LOCATION.—The town of Castle Rock occupies township 7 north, range 1 west of the fourth principal meridian, in Grant County. This township, in 1849, was made a part of the town of Wingville. In 1851 the north half of the township became a part of the new town of Muscoda, the south half remaining in the reduced town of Wingville. In 1856 the township was given a separate organization under the name of Blue River, which in 1876 was changed to Castle Rock. It is bounded north by Muscoda, east by Highland (in Iowa County), south by Wingville, and west by Hickory Grove. The town lies about eight miles from Muscoda, by the usual roads, and ten miles from Boscobel, both located on the Prairie du Chien division of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad line near Wisconsin River. Other near-by towns are Fennimore and Montfort on the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad (Lancaster division), and Highland, which is now served by a spur of the same line. The south part of the town is nearer the last two places, the north part nearer Fennimore.

SURFACE AND DRAINAGE.—The town lies in the Driftless Area. It is crossed by two streams, the Fennimore and Blue River (the former joining the latter in township 8 north, range 1 west), which have their sources in the northern escarpment of the Military Ridge and flow north through valleys carved in the plateau, which gradually deepen, while the bordering bluffs grow higher as one descends toward the Wisconsin. Each of the two streams has several affluents, the most important one within the town being Six-Mile Creek, which enters Blue River in section 4. The valleys of the streams are from a quarter of a mile to a mile in breadth of cultivable land, which includes the alluvial, the terrace above the alluvial, and so much of the lower slopes of the bluffs as is not excessively steep or forbiddingly rocky. Along some of the affluents, valleys—or coulees—one out in similar fashion, but these are usually narrower, with a larger proportion of steep lands included within the farms. The ridges are generally narrow, but they have more flat, arable land where the streams flow at greater distances from one another, as in the south and central parts of the town, and less in the north, where they approach one another. There is a broader ridge eastward from Blue River and another westward from the Fennimore. The first connects with Highland in Iowa County; the second with Hickory Ridge in the town of Hickory Grove. These ridges are practically spurs running north from the great Military Ridge prairie, but they were usually lightly wooded.

TYPES OF SOIL.—No soil survey of Grant County has been published to date. But the survey of Iowa County, where conditions are very similar, throws much light upon the character of the soils in adjacent Grant County towns. The prevailing type of upland, or ridge, soil is the Knox silt loam, described as a "light brown or grayish friable silt loam having a soft, floury feel." Below the surface soil is a clayey loam. This type is largely of wind-borne origin (loess). It is a dependable soil for cropping, producing all of the cereals, also roots and vegetables, clover, and alfalfa. From the lower, gentle slopes of the bluff's down into the valleys, to the line of the terrace bounding the alluvial, the prevailing type is the Lintonia silt loam. This soil is similar in texture and composition to the Knox silt loam from which, by the process of erosion and deposition, it has been in part derived. There is mingled with it, however, in many places in Castle Rock sandy detritus from the St. Peter and upper Cambrian strata, cut into by

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FIG. 7. TOPOGRAPHIC MAP, TOWNS OF EAGLE, ORION, HIGHLAND, PULASKI, CASTLE ROCK, AND MUSCODA

Reproduced from United States Geological Survey Richland Center Quadrangle

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2 Joseph Schaefer, A History of Agriculture in Wisconsin (Madison, 1922), 12, 18.
the erosion process which formed the valleys. The distinctly alluvial floors are, as in Iowa County, covered with Wabash silt loam and Wabash loam deposited by the rivers. These are mucky in the damper portions, and contain also in spots sand, gravel, and other material derived more directly from the eroding uplands. But the basis of all these soils is limestone. The valleys are well drained by nature, the only standing water being in shallow sloughs, which are easily drained off into the streams. They are especially noted for their abundant production of grasses.

Timber.—The lands of township 7, range 1 west, when surveyed in 1836 by Sylvester Sibley, were described, generally, as "thiny timbered," or "very thinly timbered," with oak. The surveyor found no heavily wooded districts, and the uplands particularly were almost destitute of timber. The valleys had the character of oak openings, the annual fires of the Indians merely keeping the underbrush cleared away there, while on the windy uplands they often swept everything clean, though in places the ridges also contained oak openings.

BEGINNINGS OF SETTLEMENT.—A glance at the plat of landowners in the town in 1860 will show that the earliest purchases of government land occurred in the years 1839-41 and 1847-50. The total amount entered up to 1850 was very small. The earliest entries, in the thirties, were purely speculative, one being by a territorial judge and one by a surveyor; while those of the forties appear to have been suggested by the possibility of finding lead deposits near the heads of Blue River, a neighborhood in which the Blue River mines figured prominently for a number of years after 1836. The entries of 1850 were, so far as we know, the earliest made by actual settlers in the neighborhood, one of whom, Emanuel Dunston, was undoubtedly the first to establish a home in the upper valley of Blue River, though he lived in the town of Muscoda, not the town of Castle Rock. John Gilleland, a bachelor, who bought forty acres in the valley of Six-Mile Creek in 1850, put up a log house, and raised a crop of corn that year, going to California in 1851, may have been the first settler in the town.

The movement of settlers which resulted in the agricultural occupation of the Blue River and Fennimore valleys was induced by the survey of the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railway line via Muscoda to Prairie du Chien. From the inception of the project it was known that the railroad would touch the Wisconsin, on which river steamers had been plying as far as Portage (Fort Winnebago) since 1837. In 1852 Benjamin H. Edgerton, chief engineer of the company, made a preliminary survey of the route from Madison to the Wisconsin and down the valley of that river, and that route was then definitely selected.1 Land entries in Castle Rock were numerous in the years 1839 to 1857, the period during which the road was building through the valley to Prairie du Chien.

Agricultural settlers had entered neighboring towns in both Iowa and Grant counties some years earlier, depending for a limited market upon the steamer service at Muscoda and the needs of the mining communities at Highland, Wingville (Montfort), Centerville (the old Blue River mines), etc. Some of these sought out the rich and pleasant valley lands of Blue River and the Fennimore, as soon as assurance of a railroad encouraged men to prepare for raising wheat on a considerable scale.4

CONDITIONS AFFECTING THE PURCHASE OF LANDS.—Only a few speculative land purchases had been made prior to the beginning of the rapid settlement of the town. Unfortunately, the school lands of the 500,000 acres grant, of which the state had located 1460 acres in this town, were sold under conditions causing nearly all of them to come into the hands of speculators, who resold these desirable lands to settlers at an advance on the original price of at least 100 per cent. The school section also was bid by speculators, as were various tracts of government lands, though (except in Blue River valley) usually only the lower tracts remained by a kind of poetic justice "speculator land" for many years, to be used for stock range by the settlers. In some cases, the speculators finally allowed such lands to be sold for taxes.

PROGRESS OF FARM MAKING.—The farms of Castle Rock were in 1860 mainly in the hands of the original entrants of the land. Owing to the recency of the settlement, they were only well begun at that date; much land was still vacant, and the principal areas occupied were those lying in the two main river valleys, particularly the Fennimore. Much of the ridge land between the rivers remained undeveloped, but east of Blue River toward Highland the uplands were generally in new farms. Only two farms, one in Fennimore valley, the other in Blue River valley, had as much as 100 acres under cultivation. More than one-half of the area of the town was as yet outside of farms.5 In 1870 the number of farms was 86, improved acres 4045, unimproved 9805—or 13,950 acres within the farms. By 1880 the farms, numbering 112, included 10,652 acres of improved land and 7544 acres unimproved. The averages for the two censuses were: in 1870, 47 acres improved per farm, 114 unimproved; in 1880, 95 improved, 67 unimproved—or 161 acres in the average farm in 1870, and 162 acres in 1880. It is noteworthy that later state censuses show a decrease in the improved acreage, which in 1885 is given as 6405 acres and in 1895 as 7375 acres. This is explained in part by the fact that much land once cultivated, especially in the alluvial areas of the valleys—which were subject to periodical overflow—and on the narrow ridges, was later devoted to pasture and hay. In 1905 the improved land amounted to 8152 acres, the unimproved to 14,598, and there were 111 farms.

CLASSIFICATION OF FARMS ACCORDING TO AREA.—The difficulties surrounding the 1860 census, for this town, are so great, owing to the confusing of names in the Blue River (Castle Rock) and Muscoda lists, that it is futile to try to use the returns for that year except for individual farms which can be identified as belonging to landowners recorded on the plat. In 1870, however, there were no farms of the first class—under 20 acres. There were 9 of 20 to 49 acres, 22 of 50 to 99 acres, 98 of 100 to 174 acres, 21 of 175 to 499 acres, and 2 of 500 and over. The total for 1880 is as follows: none in the first class, 15 in the second, 19 in the third, 89 in the fourth, and 37 in the fifth. Only 2 farms overran the 500-acre limit.

These figures show that the prevailing type of farm, in the period just following the farm making era, was the good-sized farm of 100 to 174 acres, and that the tendency was toward the large farm, 175 to 500 acres, of which there were 16 more in 1880 than in 1870, while of the next smaller there was 1 more. The increase in small farms, 20 to 49 acres, from 3 in 1870 to 15 in 1880, is accounted for by the recent arrival of a few foreigners, mostly Bohemians, who were passing from the status of farm laborers to that of beginning landowners.

But gross acreage, in a town where uncultivable land is so abundant and so intermingled with cultivable areas, is an imperfect test of agricultural progress. The poorer lands were very cheap; even as late as the middle seventies some of them brought only nominal prices. Any farmer could own hill land who wanted it, for pasture or for wood—since timber grew on the hills very rapidly after the settlement of the country put a stop to fires. So, it is the arable land which must be considered, and by that test only a small proportion of farmers of Castle Rock were in the class of large-scale producers. In 1870, 50 of the 86 farms counted not over 40 acres of improved land, and none of the remaining 36 overran the 100-acre limit, though a considerable number reached it. In 1880 there were 60 farms of 40 acres or less, more than half of the entire number, while 42 contained upwards of 40 but not over, 100 acres, and only 10 had more than 100 acres. These ten were the large farms, and the largest improved acreage in any farm was 200 acres.

GENERAL PRODUCTIONS.—The wheat production record of 1860, as transcribed from the census to the plat, indicated a moderate development by that time in wheat growing. Though the farms were all new—none of them more than six or seven years old—several crops of 500 bushels were made. There was, however, at that date nothing to distinguish Castle Rock as a wheat growing town. In 1869 the average wheat product per farm was 276 bushels, which compares very dis-

1Letter from Nicolas Orth, August 19, 1922.
3Mathieu Schaefer, the writer’s father, was a settler in township 9, range 1 west, as early as 1837. He bought school land in section 6, town 7, range 1 west, in 1853, and settled there that year. Some of the settlers in the eastern part of the town came first to the mines near Highland.
5The exact facts cannot be ascertained from the work of the census taker, who confused the Muscoda and Blue River (Castle Rock) lists inextricably. Only minute local research can clear the matter up, since the census taker’s spelling of names makes identification from the plat impossible in some cases.
advantageously with Bangor, another Driftless Area town, or with Pleasant Springs in Dane County—the first of which had a record of 642 bushels, the second of 386 bushels. Still, Castle Rock stood number eleven in the list of twenty-three towns. In 1879 the average was 187 bushels, and the town’s place was number seven in the list of twenty-three. This relatively high standing was due to the doubling of the cultivable area during that decade, and especially to the extension of the area on the ridges—the Knox silt loam soils—and on the lower hill slopes where the soil was Lintonia silt loam. These were the best wheat lands, and when freshly opened were apt to produce a fair crop even under the most adverse conditions. But in five years after 1880 the wheat crop of the town declined 25 per cent, and ten years later it had vanished as a market crop. The maximum wheat production was reported in the census of 1870, over 23,000 bushels. Other market crops in 1870 were pork, in which it ranked second in the list of twenty-three towns, and beef cattle, in which it stood third. The almost limitless summer range for stock on the unfenced hill lands explains the last item, while the excellence of the alluvial bottoms for the growing of corn made pork raising a profitable industry. There were few sheep, due to a pest of timber wolves and equally destructive dogs. In 1880 the number of swine was 12 per farm, and the number of beef cattle (i.e. cattle other than milch cows) was 5, a decrease of 1 in ten years. Cows had increased by 1, and the butter crop had gone up to a respectable figure, though it was still low. In 1885 there were 858 more cattle than in 1880, and it is safe to assume that the increase was largely in cows, for the town was credited with nearly 22,000 pounds of cheese in addition to 18,725 pounds of butter, against a total dairy product of 19,000 pounds of butter in 1879. The change had been wrought by the cheese factories established for the town in 1881, which revolutionized the agricultural system. Some farmers, instead of running their cows on the hills, now gave up to them the best grass lands of the alluvial bottoms; they weeded out the non-productive cows, buying better ones as far as possible and raising calves from the best producing cows and improved sires to build up the herds. The result is seen in the report for 1895, which shows the town produced in the previous year 61,750 pounds of cheese worth more than $5000, and 23,010 pounds of butter worth $8087. The number of cows at that time was 767. From the beginning of the cheese making era the agricultural prosperity of Castle Rock, so far as the better farms are concerned, has been unquestioned; yet there is so large a proportion of poor farms that the town as a whole has a very low ranking.

Special Productions.—An interesting disclosure of the census is that in 1879 there were 89 working oxen on 86 farms. These beasts were used mostly on the small hill farms, particularly by recent immigrants from Europe. But the small new farms were relatively numerous, and so for a number of years the sight of ox teams working in the fields or draying on the roads was a fairly common one. By 1890 only 18 oxen were left in the town.

A product which was significant in several respects was clover seed, of which in 1879 the town produced 313 bushels, or nearly 3 bushels per farm. In that item it ranked well, and proved that the farmers were wisely taking steps to restore the fertility of their lands.

There were no forest products sold in 1869. In 1879 nearly every farmer cut some firewood, but only a few sold cordwood from their farms. During the next decade, however, it became customary on some farms to slaughter the fine young oaks which grew so beautifully on the once bare hills, and sell them in the form of railway ties. However, there is much more timber in the town today than was found there by the pioneers in the early 1850’s.

Value of Productions.—The value of all farm productions in 1879 was $51,588, or an average per farm of $460. Seventeen of the towns compared were ahead of Castle Rock in this respect, and only 5 were below it. An analysis of the censuses of 1870 and 1880 shows that, according to the former, there were 19 incomes of $1000 and over, the maximum being $2700, with 3 others as high as $1200. Thirty were between $900 and $999, 21 between $400 and $599, and 15 between $200 and $399. Only 1 was under $200. The 1880 record shows $1300 as the maximum income, with 1 of $1350 and 6 of $1200, but only 13 over $1000. There were 14 between $900 and $999, 22 between $400 to $599, 41 from $200 to $399, and 18 of less than $200. One farm reported no income. In other words, two-fifths of all farms were producing less than $400—a sure sign of agricultural depression and a suggestion that a change of system was inevitable. It was the situation revealed by these figures which explains the exodus around 1880 of small farmers from the town—and from other towns similarly circumstanced. These people went to the Dakotas, to Nebraska, Iowa, even Texas. Some of them, who sold their farms for barely enough to pay off the mortgages, are now wealthy landholders in the prairie regions. Those who remained—usually the owners of the better farms—adjusted their agriculture to the requirements of the new dairying, and prospered; so did also, ultimately, some of those who bought the inferior farms of the emigrants.

In 1904, however, the average farm income in Castle Rock amounted to only $582. Only three towns had a lower average. In 1919 this average had gone up to $1300, but with the inflated prices of that year this actually amounted to probably less than the average of 1904. All the towns studied reported higher average farm incomes in 1919 than Castle Rock. Three towns had a smaller aggregate number of cows, and nine had a smaller average number per farm. Three farms had a smaller average crop income.

Manufactures.—The town of Castle Rock was purely agricultural, but there were for a number of years two gristmills—one at the hamlet of Castle Rock in section 31, on the Fennimore, the other near the junction of Six-Mile Creek with Blue River, in section 4. The skilled blacksmith at Castle Rock (John A. Johnson, of Scandinavian birth) performed a service in the way of machinery and tool repairing which approximated that of a well equipped modern machine shop. There was for a time another neighborhood blacksmith on a farm in section 6. Many of the foreigners in the town, though engaged in farming, were skilled mechanics in various lines who occasionally worked at their crafts.

Villages, Post Offices, Schools, and Churches.—Castle Rock, in section 31, was the only hamlet in the town. Its business can be summarized in a sentence. It had “Sylvester’s mill, Johnson’s blacksmith shop, and Van Buren’s store.” The families of these men, of a millwright, and two or three others lived in the vicinity, but even the mill owner and the blacksmith had farms, lived on them, and managed them. There was a post office at Castle Rock, the mail arriving from Boscobel, whence goods for the store were hauled and whither produce bought at the store, mostly butter and eggs, was transported. It was the post office which finally gave its name to the town, and the post office was so named from a gigantic pine covered “castle,” eroded from the St. Peter formation, which is an arresting object in the picturesque surroundings.

*See History of Agriculture, chap. x.

The village was on the land of the mill owner, Daniel R. Sylvester, a native of Maine. He absolutely prohibited the sale of intoxicating liquors in any buildings on lots leased by him. When he sold his interests and removed to Colorado, a saloon came in, to the serious moral and economic loss of the neighborhood.
The schools of the town have always been of the one-room, one-teacher type. The earliest was opened in a rude log house located in section 6, probably in the year 1856. Others were added until the number was four, the same as at present. Well remembered teachers of the period 1856 to 1888 were Isaac A. Sabin, a New Yorker; Mathias Schafer, a native of Rhenish-Prussia; Charles Wanek, a native of Bohemia; also Sarah Switzer, Fred Sylvester, and Herbert Johnson, all natives of Wisconsin and all trained in the Platteville Normal School, as was Mr. Wanek. Mr. Schafer was educated in the Gymnasium at Trier (Treves) in Germany, and Mr. Sabin in some eastern school, academy, or college the identity of which has not been ascertained.

Among the Bohemian immigrants to the town were several families of Protestants who, with some of the Germans, maintained a Lutheran church located near the town line in section 4. For a number of years in the 1870’s and 1880’s the church had a pastor, a Bohemian educated in Vienna, who spoke both Bohemian and German, and who was also a practicing physician and a prominent character. He afterwards settled permanently on a farm. Later, preachers have come at stated times, usually once each month, from Chicago. A Catholic church located on section 27 has always been served by priests who officiated regularly in town or village churches located elsewhere. The Norwegians had a church near the hamlet of Castle Rock. Various denominations from time to time used the schoolhouses for holding occasional church services and Sunday-schools. Probably a majority of the farmers were of the Catholic faith, and most of them attended the large and flourishing church at Muscoda or the equally prominent church at Highland.

Population Changes.—The table printed at the end of this section shows that, numerically, Americans and aliens in 1860 were almost equal. But, significantly, the American families numbered 26 and the foreign 39. Ten years later the proportion was 8 to 98. Then a gradual change occurred. In 1883 there were 21 native families, 115 foreign; in 1890, 52 American, 102 foreign; and in 1920, 101 American and 44 foreign. Castle Rock was practically a community derived from foreign immigrants who at first were German, Bohemian, and Irish, in that order; then Bohemian, Scandinavian, Irish, and German. While most of the inhabitants now are American born, a large majority are of Bohemian stock.

The American contingent, though from the first small, was socially and politically important. During many years the leading citizen of the town unquestionably was Daniel R. Sylvester, a native of Maine, who served in the Civil War, earning a captaincy. Afterwards he held many town offices and also represented his district in the state legislature. He was not a skilful politician, however, and his leadership was often challenged successfully, especially since politically he belonged to the minority party in the town, Castle Rock being Democratic. Charles Van Buren, another eastern man, held the town board chairmanship for a series of years, as did also Henry Gore. The division of the foreign element into German, Scandinavian, and Bohemian rendered American and Irish control of town affairs easier. In recent years the Bohemians have had things much their own way, though apparently without manifesting any special race consciousness.

As farmers the Germans, who settled there early enough to secure the pick of the lands, were in the lead. One of them (Christopher Dieter) in 1880 was the sole representative of the cattle feeding class, having a herd of 70 steers which he pastured in part and fattened on corn. He raised some of these animals, but bought most of them from the neighbors. Another German had the largest number of swine, 68, while an Irish farmer produced the largest amount of butter. The leadership in securing the cheese factory was taken by an American farmer, and that same farmer (James Black) influenced some of his neighbors to begin breeding up their herds. Germans, Bohemians, Irish, and Norwegians all developed into successful cooperative dairymen.

### Castle Rock—Population Statistics

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