

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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DOCUMENTS

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THE LEGISLATURE

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE.

1860.

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1860.

THIRTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE.

HOUSE.

No. 30.

MEMORIAL

Relating to the disposition of the Settling Lands of Maine.

STATE OF MAINE.

To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives in Legislature assembled:—

The memorial of the undersigned, a citizen of the State, humbly represents that in the opinion of many citizens, the policy of the State relating to public lands suitable for agriculture, needs to be reformed in order to make it more suitable to the present state of things. And your memorialist begs leave to suggest that the provision of the law which restricts the purchaser from the State of settling land to the purchase of one lot not exceeding two hundred acres, while it may prevent some abuses, which could be as effectually prevented by other means, is calculated to repress enterprise in that direction, and to induce large numbers whose industry and thrift would seem highly to enhance the public weal, to emigrate to other States, where ampler fields under a more liberal policy, and more genial skies invite the enterprise of those who ought to be the hope of their native State, to seek the generous reward due to the unrestricted exercise of their capacities.

The avowed object of the law is to promote the settlement of the public lands, whereas, an analysis of causes, it is believed, will show that it is calculated only to impede the progress of settlement. And if the law were designed to that end, we would be obliged to admit that it has had great success, since the experience of many years demonstrates that it serves not to promote, but rather to discourage the purchase and cultivation of the public domain. For while we have an area of lands capable of yielding

all the products of this climate so vast, that we have, as yet, had no occasion to make even a careful exploration of them, going to waste and abandoned to silence and solitude, the tide of emigration flows on; much of the strength of the State is lost for want of its fostering care; large numbers of those whose intelligent labors ought to enrich the State, are actually driven from her borders by the powers of the government, which ought to present to her youth a smiling face and extend an encouraging hand. Thousands of Maine bred young women, who ought to be the cherished wives of Maine husbands, the proud mothers of children, and become respected matrons to adorn and ennoble the State, every year waste their strength, and find their graves within the walls of the cotton mills of other States, and ultimately become the wives of aliens to their native soil, and the heads of families of precarious condition and uncertain prospects; or else seeking a higher destiny, are doomed at last to pine in solitude and celibacy.

Thus, much of the large expenditures and labors bestowed upon the education of our youth are either wasted, or their benefits reaped by other communities. Still we struggle forward. We blindly buffet the waves of death, and the fact that we survive this fearful drain of mental and physical power, proves the inherent strength of our people.

But one compensation which we receive for this draft is that, by our land policy, which contributes to these evil results, we are able to keep our lands, which we cannot give away, from the hands of speculators. We are able to hold small lots of land, which most men who have the means and the ability for great undertakings, do not want, that we may furnish miserable retreats for some few generations to come, for men of timid or inefficient character or of prostrate fortunes, who, under a more liberal policy, would have been better protected or more successful in a more prosperous community.

We complain that our people are so little prone to agricultural pursuits. We yearly spend much thought and large treasure to encourage the cultivation of the soil, and to enhance the respect due to that most useful of arts. Yet shutting our eyes to the progress of the world, we blindly persist in a policy which constantly tends to its degradation.

Your memorialist begs leave to submit the following propositions:

That the cultivated estate of the citizens is a source of public wealth.

That this source of public wealth cannot be greatly enhanced except by the cultivation of a love of country life and of rural pursuits among our people.

That the want of capital in the agricultural population and the consequently small scale upon which our agricultural works are conducted, are the parents of many evils, tending constantly and violently to deter both men and women from rural pursuits, and serving to disgust the youth of the State, and to drive them into other branches of industry.

That among these evils is an almost entire want of the division of labor; by reason of which many exhausting functions, which ought to be distributed among several, are necessarily performed by the same person; and hence the family supporting itself upon the farm, is too often overtaken.

That an instance of this is presented in the too frequent condition of the farmer's wife, who is expected to bear and nourish children, to superintend the household, to direct the education and form the morals and the manners of the family, to create sunshine and cheerfulness in the house, to bake and brew, to make and mend, to do the principal work in the dairy, to nurse the sick, and in the midst of manifold other drudgeries, to sustain the dignity of the American matron.

That whatever can in any measure tend to supply this want, or to remove these evils, tends to encourage the pursuit of agriculture.

That the encouragement of men who have capital, or can procure it, to clear and cultivate the settling lands of the State, would have such a tendency.

That the restrictive policy of the State deters such men from settling upon the public lands, since the profits to be derived from so much tillage land and good pasture land as is usually found upon one lot, is not of sufficient amount to afford any inducement to such persons to relinquish the advantages of older communities and enter a field of labor so circumscribed.

That if this class of men could be induced to bestow their ample means, greater or less, and devote their intelligent labors to operations of commensurate magnitude upon the new lands in the State, the following advantages would result.

It would give employment and ultimate independence to men and women, many of whom would otherwise emigrate to better their condition, and of whom many others would continue to dwindle in miserable dependence in large towns.

The advantages of a wise method of culture, with a full use of the best machines, and a judicious division of labor, both enhancing prosperity and diminishing the severity of farm service, would be practically illustrated, and others encouraged to follow the examples.

Estates would be gradually and more highly improved and adorned, thus rendering the pursuits and the results of agriculture still more attractive, enhancing the pleasures and elevating the condition of the rural population.

Among other things, worthless wastes would be drained and made productive, rugged hills would be clothed with verdure, and peopled with ever increasing flocks and herds, broad plains favored by nature would be still more ameliorated by art and covered with golden grain.

Thus the prosperity and happiness of the people would be greatly enlarged and the desolate wilderness would be turned to a source of public wealth.

And your memorialist further propounds that the agricultural art is rapidly and rightly coming to be considered as in the nature of a species of manufacture, in which soil and other materials are converted into articles of traffic for the profits yielded. What if there is profit in the skilful culture of a hundred acres? there is a proportional profit in that of a thousand; if in a thousand, then in other thousands.

That the capitalist who would go to the forest to expend capital in large agricultural works, would take with himself, and under his patronage, many artizans and laborers who are unable to begin unaided, or unwilling to endure the hazards and privations incident to the beginning of a new settlement, without the help of some patron. That many of these once planted in a new home, would soon become proprietors, and practice for themselves the arts of husbandry learned of the patron.

And it ought to be remarked that the jealousy and prejudice against large estates, has no foundation in true economy; that such objections lie only against the cultivation of an amount beyond the means of the cultivator; that while large estates are well managed,

they, like manufacturing institutions, afford employment for those who cannot or will not become proprietors themselves, and like them, yield the wealth of merchandise : that inasmuch as we have no law of primogeniture or entails to perpetuate such estates in feeble hands, when they are badly managed, natural causes are constantly at work to sub-divide and transfer them to others.

Your memorialist therefore respectfully submits that the best good of the State urgently demands an amendment of the law in such manner that the Land Agent be authorized under the sanction of the Governor and Council, to sell in any quantity any lands of the State more valuable for agriculture than for timber lands, whether previously surveyed or not, when in their judgment such sales would be expedient, provided they shall be satisfied that it is the intention of the purchaser to use the same for agricultural purposes, and provided that the purchaser, before he receives his deed, shall in proof of his intention, perform settling duties equivalent in proportion to those now required of purchasers from the State, not including labor upon roads, or that some other method be devised to remove the restrictions now prescribed by the law.

W. GILBERT.

March, 3, 1860.

STATE OF MAINE.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, March 6, 1858.

On motion of Mr. Wells of Freeport, laid on the table, and 350 copies of the same ordered to be printed for the use of the Legislature.

CHARLES A. MILLER, *Clerk.*