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An 1880s Invitation to Buy Land in East Missouri and in Arkansas:

“Zur Beachtung für Landbauer . . . Ankauf von Land”

by Robert Wells

A Railroad's 1879 Invitation to Settle on the Lands it Crosses

— — —

For the Attention of Land Cultivators
who plan to emigrate to the
United States of North-America

Purchase of Land

at most advantageous conditions
that will enable anyone
to own his property

— — —

Thomas Essex W. A. Kendall
Superior Land-Commissioner — — — Sub-Land Commissioner
Little Rock (Arkansas) — — — St. Louis (Missouri)

For information one may contact:

Robert Wells

3, Fenchurch Buildings, London (England)
Agent of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern
Railroad Company (Land-Administration)

**The
St. Louis, Iron Mountain &
Southern Railroad - Company
is selling its land in Arkansas to new settlers
with the following rebates, that is:**

15 % of the previously agreed upon price
if 1/6 of the purchase price is being presented,

25 % of the previously agreed upon prices,
if ¼ of the purchase price paid,

and 40 % if the whole purchase price
is being paid at once.

Those who purchase land from the Company receive a discount
of 33 1/2 percent, and that is on the freight of all movable items of the
immigrants that are being transported by the railroad of the Society.

Settlers who will buy land that borders on the lands of the
Railroad-Society, receive a discount of 20 percent and,

Those who buy 160 acres of land from the Railroad Society and
pay for 1/4 right away, get half the ticket on the “St. Louis, Iron
Mountain and Southern Railroad Society” reimbursed, while those
who purchase 80 acres and pay for them fully right away receive the
whole ticket price reimbursed.

Payment Terms Nr. 1. At the time of purchase and in the following year 6 percent interest will be calculated on the capital; in the third and each year following 1/9 needs to be adjusted besides 6 percent interest on the rest, until all has been paid of the purchase price, what therefore corresponds to a credit of 10 years.

Payment Terms Nr. 2. At the time of purchase and every following year 1/4 of the purchase price and 1 year interest perorated 6 percent per year, until all has been paid what corresponds to a credit of three years.

Payment Terms Nr. 3. Payment of the whole price at the time of purchase when the buyer will receive the pertinent title deed right away. Buyers who will pay immediately or in short intervals receive the following discount:

- 10 percent remuneration on payment terms Nr. 1 of the price of the land.
- 20 percent remuneration on payment terms Nr. 3 of the price of the land.

In the State of Missouri as well as in Arkansas good building land owned by the Railroad costs from 2 1/2 dollars, or generally in the average of 3 to 5 dollars per acre in a centrally located district with towns, churches, societies, post- and telegraph-station, newspapers, decent people; further with mild climate, rich soil, frequent harvests, good water, free range, fish and game, good wood for building, rich mines, great fruit in valleys and plateaus, water power, rivers, railroads, and local markets.

Much rain, early and long summers, moderate winds. In one year one can get two harvests from the same soil.

Wheat, maize, cotton etc. thrive in the same field.

Six navigable rivers are crossing the land that belongs to the Railroad.

Prices cheap. 10 years of credit if desired.

No grasshoppers, no downpours, no damaging north wind, no famine, no monopolies, no hot winds, no snow nor frost.

The region is unsurpassed in America in the coincidence of all possible industrial advantages.

Come and see! where food and clothing are cheap; good water and firewood ample, raw materials plentiful, transport means regular; in a region where an already organized populace counts, is also connected with rich, if by nature less advantaged, districts, where undoubtedly still many inhabitants will settle, the number of factories multiply, wellbeing and wealth will be awarded those who settle there and make these regions their home.

40 acres of land, at 4 dollars per acre or 160 dollars—the usual conditions of the trade—to be paid right away or the rest in three equal installments. (The prices of the government are lower, but the lands are not as close to the railroad and not as good. One may also buy from the railroads at more advantageous payment conditions.) There remain for three equal annual payments 120 dollars, for a pair of oxen 50 dollars, a cow 18 dollars, sow and pigs 5 dollars, a plow 6 dollars, a harrow 2 dollars, hoes etc. 1 dollar, axe 1 dollar, drill-harrows and wedges 1 dollar, seeds 1 dollar, a pump 8 dollars, household items 25 dollars. All together 118 dollars, so 92 dollars remain for other needed items or otherwise economical use.

One needs only few foodstuffs to start and one can, because workers are always sought after, earn one's livelihood in most different ways. A small plot of land may provide vegetables and fruit to a household. Clothes are not expensive. Glacé-gloves are not needed. As to health, one need not to be afraid of settling in this district if one takes it easy. If one is used to live quietly, to dress warmly, and to lead a reasonable and generally moral life, one will not only gain good health but soon also affluence. I myself now own 160 acres of a building site in one piece where I as well as others reside.

On my own dairyfarm there are a 1000 apple trees, 3,000 peach-, pear, grape- and berry trees that all bear fruit. I own a hill that contains iron which might become quite valuable for my offspring. I am but a mile from a water-operated flour mill. In this district, there is still good land cheaply available and new settlers are always cordially welcome with us.

The newly introduced agricultural systems lead to surprising yields. The bad times haven't almost touched us because labor has always been needed to get building wood to the markets, and whenever possible many improvements have been made. I prefer low lying land because it can be planted so much more easily than in the North from where I come. Roots do not reach as deeply in fat earth. The upper land is excellent for grains, grass, and fruit. The prairies (meadow flats) are not as good as they dry out, and besides harvests demanding full care for them remain uncertain. Providence seems to have them set aside as unproductive and bare. The soil of our forests results in clear, healthy and soft water that springs up from layers of sand. I am most satisfied with the great improvements.

Fruit. Apples, pears, cherries, quinces, apricots, plums grow well. Grapes and wine are excellent. Strawberries, blackberries, currents thrive and are wonderful. The fruit of Arkansas is as large as that from California and tastes even better.

Almonds and pecan grow well as well as white walnuts and hazelnuts, and regular walnuts are plentiful.

The fact that the climate is half tropical, also free from the extremes of great heat and rigorous cold, it is very good for the soil and produces wild growing masses of juicy berries and grapes that at present go bad or are eaten by animals whereas many impoverished people could greatly profit from those natural riches.

Good Woodland. Many people have a predilection for prairie (meadow flats) districts; they overlook that the existence of forestland offers most clear proof that the soil must be good; that such regions must be especially rich in water and that providence has destined them especially for the growth of plants to assure mankind of garden plots.

In the highlands of the United States there now are hardly any needed woods to provide shade for grass and cattle resulting from the steady improvements of farms. Many farmsteads have forests of much greater value than the land itself.

In a forested district, houses, barns, sheds, fences are not as expensive as at other places, and affluence that hereby becomes

possible offers people the possibility to work and becomes a source of income. A man without means is a helpless creature on the prairie; in contrast, whether rich or poor, forested land always gives plentiful income.

This district contains the only forest left with precious wood that must encourage the industrious workman to prepare wood for resale. Many trees reach a thickness of 6 cubic feet diameter. The kind of wood are oaks, hackberries, elm, acorn, black and white walnut, grasshoppers, mulberries, birch, poplars, ash, cottonwood, gum, Atlas-walnut, mulberry figs, cypress, yellow fir, bois d'arc, holly, sassafras, catalpa, cherry. In the lower lands one finds oaks, elms, walnut trees, poplars, ash, gum, mulberry figs, and cypresses of five cubic feet diameter; other kinds of trees are large, but of lower growth.

There are seventy different kinds [of wood] that are mostly used for art work and often are very sought after. Wood for building in older States is constantly becoming rarer. Owners of saw mills, machines, cooper shops, wagons, agricultural tool-making shops, and furniture factories turn their interest to these new forested districts. Earlier, wood was prepared in only a raw manner and then finished in other regions; for such work there was in the land almost no turning lathe; but the same basic material was returned to us by the railroad, finished and polished for sale to our people or in transit to the markets in Texas or Mexico. Today the wood owner strives building his mill in union with the settler so that way the one helps the other, work becomes more regular for both, one gets more for the wood than the land had cost, and the former gets readymade more quickly.

Experiences of a Naturalized Citizen

Hope (Arkansas), November 4, 1879

Esteemed Sir!

A person without means does not need a sum larger than 250 dollars to establish a small farm and yet can get along quite well. He will be able to fence in 40 acres all by himself without great cost in

the first winter. By planting potatoes and other vegetables early, he may be able to get along very cheaply after May 1 already. November wheat makes meal already at the beginning of June, and around that time maize is ripe for roasting. In my view our local market is better than St. Louis because the growing of cotton increases in our region and that causes a greater demand for victuals of all kind. By the multiplicity of harvests, work is available all yearround, for instance for planting, maintaining or harvesting; also wood is a large source of getting along well, and cattle is thriving without demanding much care.

Two brothers who came here last year as gardeners rented about 10 acres near town. In one year they already sold enough of their produce to pay 5 dollars per acre, a horse and a market wagon, further 40 acres at 17 dollars per acre (for which they provided earnest money). Ireland potatoes are being sold here for 1 dollar and 25 cents and sweet potatoes of 50 to 75 cents per bushel. In this region, an acre provides 200 bushels of Ireland potatoes, 400 bushels sweet potatoes, and 100 bushels oats. If one knew in Germany and Switzerland what kind of harvests one may achieve here, how well the cattle thrives, and how similar the climate is to the European, immigrants would go ahead with mighty paces.

Although the population derives from English stock, there are many Germans among us. – Except in the immediate neighborhood of the larger towns, one may buy land as secure property and found a homestead, by means of a money amount that is smaller than the rent that one would have to pay in Europe for the same number of acres. Like anywhere else, forested land is better than prairie land. We produce oats and wheat as well as one does it in Europe. In one year one may get two harvests of Ireland potatoes. Vegetables, maize, cotton, melons, beets, chards, gold apple, sugar grain, and many other kinds of fruit grow here very well.

As to the truth of my claims one may inquire with the clergyman here or the Catholic or Anglican Bishop in Little Rock (Arkansas). I came here as a railroad worker and have now settled in town, have a good farm that yields a nice profit. I hope that people who live in

Europe in adverse circumstances will be able to come here where one may achieve a position without much toil, worry, and work which, as fortune and wellbeing may well be compared with the situation of a great lord in Germany.

(signed)

Reports of Mennonites about the States Arkansas and Texas

To our Brethren!

I have been living in the State of Minnesota, United States, for four years. The land consists mainly of prairie and one finds woodland but seldom. All wood for the building of houses and fences comes to my place per railroad from 135 to 200 miles away. Hay is used for firewood. Winters are long and hard. Cattle need to be fed at least six months in the year. The foremost products are cereals such as wheat, Indian corn, oats etc., work in the fields is mostly done by machines, and the spending of large sums is needed for the purchase of tools and traction animals, and they cost: Breaking ploughs 25 to 30 dollars, regular plows 15 to 25 dollars, sowing machines 60 to 75 dollars, self-binding grain-machines 258 dollars, grass cutting machines 90 dollars, hay rakes 30 dollars, threshing machines 500 to 700 dollars, cleaning grinders 20 to 30 dollars, wagons 65 dollars, a pair of oxen 90 to 125 dollars, a pair of horses 150 to two hundred dollars. A good part of the summer is being used for gathering cattle feed for the winter, and half of the winter gets lost to work in the fields because of inclement weather.

On 25 October 1879 I set out in the company of Brother Peter Krahn of Alexandrowk, South Russia, to look for a milder climate, where people would be able to establish a home at less expense and could lead a more comfortable life. We took the Sioux City and St. Paul Railroad to Lemars, Iowa where we took the Illinois Central Railroad to Cairo, Illinois. From there we went with the St. Louis Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad through southeastern Missouri, reached the northeastern corner of the State of Arkansas, a densely

forested region, and reached Judsonia on the Little Red river at midnight on 28 October 1879. The next day we traveled by wagon through somewhat hilly land, that was covered by forest but suitable for orchards. On the farm of Mr. Wheaton we found flowers and bushes in full bloom. Peach trees, two years old, drawn from offshoots, were 2 1/2 inches thick and had grown to 8 feet. From a strawberry patch of 2 1/2 acres he sold this year 350 bushel strawberries for more than 1,700 dollars, with pure profit of 1,150 dollars. At Mr. Peter Smith two miles from Judsonia many kinds of flowers were in full bloom. A short distance farther, Mr. Bonham had planted 40 acres with peach trees. This year he was offered 1,500 dollars for the fruits on the trees before their being picked. I do not know how much was actually earned.

Soon after we passed a ferrous spring that possesses very fortifying elements. Then we drove over flat land, with trees grown to quite some height, without underbrush. We saw many fields, where enough maize was grown in the first year of planting that it paid for the land. One proceeds here as follows: A circle is being dig up in fall or winter so that the tree dies off; it remains standing, however, and no leaves grow the next year. In between maize is planted in rows and yields the first year 20 to 25 bushels per acre. New maize is being planted every year until the tree falls down and the trunk has rotted so that the ground is fertilized and cleared with little effort.

From here we drove over good land in a circular direction and arrived at Seavey where the County Administration of White County is located. Here we found sulfurous springs. An inexpensive horse railroad transports passengers and freight to the railroad station Kensett six miles distant. About 1,000 bales of cotton were ready in Kensett to be shipped on cargo wagons. Each bale weighs about 500 pounds and for it one needs about an acre of land. Cotton is valued at 10 cents a pound so that a bale comes to 50 dollars. We met often farmers who brought three bales, valued at 150 dollars, to market. About 10,000 bales are sent annually from Kensett.

On 30 October we arrived in Gurdon in southwest Arkansas. Here we found an artesian well 200 feet deep with sulfurous flowing water. In that depth there is here almost everywhere water to be found,

and the cost of such a well comes to about 75 dollars. This place is surrounded by heavy fir and oak woods. At the thick end the trees measure 1 to 5 feet in diameter, do not have branches to about 60 to 70 feet height, and their full height is 100 to 150 feet. A single tree yields 2,000 to 4,000 feet construction timber. This kind of tree covers the land three to four miles west of Gurdon as well as a stretch east of it.

Our way went westward, and after we had crossed a branch of Terre Noir Creek we reached an open region that had been settled for a long time and formed a large cotton field that covered many miles. The amount of unpicked cotton covering the ground looked like fallen snow. The soil was of reddish color and sandy. Much of it has been used for some 40 to 50 years for cotton growing. Shortly before we reached Antoine Creek, the color of the ground turned black and was very deep and with very large trees standing. We stayed that night with a planter who owns 600 acres of land. He had already picked 30 bales of cotton from 40 acres and usually brought them 25 miles distant to market. The next day we went over hilly country and over the valley lands of the Little Missouri river that are of deep red and black clay soil, two to three miles wide and may produce one to two bales per acre. Then we passed a stretch of 15 miles where there was heavy fir and oak forest, in between many a cotton field. We then reached Prescott at the railroad, a small town of 1,000 inhabitants, from where yearly 1,500 bales of cotton are being shipped. Near this place land is very good. We visited Dr. Powers' property that 20 months ago had still been covered, but now no tree or stump is to be found, but fruit trees, bushes, roses and other flowers in full bloom; strawberries started to bud, potatoes grew in the soil, and figs started to ripen on trees. A wonderful change in so short a time. Twenty miles toward the southwest from Prescott there are open places in the woods. When drilling, one finds water 200 feet deep. East from the little town the land gets lower and water runs richly from the artesian drillings and the hills, similar to springs on mountain ridges.

On Saturday morning of 1 November we began the trip to Texas, passed through Hope and Texarkana in Arkansas, Marshall, Dallas, and reached the next morning Fort Worth, Texas. On Monday 3

November we went on by wagon in order to take a tour of 300 miles toward the southwest in order to inspect the land. We passed through Farrant, Parter, and Palo in Pinto County, and found very beautiful land in said county, about 20,000 acres with rich soil that was well suited for the cultivation of wheat, maize, cotton, millet, and other grains. One man got 30 1/2 bushel of wheat per acre from 12 acres. The next interesting point was Crystal Falls in Stephens County where we found nearby large deposits of coal as well as beautiful land for agriculture. This place will grow quickly. From here to Griffin are beautiful lands, also to the south until Albany, the county seat of Shackleford County. Fifteen miles distant there is nice land, but situated somewhat higher. South of Albany to the midst of Callahan County paths are often crossed by small brooks of the branches of Hubbard Creek that join the main branch of the Brazos River near Crystal Falls mentioned above. To the left and east are nice valley lands that are well suited for agriculture, and to the right are grass covered hills well suited for pasture for sheep and cattle. At Mr. Powell, 6 miles north of Belle Plain, we found a herd of 870 sheep that during the last season had been shorn twice at each shearing and provided at each shearing in the average 2 1/2 pound wool, makes 5 pound wool at 25 cents a pound during a season. The original price of the sheep was 1 dollar 50 cents apiece. The shepherd's pay was 15 dollars a month besides board. This herd has not been fed during the last winter or been brought into stables; it looked for feed outside and protection in the hills and hillside. But when it snowed or cold rainy weather occurred, many sheep perished. A few sheds to protect them from the weather would have saved them. Here however the people are very negligent in taking care of cattle; their profit is much lower therefore than if they were competent farmers and cattle breeders.

From Powell's we journeyed westward through Callahan and Taylor Counties. There are large stretches of beautiful land in the northern and northeastern sections of Taylor County. From Buffalo Gap in Taylor County we crossed the mountains to Nolan County. At one place we crossed a wire fence that is about for miles long, connects two hilltops, encloses more than 50 acres of land, and is

being used by Mr. Carter and Mr. Grounds as pasture for a herd of more than 8000 heads of cattle. We were told that these two men had begun quite poor about five years ago and have become rich by cattle breeding. They don't feed the cattle with hay because it survives on natural grass. In the northeastern part of Nolan County we found a big stretch of rich, deep black soil that was covered with Mesquite grass and woods.

In Mitchell County the soil was red and sandy. From here we turned eastward and passed through Nolan, Fisher, and Jones Counties. In these counties we found beautiful valley lands from one to three miles long that surround the main branch of the Brazos River. We found good water, also some woods. We were told that the northern half of the county has some of the most beautiful lands in the state, with chocolate-colored clay soil and is without hills and mountains.

From Phansom Hill in Jones County we went through the highlands of Shakelford County that are well suited for sheep breeding, and we reached Fort Griffin on 23 November 1879, after we had spent three weeks in Texas and covered 450 miles per wagon. The next day we took the postal coach to Fort Worth and from there we went per railroad back to my home in Minnesota.

We can briefly summarize our observations made on this trip: Arkansas and Texas offer better possibilities of earning money than the other western or northern States because lands are cheaper and the climate is milder. We may especially recommend Arkansas to poorer folks with large families because they may start there more easily and with less capital than in any other state. In the first year, a man may build a blockhouse, fence in a piece of land, and when the trees were circled in the previous fall with ditches he may grow enough maize in order to earn more money than the land will cost. North of Judsonia is a nice stretch of land that is suitable to grow early fruit as well as maize and cotton; strawberries are being shipped in April to the northern markets.

We can recommend the lands between Arkadelphia and Hope near Prescott in Arkansas to those who prefer heavily wooded lands, firs and oaks and want even earlier harvests; those lands are however

farther from the northern markets. There one finds land where one may grow a bale or 500 pounds of cotton per acre. Cotton growing is quite profitable for someone with a large family, because at harvest time each child can pick as much cotton as a grown-up person. The land may be purchased for 2 to 3 dollars in cash per acre. Taxes in Arkansas amount to about 1 1/2 percent based on the estimate of the land at about half of its real worth, and according to the State Constitution taxes may not surpass 2 percent of the value.

I recommend Texas to people with greater means who prefer cattle breeding and agriculture at a larger scale, who have enough money to erect fences and buildings and to buy cattle or sheep herds that feed on grass which grows amply in the mountains and valleys. Once the railroad from Fort Worth to El Paso at the western border of the state has been completed, what may be accomplished in two to three years, large stretches of land may be used for agriculture that one may still buy for 1 to 2 dollars per acre. Those lands are suited for growing wheat, cotton and maize, they will also feed large cattle herds. Taxes on land in Texas, in counties that still have not been organized, amount to 2 dollars and 40 cents per 640 acres, in other counties two to three times as much. Nearly 70,000,000 acres of land are reserved in Texas for the maintenance of schools. When these lands are being sold, their taxes are being permanently used for the support of schools. This is the most impressive school fund established by any state in the Union.

To all our [Mennonite] Brethren who intend to settle in one or the other of these States we must recommend to turn by letter to Mr. M. C. Kelley, 104 Clark Street, Chicago, State of Illinois, United States of America. He has accompanied us on our trip, is familiar with the lands and agent for the owners of millions of acres of the best land in the States of Arkansas and Texas. He can furnish all necessary information and assist those who wish to select good land so that they receive the best prices for the trip and freight to the lands they have chosen. He has provided us every opportunity on this journey to inspect the lands and to learn everything worthwhile. He has promised us that he would do the same for our Brethren also in

the future.

We have taken this trip to Arkansas and Texas because it was our sincere aim of finding a part of America where the poorer class of Mennonites, also those owning 500 to 1,000 dollars and or more, may establish a home for their family and in Russia may escape the burdens imposed during the last years; where they may prosper and worship their God in conformity with their conscience.

Mountain Lake, State Minnesota, 5 December 1879.

(sign.) **Abraham Penner. Peter Krahn**

[on the pamphlet's back]

Cheap Homesteads in East-Missouri and Arkansas

In a centrally located county, with towns, churches, associations, United States post office, newspapers, telegraphs and good company;

moderate climate, fertile ground, plentiful harvests;

good water, extensive properties, fish and game, beautiful lumber, profitable mines, excellent fruit on heights and flats;

near water power, rivers, railroads and good markets.

No locusts, no downpours, no terrible north winds, no famine, no monopoly, no hot winds, no snowfalls, no freezing.

Sufficient rain, early and favorable seasons, moderate winds.

Two harvests may be cultivated in one year on the same soil.

Wheat, maize, and cotton are growing on the same field.

Six navigable rivers are crossing the lands for sale.

Low prices, ten years credit if desired.

As to industrial advantages, this district is not surpassed by
any other in America.

One shall come and see!

Where food and clothing are cheap, good water and stuff for

burning aplenty, raw materials in abundance, and transport assured; in a district where, ordered social conditions rule and which is adjacent to also rich but less advantaged regions, there people will certainly settle, factories will undoubtedly increase, and people who go there and take up land, must become prosperous.

[Ink Stamp]

One May Write To:

Robert Wells

15, Bishopgate Street Without

London, England

Translated by Leo Schelbert

Explanatory Note:

The small size pamphlet of the ca.1890s found in a used book shop in Switzerland highlights how railroads tried to attract German and Swiss settlers for lands granted them by the government. While the first part of the 23-page printed text is a wholly laudatory type of advertisement by a railroad company, the two letters that follow purport to give reliable on-site views. Especially important in this regard is the report attributed to two Mennonites – one from “Alexandrowk” in southern Russia [perhaps Alexandrovskaya southeast of Saratov on the Volga], the other from Minnesota – who certainly would not mislead their own people. Both letters aim to assure prospective settlers by what appear to be attractive facts.

The two reports, if authentic, may have been much edited, a practice that has been attested when on occasion an original could be located for the sake of comparison. Like the railroad part, also the letters included in the pamphlet ignore problems like droughts, gutted markets, or frequent economic downturns. The search for profit, furthermore, appears to be paramount, and the total absence of American Indian people in all three parts is noteworthy.