PREFACE

This volume is intended to serve two purposes. In the first place, it constitutes the general introduction to the Town Studies of the Wisconsin Domesday Book. In the second place, it affords a tentative sketch of the history of agriculture in this state, which it is hoped may prove serviceable until a more complete treatment of that subject shall have been made possible through the intensive local studies which the Domesday Book plan calls for.

The work on Wisconsin rural towns (townships, many call them, but town is the technical designation), which has been in progress for about two years, had reached the stage where the data relating to twenty-five towns were ready to be cast in final form for publication. Then it was seen that the matter on each town could be treated in much smaller compass, and the whole series consequently published much more economically, if there was a comprehensive sketch of the history of agriculture in the state to which on all general topics one could simply refer, instead of repeating such matter in the texts pertaining to the separate towns. With such a sketch to serve as introduction, the texts of the town studies can be shortened about one-half—no insignificant item when we consider the cost of paper and of printing. Accordingly, I proceeded to write the sketch here presented, and found, as had been anticipated, that the data collected for the intensive local studies, although still limited in scope, were of unique service in this wider investigation. A volume of those town studies, twenty-five towns widely distributed geographically, including plats representing farms and farmers of 1860, is now in press and will be issued by the State Historical Society in the near future. Its publication will afford an opportunity of determining the various ways in which such a microscopic
historical survey of local areas may help to advance the cause of history.

The history of agriculture in Wisconsin is believed to possess so much inherent interest to Wisconsin people, that the publication of this sketch as a separate volume, of moderate size, is fully justified. To the full extent of the present edition, it is thus made immediately available for the use of libraries, farmers' clubs, schools, and individuals in both public and private stations.

I desire to make emphatic my description of the present volume as a sketch of the history of agriculture. No claim of finality in the study of that subject is made, and I am well aware that the rigorous exclusion of many sub-topics which others would have stressed in writing a similar work would subject this book to criticism, were its claims less modest. I had in mind to write down, in minimum space, just those things which would be most useful in connection with the local studies for which the book is the background. A number of topics, like lumbering, railway building, mining, manufacturing, commerce, and labor, have been treated with relative completeness by Frederick Merk in connection with his admirable study of the Economic History of Wisconsin during the Civil War Period, which was published by this Society as Studies, Volume I. For the present, and until more complete studies of the same topics for the entire period of Wisconsin's history can be undertaken, those portions of Merk's book which deal with them will serve the highly useful purpose, in conjunction with this history of agriculture, of underpropping the Town Studies. Other topics, as for example agricultural education, agricultural organization, agricultural finance, call for such extended special investigations that for practical reasons their treatment had to be deferred to a later time.

The bequest by the late Senator George B. Burrows of the major part of his estate to the State Historical Society, which has power to employ the income thereof for purposes of this nature, enables the Society to publish the present volume and
also to begin the publication of the series of volumes contemplated under the title of Town Studies. The Town Studies, since the various processes involved in their preparation are now fully worked out, can hereafter, it is hoped, appear at the rate of several volumes per year. General studies, analogous to the history of agriculture, will also appear from time to time.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance rendered me, in connection with the preparation of this work, by Edna Louise Jacobson, the Superintendent’s secretary, who performed valuable research and compilation work on phases of the study and put the manuscript in shape for the press; to Mary Stuart Foster, of the Library staff, who prepared the maps; and especially to Dr. Louise Phelps Kellogg, senior research associate, whose careful reading of the entire manuscript has added materially to the value of the book.

Joseph Schafer.

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