

U. S. PREPARING NEW FOREST IN BROWN COUNTY

Rehabilitation Work Among
Hoosier Farmers Also
in Progress.

BY TRISTRAM COFFIN

In the march of civilization westward across America, families from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and southwestern Ohio settled in the hilly, rough country of what is now Brown County, Indiana.

Isolated from large communities by rocky hills and their own taciturn natures, the Brown County residents have become famed for their vernacular and customs. By 1890 the population of this area had reached a peak of 16,703.

Then poverty struck. Heavily-wooded areas were stripped of their trees and forest industries no longer could provide a means of livelihood.

Population Shows Decline

More and more land was placed under cultivation, and as year after year farmers planted the same crops, fertility of the almost barren soil became depleted. Topsoil was washed away by heavy rains. As timber resources declined, so did the population. By 1930 there were only 5,168 persons living in Brown County.

Since 1930, practically every house has been re-occupied and some new log cabins have been built as a result of the back-to-the-land movement common to the poor land areas of southern Indiana.

Economic pressure forced land owners to cut off second growth timber as soon as it approached cordwood or mine prop size.

Conditions Among Worst

Concerned by soil erosion and forest destruction, the Division of Land Utilization and the State Agricultural Experiment Station, Purdue University, made an investigation.

This survey revealed physical, economic and social conditions in Brown County were among the most serious in the country. The Federal government's Resettlement Administration began as a project the purchase of 20,000 acres of poor farm land in the county for conversion to forest use. By March 31 this year, 17,500 acres were under option. Total cost of the development is estimated at \$685,480.

Government officials have said the purchase will have a beneficial effect on local public finances, because while much of the land is now tax delinquent and producing no revenue, the local government nevertheless must spend money for roads and schools.

Other Areas Hit

Looking ahead to the future, the government experts expressed the belief that if families are moved to better land, they will become better taxpayers and the development of the forest land will in time provide a new source of wealth.

These land-poor farmers, barely existing in scrubby cabins, know and like the land and would make good farmers if they had fertile soil, government officials have stated.

The Resettlement Administration found other communities in the state where soil erosion had seriously affected the economic life of its inhabitants.

The acquisition of 30,000 acres in Martin County at a cost of \$247,000 was begun as a project, total cost of which is estimated at \$724,363. Working with the resettlement organization, the National Park Service purchased 8,000 acres in Ripley County for \$144,000 and 6,265 acres in Pulaski County for \$131,568.

Recreation Centers Developing

The latter two tracts are being developed as recreational centers for low wage industrial groups and youth organizations. Thus the removal of impoverished farmers to better lands will furnish factory workers and children from smoky cities an opportunity for healthful out-of-door recreation, it was pointed out.

The three-fold Rural Resettlement Administration program of aid to farmers, establishment of low-cost housing and prevention of soil erosion includes the rehabilitation of Hoosier farmers through loans.

Pressed for farm upkeep funds, many Hoosiers were unable to provide sufficient collateral to obtain

loans from private and public agencies.

At present, the Resettlement Administration is assisting 354,000 farmers throughout the country and has outstanding approximately \$63,000,000 in loans. In addition, approximately 175,000 farmers are on rehabilitation rolls.

Farm and home management budgets are outlined and supervised for those to whom rehabilitation loans are extended. Indiana has 2,459 families under rehabilitation supervision directed by E. H. Shideler, 212 Federal Building, Lafayette.

Of the projects started by the Subsistence Homesteads and transferred to the Resettlement Administration, one considered by authorities to be among the most successful in the country is at Decatur, Ind. It is known as Decatur Homesteads.

Model Homes Occupied

Forty-eight model, low-cost homes have been completed and occupied. Residents are employed in the city's trades, professions and industries and have an average income of about \$1,200 a year. Eventually, these homes are to be sold to the residents. Arrangements now are under way to solve problems of taxation, public service and public education.

Indianapolis has contributed four men to the government's task of re-

habitat.

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