



# *The* Wonder Springs Chronicle

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## The Wonder Springs Chronicle

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## The Third Opening of the West: *Part 1*

*Three Acres and a Cow*, 1880s British Land Reform & 1920s  
Distributionism

*Forty Acres and a Mule*, Emancipation of Southern Slaves, US Civil  
War

*One Hundred Sixty Acres and Independence*, American Homestead Act  
1862-1976

Human beings are a risk  
adverse bunch. In fact this seeking  
of security is the real reason we  
seek to form bunches. Families,  
neighborhoods, communities,  
towns, cities, states and nations,  
as well as churches, synagogues,  
mosques, social clubs and lodges;  
the list is almost endless.

The physical issues however,  
flows from the reality of fallen  
man. We truly believe that there is  
safety in numbers, which is true to  
a point, that point being when the  
dignity of the individual is replaced  
with its loss. The more of that  
individual dignity we lose, the more  
we evolve into the so-called lesser  
animals.

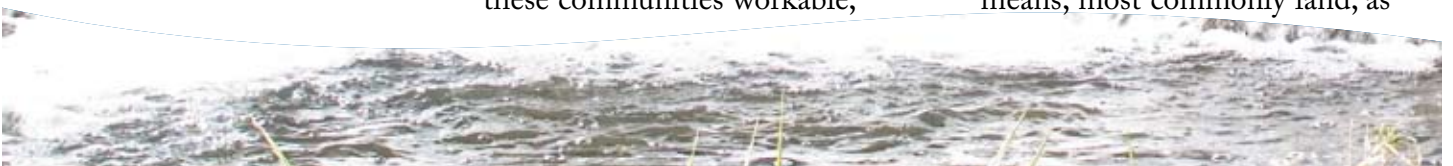
In western culture, to make  
these communities workable,

we first created a financial  
system called banking, in which  
we believed that a preexisting  
commodity called money could  
be managed in such a way as to  
increase security.

It took some enterprising Scots,  
enlightened by the Protestant work  
ethic, to give us a positive model  
for creating that global shining and  
secure city on a hill. That merger  
of banking and enterprise fueled  
the creation of capitalism, in which  
risk is controlled through the  
application of compound interest.

What happens however, if  
natural risk isn't covered by the  
simple compound interest spread?

Simply put, human beings  
seek their security through other  
means; most commonly land, as



described at the introduction. Since during the Age of Discovery and the open frontier all land was initially the property of the state, and hence land grants of varying orders, became the mechanism for development to take place, this is beyond the pale of capitalism and compound interest.

In other words, free or very cheap land, and the resources there of, and there on, became the mechanism that allowed risk and security to maintain manageability within the capitalist system. The opening of the American west was the means by which “those people,” outside the genre of developing industrialization, could have a chance to achieve security through self-sufficiency.

With the closing of the physical frontier, risk was essentially shifted from land to enterprise, in the form of industrial securities, or stock. However risks of infrastructure, too large or too risky to fit within the confines of this creative innovation, were continually assumed by the government and simply paid for by increasing taxes.

This system didn't work all that well, for it led to two world wars, a great depression, other non-war wars, Korea and Vietnam, as well as an increasing reliance on debt driven consumerism, stagflation and not so passive forms of military and environmental imperialism.

For a generation or so, we have attempted to extrapolate this decreasingly effective financial process by various booms and busts, in which we were so enlightened we believed that this time is different and we could achieve security without truly understanding the reality of the maturity of the Industrial Age; and we have yet to create any mechanism to replace this financial genius.

The quotations from the beginning of this article were historical concepts of subsistence agriculture. There is a twentieth century saying that goes something like: Those who think small subsistence farming is a great way to live; haven't tried it. In the twenty-first century we have fulfilled that universe in that: All individual farming and ranching is subsistence.

Today it is probably correct to say, without U. S. government farm subsidies we would have starved to death. It is also correct, because of U. S.

government agricultural subsidies we have created a precarious food system directly linked to many of our health problems and is totally unsustainable in a world of continually changing climate, escalating energy prices, and true limitations on the availability of water.

Barack Obama doesn't understand or care about agriculture, as long as he and Michelle can get an inexpensive burger and fries; life is good. Mitt Romney, we have taken to task for lack of any thought of food or agriculture in his almost 40,000 word Believe in America treatise. Herman Cain's brings us 9-9-9 where his claim to fame comes from the fast food industry, specifically Coke, Burger King and Godfathers Pizza, the chief beneficiaries of our nationalized agricultural system. This week Rick Perry's 20 percent flat tax, looks inferior to our Grizzly USA Plan, and like the president, he seems more comfortable talking, other than in debates, or providing concrete substance on anything.

Before we can look at the “Third Opening of the West” we must provide at least a historical context of the first two. For the basis of the First Opening we will include the period from the arrival of first European settlers and adventures, until essentially the American Civil War and the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862.

For the Second Opening of the West we will incorporate those 114 years, which encompasses the closing of the physical frontier, about 1900, and the New Deal farm policies that came out of the Great Depression and beyond. We declare this end with the “fence row to fence row” farm policies of Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz during the Nixon Administration for the nationalization of Agriculture and the beginning of the Third Opening of the West. So far this third crony boondoggle has led to the creation of the Great Fly Over, the God-awful Drive Through, the Right and Left Coasts.

These massive agricultural subsidies provide grains to agribusiness and food behemoths for much less than the true cost of production, greatly distorting and simplifying our national and international food supplies; making them very susceptible to natural and economic turmoil.

We have used the term the Second Opening of the West as expressed in Wallace Stegner's book, Beyond

the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West. For a more concise version of Powell's plan for development we direct the reader to: Charles Hutchinson's web article John Wesley Powell and the New West.

Putting it all into a context that is totally boring to those from either the Right or Left coasts, as well as the universe of most politicians, financial managers and economists; because we didn't listen to Powell, the Second Opening required the New Deal band-aid, which ultimately put American agriculture on life support. To keep the patient from dying, Secretary Butz strategically changed the farm subsidy programs from government bandages to government steroids.

It seems that governments, not only in the United States, but also around the world, are incapable of doing anything positively beneficial, which will lead us to a sustainable quantity —price sensitive food structure.

The future the United States is going to rely on, for the first time in our nation's history, and for that matter the future of the world, developing a sustainable market driven, wealth producing, debt limited, entrepreneur driven food, dare I say, human agricultural ecosystem, within a world of limits of energy and most importantly water.

Let us begin with a description of the land, "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian." Beyond meaning to the west of the United States' east coast centrality. The hundredth meridian in this discussion is roughly a line of ecological change between the tall grass prairie and the short grass prairie. These beyond areas, includes not only grasslands but also deserts, all of which have annual precipitation of less than 20 inches (50 cm) per year.

Generally speaking the tall grass prairies, east of the hundredth meridian, have annual precipitation between 20 inches and 40 inches (100 cm). Forested lands normally have rainfall of over 40 inches and are described as having poor glaciated, alluvial, soils that include mountainous areas. To put the hundredth meridian on a map, why not look to Minot, North Dakota, and use this as a north to south demarcation between the tall grass

and the short grass prairies. With a little digesting you now can understand the great natural blessings of the ecology of the United States of America.

The Butz failure in Agriculture is flawed, as is the previous Homestead — New Deal before it, because they all treat the entirety of the United States as tall grass prairie, Iowa if you will. Succinctly, you can grow just about any domestic crop in Iowa without the need for supplemental irrigation.

The Homestead Act treated all of America as tall grass prairie. During the homestead era on 160 acres, including the New Deal, you could make a beyond subsistence living, on the tall grass prairie and related lands that had access to irrigation water.

America's Dust Bowl of the 1930s had treated short grass prairie as long grass with disastrous results. Until such time as the Ogallala High Plains Aquifer runs out of economically viable irrigation water, or shale fracking fluid, we are treating this area as tall grass prairie. After the water runs dry, it will return to short grass prairie or desert. No matter how long it may last, the Ogallala Aquifer is one of our most valuable limited natural resources.

Actually John Wesley Powell thought that you could make a living on 40 acres with access to irrigation water, and even the civil war's "forty acres and a mule" also confirms that water access. The "three acres and a cow," borrowed from the English countryside, and abundant water, is assumed for the primarily Roman Catholic concept of distributism.

I had not heard of distributism, before I began researching this article. In fact it is not in either my Mac supplied dictionary or the Microsoft Word dictionary. The interesting thing about distributism is it is both anti socialist and anti capitalist in its worldview. It essentially believes that people have the right, and function most productively when they own physical property. The Biblical reference given to distributism is Psalm 37.

In many ways, it is quite similar, except in name, to America's secular micro-eco-farming movement. One, of countless examples, is the "Center of the Micro Eco-Farming Movement" and since I used their much specific nomenclature, they deserve a link.

There are a number of problems with distributism and eco-farming; primarily it is pretty much designed for subsistence. Using the distributism's cow, you need a market for your excess milk, a summer max precipitation of at least a tall grass prairie, (short grass requires at least 10 acres for grazing and access to external winter hay), a way to breed your cow, land to raise the calf, and means to have milk to use and sell while between subsistence calving periods.

Powell's homestead provisions took into account these limitations. As is true today, west of the hundredth meridian with 40 acres and abundant irrigation water, you can have an orchard, a vineyard and or a produce truck farm. Adding a little agricultural crop and livestock diversity and you might be able to create a sustainable, family enterprise. Add in a bit of agritourism and direct marketing, and you could become a poster example for the twenty-first century Individual Age.

However, out west, without irrigation water, with just 160 acres it is not enough land to do anything but starve to death. Without access to outside capital resources, and only with a real job, you do not have time to really do anything other than attempt to make enough money through agriculture to pay the taxes on your vast landed gentry estate.

Powell's proposal for non-irrigated land was 2,560 acres for homesteads that relied on grazing and dry land crops. That would have worked during the Second Opening, New Deal era, but of course that was way too market oriented for even nineteenth century government egalitarianism.

Three fourths of my ancestry are based on Washington territory and state homesteading. On my mother's side of the family we base our history in Washington from 1883 near Creston (about 60 miles west of Spokane) and before the American Revolution in the Carolinas on her mother's side. Her father's parents were immigrants from Denmark, arriving in Wilbur Washington around the turn of the last century. Her grandfather was a carpenter.

On my dad's side of the family his mother's father homestead is in the Waukon area about ten miles west of Spokane on the fertile fringes

of the Palouse short grass prairie in 1890. They were immigrants from Germany. My Irish named ancestors were very successful in upstate New York before the Civil War, probably coming to America, via Scotland, either because of the Irish potato famine or other reasons. His grandfather and father created homesteads in the Okanogan Highlands of north central Washington, when the north half of the Colville Indian Reservation was opened to homesteading in 1900.

I bring this up, because my mother's grandfather on her mother's side, homestead was a truck farm, orchard and vineyard on the shores of the Columbia River before the building of Grand Coulee dam. He was successful enough to buy other property and raise nine children.

On the short grass, good soil of the Palouse, my dad's mother's family were successful enough to still have ancestors farming in the area, and the tombstones in the Reardan cemetery are of such size to show they were not subsistence farmers for very long.

My father's dad and grandfather's homesteads in the Okanogan Highlands however were a different story. Sometime around 1920, great grandpa James Bannon had enough of trying to scratch out a living on 320 homestead acres (two 160 acre parcels) and left everything, including his wife, and headed for California, never to return. I joke he may have been the only sane person on that side of the family.

The interesting thing, in context of this article, is that if the Bannon homestead in the Okanogan Highland had been not 320 acres but 5120 acres, which would have by necessity included the bottom lands of the small Bannon Creek drainage, then reserved as Indian allotment ground, they could have made it as a cattle ranch, because it is within the size scope of similar ranches in the area today.

To close this week's segment, what this shows is that for a century and a half, the American government's development of our national lands, especially when we did not touch upon the land speculators responsible for building our transcontinental railroads, we see agricultural policies, up to the present time are dismal failures.

Things are going to have to change if we are going to provide anything but nationalized subsidized food, totally dependent on cheap fossil fuel energy, mining of water from ancient aquifers, and subsidized tall grass prairie crops of corn and soybeans.

One of the popular quotations from distributism about the failure of socialism seems to be appropriate: The Government forces you to put your eggs in one basket, and then they decide to take away the basket.