

"Bonanza Farming in the Red River Valley" article submitted by David E. Ortman, Seattle, WA

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In 2012 Ortman writes, "Given that we seem to be living in the Great Recession, most of the economic comparisons seem to be with the Great Depression of the 1920s and 30s. However, there was also the "Panic" of 1873 that occurred just prior to the Swiss Mennonites arrival in South Dakota and Kansas from Russia in 1874. Arriving in the midst of a financial and banking crisis is not likely what the forefathers/mothers expected." The article "Bonanza Farming in the Red River Valley" by Hiram Drache is a summary of this time period, including the arrival of Mennonites to North Dakota.

Bonanza Farming in the Red River Valley

by Hiram Drache

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The geological formation of Lake Agassiz provided a fertile, treeless, stoneless, prairie in the central part of North America. Despite the fertility of the soil, there was little early interest in this area because pioneers did not have the necessary trees and water to attract them to the region.

In 1812 Pembina became the first settlement south of what was to become the international boundary. Members from the settlement at Fort Garry in Canada came down annually to hunt buffalo in this region. These hunters killed 20,000 buffalo each year until about the 1850s. In 1842 the Red River Carts started their periodic journeys to St. Paul. These Red River carts were a dramatic part of history. Sometimes as many as 800 of them made up a single train. In 1857, the United States government provided for the erection of Fort Abercrombie north of what is now Breckenridge, Minnesota which served as the head of navigation until the railroad came to Moorhead in the early 1870s. In 1859, the Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post at what is now Georgetown, Minnesota. Hudson's Bay had three other trading posts south of the international boundary.

In 1864, the Congress of the United States chartered the Northern Pacific Railway Company. This charter provided for a land grant of nearly 11 million acres in what is now the state of North Dakota alone. The total land grant, the largest given by the Congress to any single railroad company, amounted to 44 million acres. Eventually 5 million acres were returned to public domain. Thirty-nine million acres in all were secured by the Northern Pacific Railroad. The land grant entitled the Northern Pacific to twenty sections of land per mile of railroad built from Thompson, near Duluth, Minnesota, to the Red River. West of the Red River it secured forty sections of land per mile through the territories to the Pacific Ocean. The Northern Pacific was granted the odd numbered sections, 1, 3, 5, 7, up to 35. This meant that the Northern Pacific received an area of about forty miles in width across Minnesota, retaining every other section in that area. After it crossed the Red River and secured the forty sections, it had half of the land in a swath eighty miles wide across the state of North Dakota. This continued through Montana and the other states to the Pacific Ocean. Incidentally, the 11 million acres that were received in North Dakota was approximately one-fourth of the entire area of the state. The Northern Pacific did not receive all of the odd numbered sections within this original grant because some pre-empters had come through the region before the railroad could officially claim it. The United States government compensated the railroad for the loss of some of this pre-empted land by giving them an additional section beyond the original eighty mile plot

through the Territories. To secure this land grant, the Northern Pacific was informed that it would have to give the government of the United States half fare on all freight and passengers that the government sent over the railroad. In addition the United States government increased the price of public domain on the even numbered sections within the grant from \$1.25 an acre to \$2.50 an acre. By this method the United States government was in a position to secure just as much money from the area where the railroad traveled as it would have if it had sold the entire region for \$1.25 an acre. The United States government did not release the Northern Pacific from its obligation of half fare on freight and passengers until after World War II had ended in 1946.

The next major incident in the history of the Northern Pacific came in 1873. The Dakotas were not particularly attractive to many of the European settlers and eastern American farmers who were looking for new land. For a period of a century, everything west of west central Minnesota had been called the Great American Desert. Geography and history books had this carefully marked as such. However, some settlers who had left Russia at this period of time because of the changing attitude of their government were attracted to the regions of the Dakotas. A large number of Mennonites from the Ukraine decided to settle west of the Red River around Fargo, North Dakota. In June of 1873, the Northern Pacific offered to reserve for them all of their land grant west of the Red River for the first fifty miles. In each mile west of the river, the Northern Pacific had forty sections of land. In total, the Northern Pacific offered to reserve 2,000 sections in an area fifty miles by eighty miles. The Northern Pacific set the price at \$3.00 per acre and agreed to give this land to the Mennonites at a 10 per cent down payment and the balance in seven years. It also promised to re-purchase any land that the Mennonites did not care to buy after they had made their settlement. The road also guaranteed a rate reduction for freight and passengers for a three year period commencing in 1873. The Northern Pacific gave an additional discount on land that would be broken within the first, second, and third years of purchase by the Mennonites. The reason for this, of course, was to stimulate farming activity and give the road income.

The Mennonites were attracted to the Dakota area, but before they would agree to purchase from the Northern Pacific, they wanted two privileges granted to them by the government of the United States. They wanted exemption from military service and they wanted to secure all the even numbered sections within the land grant which was still public domain. This would have given the Mennonites a solid block of 4,000 sections in an area 50 by 80 miles west of the Red River in North Dakota. Congress seriously considered granting military exemption because the mood in the United States at that time pretty well reflected the idea that there would be no major war for that country for the foreseeable future. However, Congress was not happy about the suggestion that it give contiguous sections of public domain within the land grant. It did not want to violate the popular Homestead Act that had been passed in 1862. There was pressure on Congress from two sources not to allow the Mennonites to secure the two privileges they were asking for. This pressure came from railroads in other areas of the United States and from other states that were not securing their potential quota of immigrants. The combined pressure was too much for Congress and neither of the requests was granted. At the same time the Mennonites had been negotiating with the Canadian government and when their requests for special privileges were denied by the American government, the Mennonites went to Manitoba where they secured twenty-five townships in the Morris and Altona area. They immediately dropped their demands upon the Northern Pacific for the 2,000 sections of land grant.

The twenty-five townships reserved for the Mennonites in Manitoba were divided between some very poor and some very good land. The land east of Morris was very wet and very low and was not particularly conducive to successful settlement, but the townships granted to the Mennonites around Altona were better drained and proved to be a choice bit of land for these people. The Canadian government twisted the arm of the Mennonites a bit by demanding that they take all of the land in these townships rather than letting them have their choice as was the case with the individual homesteaders when they came to any given area. It was in the Altona area where they became permanently established and to this day are some of the most successful farmers in Canada. It was in this region also that one of the large farms, the Lowe farm, west of Morris, was established. This farm, which closely resembles a typical bonanza, operated by three men, including Mr. Lowe. It employed some of the first mechanized plowing and threshing to take place within the area of western Canada.

The second major event affecting the Northern Pacific progress and the eventual development of the bonanza, came with the Panic of 1873. The Northern Pacific had spent money rather recklessly in the construction of the road and abused some of its land grant privileges. This was in keeping with the typical railroad construction company which sought to milk the railroad of all profits possible in the process of construction and hoped that some how or other the railroad at a later date would stand the burden of the excessive construction cost.

The original intent of the land grant as given by Congress was that this land should be sold to homesteaders and the money should go for building the railroad, but as previously stated, few Americans were interested in settling on land from Central Minnesota and west. No one really wanted to settle in the Great American Desert. This forced the railroad to change its tactics. If it could not sell the land, then it would have to try to secure money by some other means. The Northern Pacific decided that the best thing to do was to mortgage this land.

In their efforts to secure a broker, Jay Cooke and Company were hired. Jay Cooke had just finished underwriting the bond sales of the American government during the Civil War. He had been very successful in that respect and had now become the biggest banker in America. Jay Cooke was quite reluctant to assume the sale of mortgage bonds for the Northern Pacific railroad, but he did send his surveyor, Milnor Roberts, out here. Mr. Roberts determined that some day the land west of the Red River would be worth \$5 per acre. On the basis of the \$5 value, Jay Cooke and Company decided that they would underwrite the construction or the sale of Northern Pacific bonds.

Cooke had several difficulties. These bonds were 7.3 per cent gold bearing. Cooke turned to the American public in his first efforts to sell them. The American public was reluctant to buy because they could secure bonds that paid equal interest in many of the already successful railroads of America. In desperation, Cooke sent some of his chief brokers to Europe where they found that the nations were involved in reconstructing France after the Franco-Prussian War and were more interested in investing in colonial areas where imperialistic ventures were absorbing all of their available cash. Thus the Europeans were not a good market for Northern Pacific bonds. When the brokers returned from Europe, Cooke decided that he would have to put pressure on American buyers. Because of his position as the biggest banker in the nation, he was able to convince many large purchasers to secure Northern Pacific bonds. Cooke was not particularly happy about having to do this. Suddenly everything seemed to tumble in on him at once. He had been involved in the struggle within the Baptist church over the issue of the race problem. Cooke also had some personal family problems that were disturbing him at this time, but more importantly, his conscience was bothering him because he was selling bonds to reluctant purchasers. Because of this he went to the Northern Pacific executives and told them that they would have to slow down construction. They paid no attention to his warnings. Finally he went to them and told them they would have to stop building because he had no more funds. Jay Cooke had advanced 5 million dollars out of his own bank but was unable to sell the bonds to cover that advance. Construction came to a standstill in the summer of 1873 at the Missouri River and was not continued for several years. Government examiners determined that even though Cooke had 16 million dollars in assets and only 8 million dollars in liability, his bank should be closed. The major reason was that most of the 16 million dollars in assets was tied up in relatively non-liquid railroad bonds.

With the closing of the largest bank in America, the Panic of 1873 set in on the nation. The Northern Pacific bonds tumbled from their original cost of about \$80 to \$15, and eventually to a low of \$7. Many people in the East had literally been taken for a ride by the recklessness of the Northern Pacific. Many of them were desperate to get rid of these bonds before the bottom dropped out entirely. At this time J. B. Power, who was to become the most significant early resident of the Red River Valley, entered the scene. J. B. Power was active in the educational circles of North Dakota as an early president of North Dakota Agricultural College. He was also active in political circles of the Territory and later of what was to be the state of North Dakota. He was a large-scale farmer and eventually secured 6,000 acres south-west of Fargo where he was a progressive farmer, particularly in the area of livestock and swine breeding and feeding.

J. B. Power, who I have dubbed the Father of North Dakota agriculture, was responsible for the bonanza scheme for he was also land agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Power believed that the only way to overcome the tradition that Dakota was the Great American Desert was to actively promote the region in the farm periodicals of America and Europe of that day. The Northern Pacific eventually had about 1,500 agents in the European area to promote the land of mid-America. These agents had to have a story to tell. James B. Power developed the bonanza scheme to sell bonds of the Northern Pacific in exchange for land. The bondholders of the railroad were informed that if they would take their bonds, which were valued at from \$7 to \$15, and exchange them for Northern Pacific land, they would be able to recover most of their losses. Although the railroad was desperate to secure homesteaders, it was more desperate to get rid of the 7.3 per cent interest loan on these bonds. In many cases the interest was more than the market value of the bonds. Power believed that large-scale commercial farms would be the quickest way to promote the area, settle the land, and bring business to the railroad. These large-scale commercial farms received much publicity in the magazines and proved to the nation the value of the region.

The railroad was at a virtual standstill through 1873 and 1874. Near the end of 1874, Power introduced his bonanza scheme to the board of directors. The bonds, worth only \$7 to \$14, were honored at \$110 if traded for land. The railroad agreed not to charge more than \$5 per acre maximum, and at the outer extremity of the grant, it charged only \$1.23 per acre, list price. This was actually two cents per acre less than the price of public domain beyond the grant. Under this option, land was secured for as little as sixteen cents per acre.

This should have attracted large numbers of investors but the people were still reluctant to come to the Great American Desert. Finally a break for the Northern Pacific came with an exceptional crop by James Holes, a farmer and a front man for the railroad in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Holes had purchased some of the even numbered sections where the railroad wanted to cross the Red River. In an area about seven miles west of this crossing, he produced a forty bushel per acre crop of wheat on forty acres of land along the Sheyenne River. This wheat sold for \$1.25 per bushel which meant an income of \$50 per acre on land that had cost him less than 50¢. Surely this should have started a mass movement to the Valley. Some people had visions of spending \$320 for a section of land which would bring them a \$32,000 crop in one year, still no one came to the Dakotas.

Finally, James B. Power convinced two directors of the Northern Pacific that they should leave Wall Street and invest some of their money in Northern Pacific Land. Benjamin Cheney and General George W. Cass were persuaded to purchase 13,440 acres in an area about 18 miles west of Fargo or two miles east of what is now Casselton, North Dakota. The face value of the bonds that were used to purchase this 13,440 acre tract of land was \$35,000. The sale price on this land had been established at \$4.50 per acre. This meant that the actual cost of the treeless, stoneless, fertile prairie was 55 cents per acre. Once Cass and Cheney had established themselves, the railroad began to sell land quite rapidly. Within the next three years up to 1878, it sold 1.2 million acres of land, half of it to 40 individuals for an average sale of 13,000 acres. In December of 1878 other activity was taking place farther north in the Red River Valley when the St. Paul and Pacific and the Canadian Pacific railroads were joined at the international border. The dream of many St. Paul merchants was now realized for Winnipeg was now connected directly to that city by railroad.

History has proven that it was the price of the land to the initial purchaser and not to the profits of farming which proved to be the real bonanza. Cass and Cheney had paid about 55 cents an acre for their land. As settlers located farther away from the railroad, the market price of the land dropped. Land within the first six miles of the railroad was priced at \$4.50 per acre. In the next six miles it was \$3.50 per acre, and then in another six miles it dropped again. Six to eight miles reflected the practical driving distance for a farmer using horses. In the extreme northern region of the Northern Pacific grant in the area around Mayville, North Dakota the Northern Pacific had set the list price at \$1.23 per acre. By trading in stock that had a market value of \$15 per acre, it meant that the actual cash cost of this treeless, fertile, stoneless prairie was 16 cents.

Many of the people who came to invest in Northern Pacific land were not necessarily enthused about farming in this part of America. Many of them came here because they wanted to save their investment. One such purchase of the land grant was by a family of Pennsylvania bankers, oilmen, and lumberjacks - the Grandin Brothers. The Grandins had loaned \$88,000 to Jay Cooke and Company. Now that he was unable to pay his debt, Mr. Cooke informed the Grandins that he would settle with them at the rate of 10 cents on a dollar if they wanted cash, or he would give them \$60,000 of his Northern Pacific stock. Mr. Cooke had received Northern Pacific stock as part of his commission for selling stocks and bonds of the railroad. The cash value of the 660,000 worth of stock was possibly not more than \$4,200, but the Grandins came to Dakota to determine whether they should take the stock or settle for the 10 cents on a dollar cash offer. On his visit here, J. L. Grandin determined that the land was valuable and decided to trade Jay Cooke's note of \$88,000 for the \$60,000 of railroad securities.

The Grandins encountered difficulty for they were unable to determine exactly which land was theirs. Some of the survey stakes had been removed but they were able to find the original base piles of rock that the surveyors had put in the region and by using the base point they were given permission by the Fargo land office to measure off thirty-six alternate sections of land in two townships. By using a compass and a handkerchief tied to a spoke of a buggy wheel, they were able to determine direction and distance for measuring land. In this manner they measured their own land - 19,800 acres in all in return for a worthless note of \$88,000.

The Grandins were so enthused about the future of the Valley that they decided to purchase more Northern Pacific stock in order to trade for more of the Valley land. J. L. Grandin returned to Pennsylvania and purchased stock for \$7 to \$15 from investors who were reluctant to move to this

region. He wired back to Oliver Dalrymple who he had met on his trip to Fargo, and instructed him to go farther north and secure any of the unpurchased land on the northern edge of the land grant. At that time Dalrymple was able to purchase another 22,580 acres for the Grandins which cost them \$2,700 in cash. Most of this land was in the area of Mayville, North Dakota. When the Grandins had completed their purchases they owned 75,535.26 acres which was divided into several farms around Mayville, Hillsboro, Blanchard, Portland, and Grandin, North Dakota, and Halstad, and Georgetown, Minnesota.

Other prominent individuals purchased land in this region during the years 1877-78-79. Charlemagne Tower, who was known as the iron millionaire of Pennsylvania, secured 28,240 acres near what is now Tower City, North Dakota. Frederick Billings, one of the directors of the Northern Pacific and a perpetual speculator, had 28,672 acres in the region. George W. Christian secured 28,060 acres. The Carrington Brothers and Casey, from Toledo, Ohio, secured 35,782 acres in the area around Carrington, North Dakota. Mr. Steele and Mr. Small secured 48,000 acres farther west in Dakota. Two gentlemen, Mr. Griggs and Mr. Foster had 35,756 acres in the area of Griggs and Foster Counties in east central Dakota. Some lumberjacks from Michigan and south-eastern Minnesota who had hit it lucky in a minor gold mining adventure in southwestern United States, decided to try their luck in Northern Pacific land. The Cooper Brothers secured 34,080 acres in the area that is now Cooperstown. H. D. Clark, a brewer from Pennsylvania, was looking for a better place to grow barley for his brewery. He secured 25,500 acres a short distance east of Bismarck. Major Buttz, a lawyer from South Carolina, went out on the southwestern branch of the North-ern Pacific toward LaMoure and secured 36,000 acres near what is now Buttzville and built a 45,000 bushel elevator. An ardent Presbyterian, B. S. Russell, who is possibly best known for his religious activities in the state, was the trustee for a corporate farm called Spiritwood. Spiritwood, which is east of Jamestown, had about 20,000 acres and specialized in sheep raising. Knowledge about this farm is quite limited although it is known to have had a 102-bed dormitory on the headquarters farm. Congressman Dwight from New York secured 27,000 acres in the area of Dwight and Mooretown, North Dakota, west of Wahpeton. Francis Downing, a manufacturer from Massachusetts, secured 27,000 acres in the area west of Wahpeton. He did not come out here himself but sent his nephew, F. A. Bagg who became one of the better known bonanza managers. Lord Francis Sykes from England sent his son over to form what might be called a settlement company. They had 10,000 acres near Warren, Minnesota, and developed another 45,000 acres in the area of Sykeston, North Dakota.

One of the most unique of all the bonanza settlements originated with forty individuals from Amenia, New York and Sharon, Connecticut. These forty people had invested about \$92,000 in Northern Pacific stock that were now worth about \$7,000. Rather than sell their stocks at market price, they decided to incorporate and trade their stock for Dakota land and hope that the rise in land values would enable them to recover their investment. The newly incorporated Amenia and Sharon Land Company sent E. W. Chaffee to the Dakotas to open up the land and sell it. Once Mr. Chaffee set foot on Dakota soil he became so enthused about the area that he decided that rather than sell it, he would develop a large bonanza farm. This farm grew to its greatest height under Mr. Chaffee's son, H. F. Chaffee who purchased the holdings of the eastern stockholders. In 1912, prior to H. F. Chaffee's death, the farm contained more than 42,000 acres. In addition, at one time or another, this farm had thirty-three subsidiary corporations involved in some type of agri-business. This was one of the last of the bonanzas to be liquidated. It was not until the high tax structure of World War I was imposed upon them that the Chaffees were forced to liquidate the bonanza by subdividing into individual holdings.

The most dramatic and best known of all of bonanza farm operations were those under the management of Oliver Dalrymple. Oliver Dalrymple was a graduate lawyer who had secured a large fee for settling the white man's claim against the government of the United States after the Sioux outbreak of 1862. Dalrymple invested his money in a large wheat farm south of St. Paul, Minnesota, and became the wheat king of Minnesota. Dalrymple was an immediate success at farming. He was also a very successful lawyer, but his love for land eventually determined his future. He speculated on the grain futures markets in Minneapolis and St. Paul and eventually lost his entire farm fortune. Mr. Cass, Cheney, Power were looking for a manager for their 13,440 acre farm at Casselton. Although they had some doubts about Dalrymple, they decided that he had the imagination, managerial abilities, and determination to fill this position. Dalrymple was anxious to come to Dakota, the land that he had dreamed of for many years. He secured a very fine management contract which provided for a salary plus the option to purchase into the original bonanza at the initial price at any time. Dalrymple did not exercise this purchase option immediately for he preferred to use his funds for purchasing other land. His contract eventually provided for 1/3 of the net income of the bonanza.

In the early years Dalrymple purchased land in the area as rapidly as he could, much of it on a shoe string. He was wise in this respect. Dalrymple realized that land value would rise rapidly in the Dakotas once the area was opened. He also realized that a successful operation on the bonanza for which he was manager would draw great attention. This would invite other people to come in to secure the profits of agriculture. Dalrymple made most of his money on the rise of land values. This, of course, was typical of most of the profits of bonanza operations. There were a few years when farming the bonanzas was extremely profitable, but in the long run it was simply the inflationary trend that made these worth-while financial ventures. Once the price of land and the price of labor started to rise in the Dakotas and wheat prices fell because of overproduction both here and abroad, bonanzas lost their profit margin. Dalrymple eventually had 65,000 acres under his signature and at the height of his operation was managing well over 100,000 acres. In addition to managing for Cass and Cheney, Dalrymple also had a contract with the Grandin Brothers. The Grandins had informed him that if he would open up 44,000 acres of their land in southern Traill and northern Cass counties, they would give him an undivided half interest in those 44,000 acres. Much of the land that Dalrymple secured in this manner is still held by that family today.

Dalrymple was interested in promoting the idea of the bonanza for he knew it would benefit him as well as the area. He let the papers and the farm magazines know his every move and he did not hesitate to imply that there were great profits in bonanza farming. Unfortunately, many of the records of his bonanza are no longer in existence. Dalrymple did such a fine job of dramatizing the Dakota prairies that the Canadian Pacific Railroad offered him a similar management contract if he would come to Canada. Dalrymple declined because he was discouraged by the prospect of earlier frost in the Canadian region. However, frost was also a threat to Dakota bonanzas and provided one of the first serious setbacks to these large farms. On August 16, 1888, frost hit the entire eastern Dakotas and destroyed most of the wheat crop. Following that frost there were a series of dry years with declining wheat prices - a combination that most bonanzas could not withstand.

Many of the bonanzas had to sell out. Those that were able to survive the dry '80s and the low prices of the early '90s managed to stay in operation until World War I. The special taxes to finance World War I by both state and federal governments caused the remaining bonanzas to liquidate them. Another fascinating feature which tended to encourage liquidation was rising land values to a high of \$151.50 an acre in the bonanza region. The Dalrymple farm liquidated its entire holdings by 1919. All of their farms were sold on contract for deed. Farmers from Iowa, Illinois, and southern Minnesota and many other states sold their land in those regions and came to Dakota with the idea of buying four acres for everyone they sold elsewhere. In their optimism they over-extended themselves. Then came the farm crash of 1921. Within three or four years most of the farms reverted back to the original owners. By 1925, the Dalrymple family, were again in control of fifty-four out of the original sixty farms it sold. Half of three other farms were tossed back into their hands and only three farms out of sixty did not revert to them. The three who managed to retain their farms were all in the immediate Casselton area. Albert Sinner, one of these three, credited his success to his cattle operations instead of relying exclusively on wheat to pull him through. Declining wheat yields and prices could not pay for land that had been purchased at the high prices of World War I. Mr. Sinner commented that he made almost no principal payment from the early '20s until 1940 when American farmers were favorably influenced by the high prices of World War II. He said he was proud he could be one of those who hung on.

What made these farms unique? (1) There were never more than 100 of them. I initially established that a farm could not be considered a bonanza unless it had at least five sections. I think this should be redefined so that no farm of less than 7,000 acres be classified as a bonanza. (2) In almost every case they had professional management. Men who were county agents or who had worked for agricultural colleges were hired to run these farms like a business. (3) Bonanzas were known for the good records they kept. Nearly all of the farms had at least one full time bookkeeper. One farm had five full time office personnel. The great volume of material on hand is evidence that they kept records of their farming operation to such a detail that plots of thistles and other weeds on the entire holdings were known in the office. Rotation, profits per acre, profits by various crops per acre, and everything else necessary to maximize profits were determined by the office force. (4) Bonanzas had to rely on large-scale machinery. To a great extent the machinery manufacturers had a hey day co-operating with the large farmers of the Red River Valley. The demand for large machinery to minimize labor costs encouraged the bonanza farmers to put great pressure on the machinery manufacturers. (5) Bonanzas were very progressive farms. Most of the bonanzas had their own experimental plots because they could not wait for agricultural colleges to determine what should be done next. In this respect, they made a positive contribution to the entire North American agricultural scene. (6) Bonanzas were demonstration farms. No one ever envisioned that these farms would become permanent. Once the good prices of the 1870s and early '80s disappeared, the pinch on their

financial resources be-came obvious. But by then they served their purpose. The Northern Pacific wanted settlers. They wanted the land broken quickly and this was the way to get it done. Bonanzas generally had their goal set on opening 5,000 acres each year. One of the bonanzas actually succeeded in breaking 5,800 acres per year until the entire farm was opened. The bonanzas were show places - maybe we could call them "show-off" places because they liked to plow and harvest with large parades of horses and machinery. Generally ten or twelve plows were used to plow a single section of land, and when harvest came to the bonanzas, larger numbers of horses, men, and machinery were gathered in a single field. The Northern Pacific ran many excursion trains and sold stereoscopic views to people in the eastern part of the United States and Europe simply to prove that such large farms did exist. At least two presidents were known to have visited the bonanzas - President Taft and President Hayes. President Hayes spent a couple of days in the Valley in 1878. Oliver Dalrymple had 100 binders in one field for the president to view. A couple of years later a trainload of European tourists came to visit the farm and Dalrymple had 130 binders in the same field, proof enough that they liked to show off to the important visitors from the outside. In 1893 the Elk Valley Farm at Larimore, North Dakota, was visited by 300 prominent agriculturalists from all parts of the world. This was in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair.

These large farms drew attention worldwide. It should be stated that there were as many critics of these farms as there were promoters of the operations. People in those days seemed to have no more sympathy with the large commercial farmer than we have in the agrarian sections of the world today.