study area is well within the limits considered essential for efficient crop production. From southeast to northwest the average number of frost free days range from 160 to 140 and summertime mean daily temperatures range from about 72.5\(^\circ\) to about 67.5\(^\circ\).\(^7\) Considering these factors with respect to corn, which was the major crop of the region in the 1880's as now, U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics (even though somewhat dated) has shown


that between 1914 and 1929, states producing the largest amounts of corn had mean daily temperatures of 68° to 72° for the three month period, June, July, and August. With respect to the number of frost free days, most authorities agree that corn is one of the most climatically adaptable of all plants and, as the early prairie pioneers discovered, it adapted readily in regions having even fewer than 140 frost free days.

An average of between twenty-eight and twenty-two and one-half inches of annual precipitation places the study area practically astraddle the east-west divide which separates the two major zonal orders of soil as they are distributed in the United States—the eastern Pedalfers and the western Pedocals. In fact, excluding the Alluvial Soils, of the other two Associations of Great Soils Groups represented within the study area, one (the Chernozem) is grouped generally among the Pedocals and the other (the Brunizem and Humic-Gley) is grouped with the Pedalfers (see Figure 8). The Brunizem (and Humic-Gley) Soils

76 U.S. Department of Agriculture, op. cit., Footnote 74, p. 310.

Arthur N. Strahler, Physical Geography (3rd ed.; New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969), p. 302. Strahler (and others) somewhat arbitrarily separates the Pedalfer and Pedocal soils along the twenty-five inch isohyetal line, which in the United States separates east from west roughly along a north to south line between 95° and 98° of west latitude. Generally, Pedocal soils have an excess of calcium carbonate due to insufficient precipitation to permit its leaching. Conversely, the Pedalfers tend toward pronounced leaching and problems with excessive residuals of aluminum and iron (Ibid.).

North Central Regional Publication 76, Soils of the North Central Region of the United States: Their Characteristics, Classification, Distribution and Related Management Problems, issued as Bulletin 544 by the University of Wisconsin Agriculture Experiment Station (Madison: June, 1960), map supplement, "Major Soils of the North Central Region, U.S.A."
CHERNOZEM, BRUNIZEM and HUMIC-GLEY, AND MAJOR ALLUVIAL SOILS OF MINNESOTA AND IOWA

ASSOCIATION LEGEND

*For study areas only

CHERNOZEM
C-1 Moody-Crofton
C-2 Kranzburg-Vienna
C-3 Arco-Mendricks

BRUNIZEM AND HUMIC-GLEY
B-1 Marshall-Knox
B-2 Monona-Idu-Hamburg
B-3 Galva-Primghar-Scr
B-4 Clarion-Nicollet-Webster

ALLUVIAL
A-1 Onowa-Lutan

FIGURE 8
of the North Central Region of the United States occur in areas where
the average annual precipitation ranges from twenty-eight to thirty
inches in the western part. While annual average precipitation on the
Chernozem soils ranges from fourteen inches in North Dakota to thirty
inches in Central Kansas, the annual average precipitation where the
Chernozems occur within the study area is twenty-four and one-half
inches.  

The parent materials of the study area soils fall into three major
groups: (1) loess, (2) glacial drift or till, and (3) alluvium. The
most prevalent parent material is loess, which underlies all of the Iowa
counties except the alluvial areas along the Missouri and other rivers
and streams, and the northwest quarter of Osceola County. In the Minne­
sota counties loess is the parent material only in Southwestern Rock
County. Aside from the alluvial areas along rivers and streams, parent
material is glacial drift or till in the remaining Minnesota study area
counties and in Northeastern Osceola County, Iowa.  

Except for most of the highly modified alluvials, all soils within
the study area were developed under tall prairie grass vegetation. They
are generally dark in color (black to dark brown "A" horizons produced
principally by successive layers of humus) with the Brunizem Humic-Gley

\[\text{Ibid., pp. 25 and 27.}\]
\[\text{U.S. Department of Agriculture, op. cit., Footnote 74, pp. 862-}
\[\text{864, 926 and 927.}\]
\[\text{Except for the Missouri River bottomland, areas of Alluvial}
\text{Soils are not shown in Figure 8.}\]
Alluvial soils tend generally to be dark too, but this is due mainly to restricted drainage. However, in the Missouri River bottomlands the soil is highly variable in all aspects, e.g., its natural drainage, texture, alkalinity, etc., as well as in its color.

While the foregoing discussion regarding the physical geography of the study area is very brief, it should serve to give a somewhat better view than before of the kind of landscape the Close Brothers chose for their enterprise.

Continuing with the discussion on the kind of land the Closes purchased, it should be reiterated that they (William and Fred Close) were apparently quite familiar with the "lay of the land" within the study area, at least by the time William Close prepared their colony prospectus, Farming in North-Western Iowa, in 1880. Indeed, though worded less scientifically than if done by a trained expert, Close did a fair job in accurately describing the topography, climate, and soil of the North-western Iowa portion. He noted, for example, that the surface of the area was "remarkably uniform in its altitude" and "though everywhere undulating it is in fact a vast plain... The most striking feature in the topography... is the predominance of prairies or natural grass." As for the climate, he asserted that "Rain [obviously meaning precipitation] falls... more in spring and summer than in winter... [and] Excepting in one or two seasons... there have been no frosts seriously injuring the corn crop." With respect to the soil he wrote: "For

82 North Central Regional Publication, op. cit., Footnote 78, pp. 25-28 and 71-89.
83 Ibid., p. 118.
centuries the successive crops of grass . . . have accumulated organic matter on the surface soil to such an extent that the most exhausting crops, in long succession, will not materially impoverish it."\textsuperscript{84}

This knowledge about the land together with whatever else they learned beforehand about mixed farming, doubtless had a bearing on the land they sought out and bought. But there seems to have been other factors too, the major of which are discussed below.

An examination of the map of Close owned and managed lands (Appendix I) reveals more subtle patterns of acquisition than appear at first glance. The most apparent thing at first glance, is the definite checkerboard pattern of large-scale acquisition. Less obvious are the areas in which large-scale land buying is evident but where the checkerboard pattern is less pronounced. Compare, for example, land acquired in Crawford, Woodbury, Plymouth, and Northwestern Lyon counties, Iowa, with Pipestone County, Minnesota, and Osceola and O'Brien counties, Iowa. The one striking difference that should be noted is that every instance of a less pronounced pattern involved land purchased by and for the Close Brothers either in their respective names or for the Close firm. Moreover, except in Northwestern Rock County where there was a definite checkerboard pattern and in Jackson County where there might have been a pattern, their acquisitions everywhere within the study area give the appearance of having been relatively piecemeal in nature.

On the other hand, nearly all the land they purchased for the Iowa Land Company, managed for other buyers (the Pipestone County land), or

\textsuperscript{84}Close, pp. 4-6.
purchased for the Western Land Company (in which they were principal officers), was acquired in large blocks of the checkerboard pattern. Indeed, Pipestone County was one huge checkerboard in this respect, as was most of Osceola County and two townships in O'Brien County.

The difference in these patterns poses the question. Why? A suggested answer is that they are merely manifestations of the two different motives stressed throughout this study as reasons for large-scale land buying in new or not yet fully settled areas, i.e., (1) short term speculations on the probability that the press of settlement and development will increase its demand and thus make its resale quickly remunerative; and (2) long term speculation on the probability that large-scale farming operations carried on through the use of hired labor or tenants will bring continuing profit from the land.

By its very nature the checkerboard pattern implies the kind of indiscriminate land buying one might expect from the speculator interested only in quick resale profits. Conversely, a less patterned kind of land acquisition could imply either: (1) the selective kind of land buying one might expect of the speculator wanting to carry on a large-scale farming operation, or (2) that there was no other land available to buy at the time. The former is the most likely implication insofar as concerns the Closes, since the evidence indicates that there was a great deal of land on the market at that time within the study area (especially railroad land).

If the foregoing hypothesis about patterns of large-scale land buying is correct, then from examining the map in Appendix I one must conclude that the Close Brothers were both kinds of large-scale
speculators simultaneously during much of their twenty-year enterprise within the study area. A simple analysis of the information available concerning their two most active years (1881 and 1882), tends to support this hypothesis.

During the years 1881 and 1882 the Closes acquired (or were negotiating to acquire) for themselves, their own firm, and the firms they represented, more than 100,000 acres of land, most of which lay in the four northwesternmost Iowa counties (Sioux, O'Brien, Osceola, and Lyon). During the same two years they sold off nearly 33,000 acres, more than half of which lay in these counties. The map in Appendix I presents a panorama of these extensive land purchases and clearly shows the checkerboard and less patterned kinds of acquisitions. It is pointed out in this respect that the land the Closes obtained for themselves is decidedly less patterned than that they acquired for the Iowa Land Company and the Western Land Company. Even their own extensive purchases in Northwestern Lyon County (mostly the "Larchwood Estate" property) did not have quite the checkerboard pattern as did much of the land they purchased for others within the four counties.

For example, nearly every parcel of land the Closes acquired in the four-county area for the Iowa Land Company was purchased from the S. C. & St. P. Railroad and the checkerboard pattern reflected by these acquisitions is obvious even in Sioux and Lyon counties. This checkerboard pattern is especially apparent in O'Brien County where the Closes

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85 For a complete tabulation of all land bought and sold by the Close Brothers within the study area, refer to Table 8, Chapter VI, page 170, this study.
bought up for their own Western Land Company long sought after Milwaukee Road land. In fact, their purchase included exactly half (the eighteen odd numbered sections) of one of the county's townships.

The question arises as to whether these checkerboard-like acquisitions are really manifestations of indiscriminate land buying as suggested above. Again, the answer is not easy to come by, but a much better case can be made in this respect for the land purchased in O'Brien County by the Close controlled Western Land Company than can be made for the land the Closes acquired for the Iowa Land Company. In the former instance, the research turned up only the fact that the Western Land Company bought the land in 1886 and that they resold it all in about four years. Nothing at all could be found that would suggest that either the Western Land Company or the Close Brothers themselves even had the sod broken on it. Moreover, the pattern of purchase seems to indicate the indiscriminate buying of land simply because it was there to be bought at a good price (less than $5 per acre on the average) and was worth the risk to buy and hold for a time in anticipation of its rise in value. In short, the purchase was made for purely speculative purposes.

The idea that a checkerboard pattern of land acquisition implies indiscriminate buying for quick-sale profits, suffers a little in

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86 The Closes negotiated with the Milwaukee Road for this land from 1881 and until they finally consummated the sale in 1886. See discussion in Chapter V, pages 138-142, this study.

87 Center Township, T96N, R40W.

88 Even Jacob Van Der Zee (op. cit., Footnote 14) was silent about Close activities in O'Brien County, except to acknowledge in a single footnote (115, p. 265) on the word of another party, that they bought the Milwaukee Road's land in O'Brien County.
credibility when applied to land purchased for the Iowa Land Company in Sioux, Lyon, and Osceola counties, especially the latter. While, as in so many other aspects of the Close operations, there is no real evidence to indicate that they in any way improved the land they purchased for the Iowa Land Company, it is a fair assumption that they did—and to a considerable extent if the accounts of that day can be believed. Taken altogether, these accounts pretty well establish that in 1881 at least 300 houses and probably as many or more other buildings were erected on roughly as many farmsteads in these three counties. Furthermore, about 100 of these houses, barns, etc., were erected, on presumably as many farmsteads, in Osceola County alone. This is a sizeable number of houses or farmsteads or both and appears to represent far more than a mere token effort to impress the community. In fact, the scope of this building effort is equivalent to one and a half houses, and probably a ready-made farmstead, on every section of land (every 640 acres) purchased for the Iowa Land Company.

However, the fact that houses were built or even that complete farmsteads were established does not necessarily mean that a large farming operation was contemplated. Indeed, it is much more likely that in this particular instance (as well as with other large-scale purchases

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89 See a general discussion concerning the numbers of farmsteads constructed and the various newspaper and other accounts on the subject in Chapter V, pages 127-135, this study.

90 This calculation is based roughly on the number of acres of an average farm (160) divided into the total amount of land the Close Brothers purchased for the Iowa Land Company in Osceola County (42,700), i.e., 42,700 ÷ 160 ÷ 4 = 66.5 (approx.) farmsteads if on one in four 160-acre parcels; 100 ÷ 66.5 = 1.5 (approx.) farmsteads for each section of land.
showing a similar checkerboard pattern) improvements on the land were made solely to enhance its resale value. If a speculative enterprise involving a large farming operation was contemplated, it would seemingly be far more likely that the land on which to begin would be selectively chosen; and that, unless all the land available was of the same quality (not a likely probability), the selectively chosen land would reflect a much less defined pattern if it were plotted on a cadastral map.

Even though most of the land the Closes acquired for themselves in Iowa reflected a certain amount of selectivity, one of their larger purchases within the state appears to have been of the indiscriminate, purely speculative variety. This was their acquisition of the "Larchwood Estate" referred to above (page 198) and earlier in this study. The 19,000 acres involved were purchased in 1881 for about $4.74 an acre (a good price in light of the $6.50 an acre paid for S. C. & St. P. land in Osceola County). Of course their initial plans for the use of the land is not known, but on the surface it appears that they intended to hold it only long enough to make its resale remunerative. In any case, they resold most of it (unimproved insofar as it can be determined) that same year for about seventy-five cents profit per acre. The point to be made in singling out this particular Close purchase and sale, is that there was a certain dualism in their enterprise with respect to their land buying activities. That is, while they did indeed convert much of the raw land they bought into livable farmsteads, they also engaged increasingly in the short-term speculative activity of buying unimproved land and selling it later (still unimproved) after its value had risen.
In fact, their tendency to more and more engage in this practice is clearly discernible on the map in Appendix I.

For example, in the four southernmost Iowa counties of the study area (Plymouth, Cherokee, Woodbury, and Crawford), the map shows a definite unpatterned appearance of the land the Close Brothers acquired for themselves. This, as previously suggested, may be indicative of selective buying with large-scale farming contemplated.

However, from the "Larchwood Estate" lands in Northwestern Lyon County and farther north in the Minnesota counties, the checkerboard pattern of indiscriminate land buying is apparent. Excluding for the moment most of Pipestone County (discussed separately below), nearly all of the land acquired by the Close Brothers or their own Western Land Company which appears on the map in a huge semi-circle stretching from Northeastern Rock County, across the southeastern tip of Pipestone County and thence through Murray and Jackson counties, was purchased from either the S. C. & St. P. Railroad or the State of Minnesota. Moreover, insofar as can be determined from the research, little of it had been improved before it was resold.

The special aspects of the Close Brothers' activities in Pipestone County have already been discussed in some detail in Chapter VI of this study (pages 152-163), but a few additional comments here with respect to motives for buying land seem in order.

It is highly unlikely that when Robert Benson and the South Minnesota Land Company shared eventually the ownership of nearly half of Pipestone County, they intended to adopt the "Close System" of building and letting farmsteads. In fact, there is little doubt that their
checkerboard pattern of land acquisition within the county was anything but the manifestation of the short-term kind of land speculation. This is not to say, however, that no houses or barns were built, wells dug, or sod broken, because the Closes saw to it that at least some of this was done. What was probable though, was that these kinds of activities--which were carried on as near as possible to the county's principal town of the same name--were primarily promotional in nature and were accompanied by much publicity and fanfare all of which was designed to create a demand for the 110,000 acres of land the Closes contracted to sell for the owners. The exact number of Close-built houses, barns, etc. that there eventually were has been obscured by history. Evidently though, there were sufficient numbers constructed for the Closes to feel secure about advertising in 1885 that they had over 200,000 acres of "Choice Wild Land and Improved Farms" to sell in the "Great Pipestone Region." 

So far in this section, only the pattern of (or motives for) Close land acquisition within the study area has been discussed and analyzed. The question still remains--were they intelligent land buyers? In a general sense there is little doubt that they were. Regardless of their motives for acquiring land (i.e., whether acquired for themselves or others and whether for large-scale farming operations or strictly for

91See specifically in this respect Chapter VI, pages 158-161, this study.

92The Pipestone Semi-Weekly Star, June 19, 1885, and other issues of that year. Apparently the Close firm had picked up some other clients by then because their advertisement also asserted that their firm had "a large list of lands in Northwestern Iowa and Eastern Dakota."
resale profit), they obviously exercised considerable intelligence in their selections else it is doubtful that they could not have been as successful as it appears they were. It would not have been feasible in this study to analyze every parcel of land that the Closes purchased simply to determine its value as farmland. Perhaps more important would be to determine, if possible, whether the land they bought specifically for farming operations was wisely selected. To this end a limited survey was taken and is discussed below.

The only land throughout all of the study area known for certain to have been acquired by the Closes for farming operations is in Crawford, Woodbury, and Plymouth counties, Iowa. The greatest concentration of their purchases in these counties was centered in two contiguous townships, Garfield in Plymouth County and Rutland in Woodbury County (see map in Appendix I, T90N, R43W, and T89N, R43W respectively). This area was considered "home" not only by William and Frederick Close but by a number of the Close colonists.\(^93\) Much of the Close land in these townships had been part of the "Bloodgood purchase,"\(^94\) but other land was involved too, even some bought later by the Western Land Company. For this reason these two townships have been chosen for general survey and description.

\(^93\) Apparently Frederick Close was involved with two personal properties in Plymouth County, a farm with his brother James near Le Mars and a home near Kingsley in Garfield Township. William Close's "ranch" was just outside of Garfield Township along the West Fork of the Little Sioux at Quorn. See discussion, Chapter IV, page 92, this study, and Curt Harnack, "The Amazing English Colony of Northwest Iowa," The Iowan, II, April-May, 1954, pp. 12 and 44.

\(^94\) See Chapter III, pages 74-76, this study.
An examination of the soil map in Figure 8 indicates that the two
townships lie almost evenly on either side of the line separating two
of Iowa's principal soil association areas—the Galva-Prim-Sac Associa-
tion (GPS and the Monona-Ida-Hamburg Association (MIH). These two
soil associations in themselves are indicative of the general kind of
topography and drainage common to the area.

For example, soils of the MIH Association areas are characterized
by "narrow, gently sloping ridges and steep side slopes which gradually
change to well defined alluvial valleys." Monona, Ida, and Hamburg
are the principal soils of the Association, but only the Monona and Ida
soils are found in the two townships with the former found most commonly
on 5-14 percent slopes and the latter most commonly on 10-20 percent
slopes. By today's standards the general land capability classification
of these soils is either Class I or Class II.

In the southern and western portions of the GPS Soil Association
the topography is generally gently to moderately sloping. Galva, Sac,
Primghar, and Marcus are the principal upland soils of the Association,

95 Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Department of

96 Ibid., p. 58. Footnote 71 above lists Iowa slope categories.
The land capability classifications used are from among the eight
developed by the USDA Soil Conservation Service. The first four clas-
cesses are considered suitable for cultivated crops. The remaining four
classes are considered best suited for pasturage or timber. The first
four classes are: Class I - Few limitations; Class II - Some limita-
tions that restrict the choice of plants and/or require some conservation
practices; Class III - Severe limitations that restrict the choice of
plants and/or require special conservation practices; and Class IV - Very
severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants and/or require
very careful management (Ibid., p. 16). The SCS has also developed sub-
classes for the eight classes, but these are not considered essential
in this limited discussion.
but only the Galva soils predominate in the specific locality discussed and then more so in Garfield Township. Because they occur in a transitional zone between soil associations, the Galva soils of this area are more sloping near the Monona and Ida soils they border on, having slopes of 2-5 or 5-9 percent. The land capability classification of these soils ranges from Class I to Class III.

With respect to Close owned land within the two townships, four contiguous sections are probably representative of much of the land they or their Western Land Company purchased. This land is shown on the map in Appendix I as the four northeasternmost sections of Garfield Township (T90N, R43W, Sections 1, 2, 11, and 12).

The first feature to note about this particular land (and one that seems to have been important to the Close Brothers), is that the West Fork of the Little Sioux River diagonally traverses part of Section One and the very center of Section Two. In fact, by following the River's course through Garfield Township and beyond, a Close preference for surface water on the land they purchased is evident.

Except for the alluvial bottomlands and terraces of the West Fork River and other streams and waterways, the soils of these four sections

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97 Ibid., pp. 40 and 41.
98 Ibid., p. 41.
99 This practice was not confined just to these townships. An even closer examination of the map points up the fact that much of the land the Close Brothers purchased throughout all of the study area for themselves or their own firms was situated on or near rivers and other streams and waterways. This apparent strongly felt need for surface water was likely tied in with their equally strong preference for a mixed farming operation with emphasis on livestock husbandry.
are mostly well drained Galva silty clay loam (texture of 27 to 40 percent clay and less than 20 percent sand) and small areas of Ida silt loam (texture of 50 percent or more silt, 12 to 27 percent clay). With respect to the Galva soils, slopes range from 0-2 to 9-14 percent but are more commonly 2-5 percent; remaining top soil ranges from two to seven inches in thickness, with the latter being the more common case; land capability classifications are mostly Class I and II, with some Class III in the southern part; the erosion hazard ranges from none to severe with slight to moderate the usual case. The Ida soils are generally inferior to the Galva having steeper slopes, thus more erosion problems, less remaining top soils, etc. However, with proper and continuing soil conservation practices, they as well as the Galva soils can be productive.

The consensus of the experts with respect to the general worth of the three principal soils of Rutland and Garfield townships (Monona, Ida, and Galva), is that all three are at least capable of growing principal feed crops (e.g., corn, oats, and hay). The hillier Monona and Ida soils are more limited in this respect since they tend toward chemical deficiencies (a phosphorous deficiency in the Ida and acidity in the Monona), but they will respond to good management practices and a

100 The information pertaining to the definition of the textures "silty clay loam" and "silt loam" were obtained from U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, op. cit., Footnote 71, p. 86.

101 Except as otherwise noted, all information concerning the soils of these four counties was obtained from U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, "Advance Field Sheet," BKN-10C-80 (1962), Standard Soil Survey, Plymouth County, Iowa, n.d., and descriptive information provided by the Plymouth County USDA Soil Conservation Service.
"moderately high" percentage of them are used for crops. The steeper slopes are in permanent pasture. The principal problem with the Galva Soils in the area of the two townships is erosion and occasionally insufficient moisture which sometimes limits normally high crop yields.

Summing up this rather extensive discussion and analysis with respect to whether or not the Close Brothers were astute judges of land quality, the limited evidence available to the research indicates that they probably were, and in every respect. That is, they were likely deliberate in selecting the land they bought regardless of their reason for buying it (i.e., whether for quick resale or for farming). Even in those instances where they purchased land in large checkerboard-patterned blocks, there is little doubt that their selections were anything but deliberate. After all, most of this kind of buying involved railroad land of which there was a great deal more on the market than they actually purchased for themselves or anyone else. This being the case, what then would explain the reasons for the Closes not buying railroad land elsewhere? Probably only two things—either that the land was already taken up by others or that the Closes believed it less desirable than other railroad land. Whatever their reason, both premises were probably true.

Insofar as concerns the Close Brothers' land buying practices for farming or farm-making, it is probable they concentrated on buying the kind of land best suited for a mixed farming operation. This did not

102 Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Department of Agronomy, op. cit., Footnote 71, pp. 38-41 and 55-58, and North Central Regional Publication, op. cit., Footnote 78, pp. 72 and 73.
mean that they always (or even usually) bought the best available land, but most of that which they did buy was probably sufficient for good yields of crop or at least enough so as to provide feed for the livestock.

7. **What lasting influences did the Closes leave behind as their legacy?** The answer to this question really calls for a conclusion based on the review and analysis of the foregoing six questions which also were considered fundamental to the objective of this study. In fact, the question is best asked as an adjunct to the second part of the study's broad objective, viz., to determine from the information and evidence available the extent the Close enterprise influenced the kind of agriculture carried on in the study area today. Accordingly the following findings with respect to the study are addressed not only to its two-part objective, but to this final question.

**Conclusions**

While there were serious gaps in the information and evidence available to the research for this study, an analysis of that which was available, considered and studied together with the many scholarly and perceptive works on America's Nineteenth Century Frontier and its settlement processes, indicate that the Close Brothers probably had some influence on the fleshing-out settlement of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota. However the extent of their influence remains in doubt and would require extensive additional research to determine, provided it could be done in the first place.
One thing that appears certain however, is that the Closes had nothing whatever to do with the initial settlement of the region if the term is meant to mean the first-wave of pioneer homeseekers who settled there. First-wave settlement in the region occurred a decade or more before the Closes arrived there even though it was nearly the mid-1870's before the region qualified for frontier status under the Federal census criterion of two persons per square mile.

The conclusion that the Close Brothers probably influenced the fleshing-out settlement of the study area is not meant to imply that, had they not come along, full settlement would have been long delayed or that it would even have been delayed at all. In fact it is likely that if the Closes had not come to the area someone else would have in their stead--some other large-scale capitalist investor (the numbers of which were legion in frontier areas whether American or foreigner), perhaps already on the scene, having learned of the region's "backwardness" and of the opportunities there quite as had the Close Brothers, and willing, if not eager, to invest in the considerable land available at good prices from the land grant railroads, "tired" speculators, and even discouraged or disgruntled earlier settlers. Perhaps the "someone else" would not have converted the land they acquired into farmsteads and rented them out as did the Close Brothers, but the more than 234,000 acres of land the Closes acquired for themselves and others, and the additional 110,000 acres for which they acted as brokers, doubtless would have been soon taken up in any case. And most likely, at first anyway, by some type of large-scale investor.
In short, during the late 1870's this region was about as ready as any officially settled but sparsely populated region could be, for a general population growth and economic development. Lessening if not yet realized by the inhabitants, were the vagaries that had made just living, notwithstanding a livelihood, difficult in the early years. The threat of grasshopper infestations had diminished. The presence of more cultivated land had also diminished the threat of ever dangerous prairie fires. Moreover, those already there had settled-in enough to learn that their land was well suited for almost any kind of crop or livestock, but especially for corn, cattle, and hogs, and there had been more good crop years after 1875 than there had been bad ones. Westward immigration from east of the Mississippi River and even from Eastern Iowa and Missouri was on the rise as was immigration to the mid-continent frontier and beyond of Europeans and Canadians. Most of all though, the railroads had finally come to the area, opening up eastern and foreign markets at a time when the demand for grains and livestock was on the rise even if the prices paid to the farmers for them were not. Being the perceptive businessmen they were, there is little doubt the Closes and many others equally astute were well aware of the potential the region held for those willing to take the risk of investing.

Whether their operational decisions were based on knowledge they had gained from the experience of others and from their own investigation of the site and situation, or were just lucky guesses, the Closes could scarcely have chosen two better ways than they did to attract money and

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settlers to the region, viz., the "Close System" of building and letting
or selling farmsteads to attract settlers; and the promotion of an Eng-
lish colony to attract not only settlers but money too.

With respect to the importance of improved land and especially
ready-made farmsteads to the latter-day pioneers, Professor Earle Ross
had this to say in writing about "Iowa's Last Frontier" (Northwestern
Iowa):

Any study of representative settlers and communities in this
changing era demonstrates the marked advantage that later comers
had over the earliest "old timers"... The costs of making a
farm even in the most elemental manner—shelter, breaking, fencing
—exceeded several times the cost of the land, whether preempted,
homesteaded, or purchased from a corporation or individual specu-
lator. Often it was far more profitable to buy a holding upon
which the preliminary improvements had been made and in a commu-
nity in which trial and error had determined desirable practices,
than to homestead and make the necessary expenditures and endure
the hardships and losses of transforming the wild prairie into a
home that was comfortable and a farm that would provide a reason-
able and dependable competence.104

As stated before, there is not enough information remaining today
to establish a definite figure on the number of farmsteads the Close
Brothers were responsible for opening. The evidence points definitely
to hundreds but the number could have been a thousand or more in all
parts of the study area in which the Closes operated, including Pipestone
County. Of course a thousand or more farmsteads would probably have
attracted a thousand or more tenants or buyers and this number in itself
is not large (even though a thousand tenants could theoretically occupy
160,000 acres of land, i.e., 1,000 X 160).105 But when considering that

104Ross, op. cit., Footnote 19, p. 69.

105Apparentle the Closes could have rented out many more farmsteads
than they actually opened, according to Jacob Van Der Zee, op. cit.,
Footnote 14, p. 126. (See quotation in Chapter V, page 128, this study.)
attracted along with the Close tenants and buyers were the many hundreds of providers of goods and services, e.g., the builders, bankers, merchants, tradesmen, and laborers, then the influx of population could have been sizeable.

With respect to the Close Colony, even though it was relatively short-lived, there is little reason to doubt that it had a considerable impact upon the region and its overall economic development. In fact, it is likely that the Close Colony gave the region the impetus it needed at a critical time for continued growth and prosperity. Beginning in 1880 and for at least a decade the colony flourished, and its prosperity was felt not only in Le Mars where its social life was centered but throughout the thirteen counties comprising the study area, and beyond.

In all, more than 400 well-to-do Englishmen (mostly) and their families joined in with the Close Colony. Most invested a considerable amount in mixed farming enterprises with emphasis on livestock. Further, as in the case of the Close Brothers, the colonists attracted a great many other types of people to the region, all wishing to provide the goods and services that the abundance of British capital would buy.

In addition to the "400," there came to Northwestern Iowa another group of British subjects whose numbers were equal to or exceeding the others. These were the notorious "pupils," who, for reasons previously discussed, were boarded-out or apprenticed to the farms of their British elders and even to American farms, the object being to teach the "lads" enough about farming so that they may someday manage their own. The pupil system in itself turned out to be a disaster, but it was not without its effect upon the well-being of the general community of Le Mars
and environs. Being mostly second sons of "the better class" Britons, all had ample remittances from home to spend, and spend they did, all to the benefit of Le Mars which, it has been claimed, "became the center of commerce for a vast area for miles around."^{106}

While there is enough information available to reasonably conclude that the Close Brothers probably influenced the fleshing-out settlement of the study area, there is little to indicate that they influenced the kind of agriculture carried on in the region today. In fact it cannot even be ascertained to what degree, if any, they may have influenced the agricultural practices of the community in which they themselves farmed even while they actually were farming there. Granted there has been a fair amount of "lip service" given to the how much the Closes did for the development of agriculture. In fact Jacob Van Der Zee devoted a short chapter of his *The British in Iowa* to the subject.^{107} Unfortunately he limited his praise to the considerable Close effort with respect to opening farms. Nowhere else—not in the newspapers or the agricultural journals or reports of the day, and certainly not in the very few more recent accounts or studies that mention the Close name—are there concrete examples of the Close Brothers improving the quantity or the quality of either crops or livestock except race horses.^{108} In their colony prospectus, *Farming in North-Western Iowa*, William Close did imply

^{106}Van Der Zee, op. cit., Footnote 14, p. 156

^{107}Ibid., pp. 120-128.

^{108}William Close had a horse named Elsham, "reputed to be the highest bred stallion in Iowa in his day." (Ibid., p. 138.)
some new or different livestock raising methods, but one cannot be sure in light of the limited information given.\textsuperscript{109}

Since there is so little information available relative to the Close Brothers' agricultural practices on their own personal stock farms, any judgement made would necessarily be inconclusive. But since they were community leaders and successful businessmen, they were probably looked up to by most in what they did or did not do and doubtless had considerable effect upon the community. With respect to agriculture, they probably introduced their share of new or different agricultural practices and copied those of others which made sense to them. In other words, it would seem that they were caught up in Spencer's and Horvath's theory of the "farming mentality" and as community leaders for a time, probably contributed a fair share to this mentality.\textsuperscript{110}

Finally, there is the one remaining question. What lasting influence did the Closes leave behind as their legacy? The most direct answer to this question is probably the one suggested by Jacob Van Der Zee, for all the Close colonists, the Brothers included—they left behind hardly a lasting influence at all. This observation seems to be a little cryptic but there really is no other logical one to the particular question. After all, while the many farmsteads they eked out from the tough prairie soil are still there, they have been done over a half-dozen or more times in many cases during the last seventy-five years. Even the tiny standard houses the Closes built are gone except for one here and there.

\textsuperscript{109}See discussion, this Chapter, pp. 209 and 210.

\textsuperscript{110}See earlier discussion, this Chapter, page 208.
used today in a different way or not at all. Gone too, is the "magnificent" brick Close business block in Sibley and the "good and suitable" Close hotel in Pipestone City. Of course if one looks sharply he can find the remnants of the old colony race track at Le Mars and even portions of Close buildings at Quorn near Kingsley in Garfield Township, Plymouth County. There are towns too with names of British origin—Hawarden and Ireton in Sioux County and Paullina in O'Brien County for example. And that is about all there is of a tangible nature turned up during the research for this study other than the information culled from official county records and from the newspapers and other periodicals of that day and later. But what about the intangible?

Very early in this study it was noted that Robert P. Swierenga in Pioneers and Profits had given speculators credit for promoting settlement rather than for retarding it, as a sizeable number of other scholars contended. This author sided with the other scholars and he still does, if by speculators Professor Swierenga meant the type who purchased large tracts of unimproved land intending to hold them only long enough to make their resale remunerative. If, on the other hand, he really meant the second or later-wave speculator who was interested mainly in establishing large-scale farming operations hoping to make a profit directly or indirectly from the land through the use of tenants or hired labor, then this author supports the Swierenga position wholly. The Close Brothers were this type of speculator despite a lapse or two. As a result of their considerable effort and in testimony to it, there are

111 See Chapter I, Footnote 45, page 35, this study.
probably a great many living and prospering there today whose forebears took advantage of a close farmstead and thus secured for themselves and their descendents a permanent home they may not have been able to afford otherwise.
Photograph taken during the summer of 1972 of a Close-built house located in Sibley, Iowa. The house has been greatly modified from the original but was still very much in use in 1972. (Photo by J.P.R.)
APPENDIX IV

"LIST OF VACANCIES FOR BOARDERS AND PUPILS.

Particulars and Extracts from Letters
Received from English Gentlemen respecting Boarders, Pupils, and their Farms.

1. A married gentleman, resident in the English colony in N. W. Iowa, U. S., and engaged in stock farming, who receives young gentlemen into his house, as boarders and farm pupils, writes, Jan. 1881:

"My house is a wooden one, as almost all houses are here, whether large or small. I have two sitting rooms, seven bedrooms, and a bath room with hot and cold water; every room is heated by a flue from the furnace in the cellar.

"Although we have every necessary comfort, I should not like to take any young men who were afraid of roughing it, as they would not get on here. At present I have 40 cows and heifers, 22 steers, 2 calves, and a thorough bred short horned bull, entered in the American herd book, and descended from some of the most noted of English short horns. I have his pedigree for nine generations. I shall buy from 50 to 100 more cattle in the spring or as soon as I find how much hay I shall have left. I have seven horses and a pony. I shall have to get one or two more ponies in the spring, before the herding season commences, as I run my own herd. I have about 420 sheep and 50 pigs. I am thinking of going in for Hereford cattle; they seem to be supplanting the short horns in popular estimation. If a pupil wishes to keep a horse of his own, I shall charge $12 a-year for its keep; of course he would attend to it himself. I should not like to receive any young men who were not of good moral character, etc., as my own sons are good lads, and I should expect my pupils to obey me as they would their father."

2. A married gentleman, resident in the English Colony, in N. W. Iowa, and engaged in stock raising and grain growing, and who is an experienced practical farmer, and has vacancies for two more pupils, writes to me, April, 1881:

"I have now a vacancy for two pupils, the two that were with me having left a few days ago to start a farm of their own. I received a letter from _____ . . . and would be glad to receive two desirable pupils through your influence, but they must be prepared to work; under 20 years of age preferred; and to take an interest in the affair, or I would rather be without them. . . ."
I am farming 1500 acres, and have about 1500 sheep, 300 head of cattle, and 100 hogs. We have had an exceptionally long and severe winter, in common with the rest of the States; but I consider this a most excellent locality for stock raising, and, if properly handled, profits are great, often 100 per cent. We raise from 30 to 60 bushels of corn (maize) to the acre, and any quantity of prairie hay can be put up at a cost of one dollar (4s. 2d.) per ton. Land ranges in price from five to ten dollars (£1 to £2) an acre. Cattle can be wintered for four dollars (about 16s.) a head, and herded through the summer months for 50 cents. (about 2s.) Sheep in proportion.

'I shipped in a car-load of Cotswold and Down rams from England last summer (1880); but there are several Englishmen going in largely for sheep to whom I will mention your offer.'

'In another letter dated June:

'Mr. _____ has arrived quite safely, and likes the country very much. We are having rather a showery spring, and the crops are doing splendidly. My lambs from the imported Cotswolds and Oxford Down rams thrive wonderfully on the rich prairie grass.'

'August:

'I am glad to be able to tell you that _____ (an Old Cheltonian) is getting on very well indeed at present, and appears to like the life out here. We have had a very pleasant cool summer, excepting a few very hot days. Crops are very good, and stock have done remarkably well this season, hogs are dearer than I have ever seen them before out here. . . . I will forward you an account of the Le Mars Derby in a day or two, our local paper was unfortunately destroyed before I got your letter, but I can easily obtain another from the office when I go into town.

'We have started a cricket club and a new clergyman this month, and both of them are, I am glad to say, a success.'

3. Three gentlemen, brothers, who settled in North Western Iowa in 1879, [probably William, James, and Fred Close] have vacancies on their Stock Farm for Boarders and Pupils. A brother in England writes to me, [probably John B. Close] May 1881:

'My brothers . . . have now a large farm of their own, where they raise cattle, sheep and hogs. At first only two went out, but they reported so well upon it, that the third joined them last year (1880), and I learn from them by letters received this week, that (having got over the longest and severest winter ever known in the West) they look forward to a successful and profitable year. . . . For any pupil going to them £ _____ are to be paid . . . When he reaches Iowa he can stay a month on my brother’s farm, to see whether he likes the life, etc; if at the end of that time he decides upon remaining a further sum of £ _____ is to be paid. This will entitle him to a year’s residence with my brothers, with whom he will live precisely as one of themselves, and will be taught
everything necessary to become a stock raiser himself. . . . At the end of his year's residence, should he wish to buy a farm for himself, my brothers will themselves give him all the benefit of their experience as regards choice of site, price of land, authenticity of the deeds (a most important point), &c., and will also when he has settled down help him in every way with advice, etc., to become successful.

"4. A clergyman's son, married, and occupying a farm in the English Settlement of Le Mars, Iowa, who has vacancies for two pupils, writes to me, Sept. 1881:

'Pupils would have 5000 acres to see managed, which we cut up into 15 farms. Land is worth about 30s to 40s per acre, and should a young fellow give his mind to the work after he has seen the American ways for a year or so, he could either buy or rent a farm and go into stock raising, or hogs, either will pay about 50 per cent. Chicago is our great stock market, so we are always sure of a good market. I have a very experienced American foreman, who would give instructions in the various ways and means of farming in the Far West. The life is rough, and no one ought to come who cannot stand roughing it at times. Shooting—wild geese, duck, rabbit, prairie hens, prairie wolf, deer, and many small birds. Outfit—good strong clothes, saddle and gun; boots bought out here are more suited to the country. . . . I may say we have out here, Hon. Capt. Moreton brother to the Earl of Ducie, Hon. A. Sugden, Col. Fenton, A. Lubbock, son of Sir J. Lubbock; and many others, about 300 English Gentlemen in all.'

"His father (a country Vicar), in a letter to me about his son's farm in Iowa, states:

'As the adjacent farms all belong to a very dear friend of ours, there would be no difficulty about obtaining one for any of his pupils. He himself has been there but for a short time, the end of last year (1880), but he is satisfied about the settlement, and sees every prospect of success.'

"5. Excellent Board, Lodging, and Tuition, for gentlemen wishing to study American farming on a large stock, hog and agricultural farm, one mile from a rising town in the English Colony in Iowa. The owner of this farm who resides in England, writes to me, Aug. 1881:

'I have a farm partly leased, partly in my own hands, under my manager, of 743 acres. . . . It is a large hog and cattle farm, managed under the best and newest methods, and with all the best machinery, shedding, stabling and yards, as used in that country. There is an excellent house, well sheltered, and in the prettiest situation in the district. I have put on an addition solely for the use of pupils wishing to learn farming before commencing for themselves. My manager Mr. ______ has sole control of the farming operations, and his wife looks after the house. He will give all opportunity to pupils wishing to learn farming to do so, and
give them every advice he can, but he cannot be in any way responsible
to parents or guardians for young men who do not care to work. . . .
The class of men I would like to see on my place is such as would work
for their own sake, and who would do credit to anything they learnt on
the farm, by getting on well afterwards. . . .
'We have a great many English gentlemen settled in the Le Mars
district, and going out there you would find no lack of society, and at
the same time find yourself in one of the best districts of the States
for investing in land for farming, or as many young fellows have done,
for opening up a business in the town. A flax mill and a paper mill
are both wanted there at present, and there are no end of openings for
starting in various way. My place has the advantage of being so near
the town that one can find out all that can be learnt of the district,
and yet get the advantage of living in the country. You can study
farming and yet look into other industries too. . . . I have about 300
acres arable, and 100 acres enclosed pasture in my own hands at present,
and of course, as in all that country, unlimited free grazing.'

"In another letter dated Sept.:"

"You will see by the situation of my property that it is very well
situated as a central position for studying the country and gaining in­
formation. I know many trustworthy gentlemen out there too, who would
give any young men I introduced to them, perfectly disinterested infor­
mation and advice on any subject they might wish information on. . . .
I have a friend likely to be going out shortly, who is a good practical
man. . . . You will see by the elevated plan of the yards that they are
well above the river, though not far from it, the House is well sheltered
from the north by a fine young wood and a very high thick willow hedge
behind it."

"6. A single gentleman shortly returning to the English colony in
N. W. Iowa, who can accommodate pupils on his stock farm, writes to me,
Oct. 1881:

'Our stock farm is situated about two miles from Le Mars, which is
a promising town of 4000 inhabitants. My brother and myself own the farm,
which (during my absence) is managed by my brother. I shall probably re­
turn about the beginning of the new year. We have in and around Le Mars
a colony of about 600 Englishmen, many of very good family and from the
Universities, and several ladies have gone out, so we have the advantage
of a society which is by no means without refinement. The colony was
founded by W. E. Close and his brothers, of Trinity College, Cambridge,
about four years ago. We have a very comfortable house (piano, etc.),
and a good housekeeper. We pay more attention to stock than to arable
farming, as we find by experience that it pays best. We breed cattle,
horses and hogs, and have been very successful on our farm. . . . At the
end of the twelve months our pupils have all the help which our experi­
ence can give them in buying their farms.'
"7. A gentleman who has a farm in N. W. Iowa, and is willing to take pupils on his return there in February next, writes to me, October, 1881:

"My farm is 80 acres in extent, and all under the plough. I grow principally maize, oats, and stock. The climate is very healthy, and the soil most productive. I have been farming there for eighteen months, and I find it everything that can be desired for a young man who is fond of work and rough country life. There is also a great amount of sport."

"The terms for Boarders and Pupils, and further particulars, can be obtained on application to T. G. MELLERSH, ESQ., 2, Southfield Villas, Cheltenham.

"N.B. Several gentlemen and young fellows from the Public Schools intend going out early next spring to the English Colony in Iowa, and Southern Minnesota."

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