Tenancy considered : life of Henry C. Vanzant

Robert Christopher Welch

Iowa State University

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Tenancy considered:
the life of Henry C. Vanzant
by
Robert Christopher Welch

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: History

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
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Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the master’s thesis of

Robert Christopher Welch

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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As with so many other writers, I find this page to be the hardest to write, for the debts that I owe to those who have helped me along this path are numberless, and in many ways I am unable to repay them. The written word in many ways is inadequate when it comes to expressing just how much I owe to many of the people mentioned here.

The staff of the Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library, with their insufferable patience and skill, made my journey with Henry Vanzant possible.

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It goes without saying that any errors in the work that follows are mine alone.
Introduction

In the course of years, many men set foot in Wapello County, Iowa. Some merely journeyed across the landscape in search of homes and wealth that lay elsewhere. Others settled in the county for a short time, only to move on if it did not suit them. But a core population found a home in the rolling prairies that bordered the Des Moines River. As with so many other places in Iowa, this group took to the land and broke it to their will. For the most part, those that would tame it owned the land. But there were some sprinkled among this group that did not own that upon which they toiled. It was not always their labor but rather their very presence that enriched others. This population of agricultural tenants farmed the land just as their owner-operator neighbors did, and they faced many of the same issues. The loss of a crop meant the loss of a home. Commodity prices impacted the very ways of life that these families tried to live. Disease, drought, and natural disaster wrought their damages to owner and tenant alike. For the owner-operator, the loss of a crop meant financial stigma and the possible loss of the land that he had worked so hard to purchase. For the tenant, the loss of a crop might mean the reduction or elimination of annual rents if a lenient landlord held title on the land worked. At worst, a bad turn in the fields meant the loss of a lease. A new farm must be rented from a new landlord the next year. In Wapello County, the life and tenancy of Henry C. Vanzant confirms many of the realities of farm tenancy in nineteenth century Iowa. It also raises just as many new questions.

The nature of agricultural tenancy has been the source of historical debate for decades. For many historians, tenancy was the end result of a corrupted federal land policy. Following the Land Act of 1820, the government demanded cash payment for the sale of the public domain. The end of the credit system that existed prior to 1820 created a financial
crisis for emigrants who faced the expenses involved in creating a new farm. In order to obtain relief from the cash demands of an uncaring government, these farmers turned to the only people able to extend the means of land acquisition; land speculators and money lenders. Creditors allowed those who lacked sufficient means the ability to take possession of the land necessary for a home, given that they entered into a mortgage. When that contract went unfulfilled for the lack of a crop to sell, these debtor farmers faced two options: move on to a new area and start over again, or rent the land necessary to earn a living.

Conversely, perspective farmers could simply choose to rent a farm outright for any number of reasons. According to Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman, land ownership was the North’s version of the ‘peculiar institution’ due to its prominent position as the keystone to an independent yeomanry. The choice was theirs, but in the eyes of historians such as Paul W. Gates, flawed federal policy lay at the root of the problem of agricultural tenancy in the Midwest.

Others disagree with Gates. Allan G. Bogue and William Peterson, among many, offer a differing picture of tenancy. Tenancy was not a financial underclass, as presented by Gates. Rather, tenancy was simply a station along the path of land tenure, or more appropriately, the rung on a ladder. Tenants were merely future land owners who lacked the immediate capital to acquire land. In the eyes of Bogue and like minded historians, farm tenants had elevated themselves from the role of wage laborer in a community. After carefully saving and acting in the role of a tenant, these farmers would soon move into the

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role of a landowner. Ideally, all moved up the ladder and became contributing members of the community.

For the vast majority of his life, Henry Vanzant never owned the land upon which he lived. He never owned his house. At first glance, one might say that he never truly owned more than the clothes on his back, perhaps some of the tools he needed to earn a living, and the furnishings of a man attempting to live a comfortable life. But this characterization is misleading. Henry Vanzant consciously and persistently chose to live the life of a tenant farmer in Iowa. His was not a life failed by a government land policy, or marked by financial failures that impeded him from owning the earth upon which he stood. The life of Henry Vanzant is one marked by a seemingly rare choice in the annals of rural history. History has written that the aim of the vast majority of Americans farmers in the nineteenth century was the private ownership of their farms, and that only those unfortunates, doomed by the greed of another or their own financial bad luck, lived in a state of tenancy, working for another and living on another's land. Yet, Vanzant chose to live in a state of tenancy for the greatest part of his adult life.

There is another side to Henry Vanzant. While history marked him as a farmer who chose to operate his farm in a manner unlike that of his neighbors, letters and legal documents reveal another picture of the man. Here stood a land speculator, selling land and lending money to others. Here in fact stood the oppressive nature of western expansion that Gates wrote of in his studies. Vanzant’s actions in the role of a land speculator appear as if to model all those traits used as evidence against those who financed the expansion of America. Vanzant leant money to his neighbors, and then sued viciously for that money
when it was not paid. He bought houses and land parcels at tax auctions, becoming proptied at the expense of others who could not afford the taxes demanded of them.

Henry Vanzant thus appears an atypical representative of agricultural tenancy and land speculation in the period from 1850 to 1885. His voluntary tenancy of thirty years and his speculative activities challenges both schools of historiography of American tenancy. Vanzant never secured ownership of the very place where he lived. Tenants are often portrayed to lack the financial assets necessary to buy land, yet Vanzant not only bought land from others, he also possessed the assets required to act as a moneylender. Vanzant presents a dichotomy that challenges how historians have studied agricultural tenancy in American history. The work that follows attempts to discover more about the life of Henry Vanzant and his atypical tenancy.

The first chapter of this paper is a short biography of Henry C. Vanzant. Born in North Carolina in 1816, Vanzant lived and worked in the South until the late 1840s when he moved to Iowa. The son of Southern tenant farmer, their influence may have acted as a formative reason for his choice to seek tenancy in the North. Vanzant’s story is told through the letters he received not only from his family, but from his landlord as well. George Wilson, a retired army officer, played a vital role in Henry’s life by providing a hospitable situation in which to live. The relationship between Vanzant and Wilson can not be viewed through the filters of tenant and landlord. Rather, the words that flowed between them seem to speak to a friendship for the two men. Perhaps it is of no small importance that Vanzant ends his tenure two years after his former landlord’s death.

Chapter two investigates the relevant historiography of agricultural tenancy. This investigation centers upon the conflict between historians such as Paul W. Gates and Allan
G. Bogue. As described earlier, historical thought varies greatly when tenancy is debated. Using Gates and Bogue as a starting point, the historiography also encompasses the works of Seddie Cogswell, Jr. and Donald L. Winters. While Gates and Bogue argued the root causes and sweeping themes of land tenure, Cogswell and Winters worked to build an accurate description of agricultural tenancy in Iowa through statistical analysis. What emerges is an image of the ‘average’ farm tenant in Iowa from 1850 to 1880. While illustrative of the state as a whole, it provides a comparison with which to weigh Henry C. Vanzant and his place in history.

The third chapter discusses the nature of Vanzant’s atypical tenancy. Records reveal that in 1850 Henry Vanzant entered into an agreement with George Wilson to rent his farm near Agency, Iowa. Ten years later Vanzant made a loan for several hundred dollars to a local business. How did a tenant farmer amass such a sum of money? Why was it used as a loan to others, rather than a security for Vanzant himself? Much of the documentation that aids in the comprehension of Vanzant’s new model of tenancy comes from the legal documents he used to sue those who owed him money. What emerges from these pieces of paper is an image of tenancy that does not neatly fit into the historiography of American agricultural tenancy.

Henry C. Vanzant offers a rare glimpse into the life of a farm tenant. His papers reveal the decisions he made in order to pay rent and run the farm on which he lived. They also provide the image of a man who challenges the historical understanding of the economic role of a farm tenant in the community.
Henry Vanzant spent thirty years watching the seasons ebb and flow over the land that he lived upon. These seasons tied his life to the land, and they commanded his actions in his daily life, just as they did any other farmer. April brought the plow and harrow, tilling the ground in preparation for May, when planting dominated his time. He spent the heat of the summer cultivating the rows of corn until the Fourth of July and cutting wheat in August. Autumn found Vanzant and other farmers harvesting their corn and making final preparations for the long winter to come, spending the cold months planning for the next year and caring for livestock. While crops changed with the years and technology improved the work necessary to eke out a living from the soil, the tasks and times remained the same.

For thirty years, Henry Vanzant performed the tasks of a farmer on land that he did not own. Rather than working his own land, securing a legacy for his son and ensuring a place to enjoy his old age, Vanzant remained a tenant on the same farm in Wapello County. Tenancy demanded the ability to pay annual rents; it was his tenancy that forced his hand in the decision making process when planning what crops to plant and what emphasis should be placed on livestock. Decisions by the landlord also fueled land use options, forcing the tenant’s hand when it came to determining what to plant. These outside forces influenced Vanzant throughout his tenure on his farm, and are vital to understanding how Vanzant farmed and the options he faced.

Vanzant rented a 210 acre plot in the southeast corner of Wapello County, Iowa. The Des Moines River coursed diagonally through the county from northwest to southeast, its
tributaries watering the county's many farms. As with so much of the rest of Iowa, the watercourses and creek beds provided the location for forests, areas so attractive to settlers for fuel and building materials. These streams, and the wooded areas associated with them in the prairie states, were heaviest in the southwestern portion of the county. In 1875, when A. T. Andreas published his *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa*, the map of Wapello County showed heavy settlement near creeks and streams, a pattern of settlement established years before, when access to water, wood, and what many, mistakenly, considered the best arable lands in the region. The town of Agency, located in the east-central part of the county, and just southeast of Ottumwa, the county seat, sat in a prairie region northeast of the Des Moines River. As with so many other towns on the prairie, it acted as a hub for at least six roads; the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Rail Road bisected the town when it passed through in the late 1850s.

By the time that Henry Vanzant began his residency on the farm owned by George Wilson, Wapello County was well past the subsistence stage of agriculture. While settlement in the county began officially began at midnight on May 1, 1843, squatters worked the land in small numbers prior to that date. Wapello County was part of Royce Cession 262, the largest area of Indian lands ceded in Iowa, encompassing part or all of what would become 38 counties. Settlers had followed the Des Moines River into Iowa since the early 1830s.

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1 A. T. Andreas, *A. T. Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa*. (Chicago: Andreas Atlas Co.) 1875. The map of Wapello County appears on page 86. Settlement of the prairies along watercourses is discussed in various historical works on prairie farming. In essence, the lack of trees on the frontier worried settlers about the potential fertility of the Illinois and Iowa prairies. For more information about this settlement pattern, see Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books) 1968, chapters three and four.


3 Ibid.
Figure 1 Map of Agency Township, Wapello County, from A. T. Andreas, *Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas of Iowa*, page 86. The town of Agency is pictured as the dark town plat located under the township label “Agency”. Henry Vanzant’s farm was located along the railroad tracks immediately east of town.

and the conclusion of the Black Hawk War. Iowa was surveyed soon after the end of the end of the war, ensuring the orderly land disposal that characterized federal policy created by the Land Ordinances of 1785 and 1789. In order to avoid the confusion of land claims and land boundaries that characterized early American land disposal, especially in the South, surveyors laid out the public domain into townships that were six miles square and subdivided into thirty-six sections for easier sale. 4

The town of Agency acquired its official sounding name because it was the location of the federal Sac and Fox Indian Agency in Iowa following resettlement after the Black

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Hawk War and the land cessions the followed it. In fact, the farm that Vanzant spent so much of his life on acted as one of the first organized market farms in the county. When General Joseph Street arrived to take charge of the Sac and Fox Agency in 1840, he established the Pattern Farm, with the intent to instruct the Indians living at the Agency in the ways of “modern” American agriculture. With the closure of the Agency in 1843, Captain George Wilson, former superintendent of the Pattern Farm and son-in-law of General Street, took ownership of the farm. The farm, consisting of approximately 210 acres, remained Wilson’s home until he moved to Lexington, Missouri, in 1851, and Vanzant’s rented home until the middle of the 1880s. In a time when, following the Land Act of 1820, the largest parcel of land that a farmer was able to purchase at one time was one hundred and sixty acres, Vanzant rented more land than many of his neighbors owned.

Little is known about Vanzant’s life prior to his tenancy in Wapello County. He was born in North Carolina in 1816 and moved with his family several times before they ended up in Tennessee in 1824. This movement westward, from North Carolina to Kentucky, Kentucky to Tennessee, and a removal back to North Carolina, laid a pattern for Vanzant to follow later in life. Life can be made better; life can be changed in the West. For reasons

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5 Tom Quinn, “A Brief History of Wapello County, Iowa” Wapello County Extension webpage, http://www.ci.ottumwa.ia.us/Historic%20Preservation/history.html. Uriah Biggs, “Sketches of the Sac and Fox Indians, and the Early Settlement of Wapello County”, in The Annals of Iowa, Number 12, October, 1865. Appears at http://www.past2present.org/own/annalsonline/Wapello/1865OctWapelloCo.pdf, page 3. General Street died prior to the completion of his mission in Iowa, and the treaty that ceded the Sac and Fox rights to most of Iowa was signed at the Agency under the supervision of Major Beach, another of Street’s son-in-laws, and his successor as commander of the Agency.
6 Ibid, 1.
8 Hurt, American Agriculture, pg. 131-132.
unknown, the hopes of a new beginning as independent yeomen did not play out, and the family returned to the county of Henry’s birth, more than likely to the security of family and kin networks. The family remained tied to the land. This episode may well have impacted Henry’s own future decisions relating to tenancy.

While it is clear from the letter that Henry’s family were farmers, the earliest solid proof that Vanzant sought employment in agriculture came in 1841. The twenty-five year old received a letter from Robert Smith, a farm owner from Decatur, Georgia, offering Henry a job on his farm. While the letter lacks a definite job description, it is clear that Vanzant would be employed in a role overseeing the work of slaves. Smith wrote, “I will furnish five hands & land for them & yourself to Cultivate & be at all expence connected with the cultivation the Same & give you one Seventh part of what produce May be raised [sic] on the same; or I will give you one hundred & ten Dollars for your Services the next year if you think you can manage my hands.”10 In addition, Vanzant’s employer also offered free room, board, and laundry service for managing three men, a woman, and a boy.11 Because of the sharecropping arrangement his pay was reliant upon his ability to supervise slave labor.

Vanzant was not deterred by his assignment. Instead, he already had had experience with the supervision of slaves. While at a wedding in Rutherford County, North Carolina, Henry Gilforth, a friend or relative, learned that some slaves in the neighborhood had begun slaughtering hogs early. Gilforth’s letter to Vanzant, dated November 19, 1838, three years prior to the job offer from Smith, asked Vanzant to “attend to some of my business if you

10 Robert Smith to Henry Vanzant, November 25, 1841, page 1. MS-213, Box 1 Number 6; Iowa State University Library/Special Collections Department.
11 Ibid.
please . . .” Gilforth instructed Vanzant to begin harvesting corn and prevent the slaves from slaughtering hogs. While the letter asks a favor of one family member or friend to another, it establishes a familiarity that Vanzant possessed in acting in a supervisory role over the slaves of other people.

The duration of Vanzant’s employment with Robert Smith is unknown. In later letters, it appears that while Smith prized Vanzant’s opinions and performance, yet Vanzant apparently no longer acted in his employ. Vanzant’s life was changing, however. In February, 1848, Henry Vanzant married Nancy McKeown, a woman his own age and born in the same county in which he was born. That same year, the newly wed couple, along with two of Henry’s brothers, embarked for the West. It may be that the call of the West that Henry’s family answered without luck earlier in life sent its siren’s song again; perhaps the move was made due to lack of good options available to young farmers in North Carolina. Yet west they went, removing themselves from family and friends; behind them also lay slavery and the way of life that Vanzants had known for generations. The rest of his family did not remain in Tennessee for long once. Within ten years, the rest of the family picked up and emigrated to northern Arkansas and southern Missouri.

His employment as an overseer, while not problematic while Vanzant lived in the South, does raise questions about his decision to immigrate to a territory where slave labor was not an available option. There is no evidence present that Vanzant opposed slavery. In fact, many of the letters illustrate an apparent comfort with the ‘peculiar institution.’

Regardless of the philosophical debate, Vanzant was one of many Southerners to move to

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12 Henry Gilforth to Henry Vanzant, November 19, 1838, page 2. MS-213, Box 1, Number 4; Iowa State University Library/Special Collections Department.
13 Ibid.
14 “Vanzant, H.C.” History of Wapello County, Iowa.
southeaster Iowa in the years before the Civil War. In an analysis of the manuscript census for 1850, Allan G. Bogue and Mildred Throne show that what they term as the “Interior South,” the states of Alabama, Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee, provided the third largest group of native-born immigrants living in Wapello County, Iowa.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, Henry’s former residence of Tennessee, as well as his birth state of North Carolina, provided a total of 128 farmers, or eleven percent of the 1,155 total farmers in that county.\textsuperscript{16}

There is no record of the journey to Iowa in 1848. No diary remains, nor are there letters describing the journey from the mountains of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina to the rolling plains of the pastoral Midwest. Letters dated shortly after the journey paint an image that not all was well for the family in Iowa. The journey shortened the life of Vanzant’s brother Andrew. Shortly after his death, his family returned to North Carolina, leaving a widow and orphaned children in the hands of those same kinship networks that his parents had relied upon a generation earlier. When Henry’s father Jacob wrote in response to the death of Andrew, he encouraged his sons to return home from such an “unhealthy” land.\textsuperscript{17} Henry Vanzant and his brother William stayed in Iowa, however, settling in different counties. Vanzant sought to make a living as he and his family had done in the South.\textsuperscript{18} Vanzant turned to agriculture.

After renting a farm for two years, in 1850 Henry Vanzant moved to the farm he would work for nearly thirty years. While it is unknown how he came into a relationship

\textsuperscript{15} Bogue, \textit{From Prairie to Corn Belt}, pg. 23.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Jacob Vanzant to Henry Vanzant, August 4, 1848, contains Henry’s father’s response to the death of Andrew. MS-213, Box 1, Number 9. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections Department. For further information about the nineteenth-century concept of environment as either healthy or unhealthy, see Conevery Bolton Valencius, \textit{The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land} (New York:Basic Books), 2002.
\textsuperscript{18} William Vanzant moved to Des Moines county, Iowa. William Vanzant to Henry Vanzant, March 17, 1849, MS-213, Box 1, Number 15. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections Department.
with George Wilson, in 1850 he became a tenant on Wilson’s farm, the old Pattern Farm from the days of the Sac and Fox Agency. Wilson lived on the farm with Vanzant for a year, before moving to Lexington, Missouri. From that point forward, management decisions about the farm were made through correspondence. Rent payments, made in a mixture of shares of the year’s crop as well as cash, required shipment to Lexington. It is through these letters that Henry Vanzant’s life is viewed; Vanzant and Wilson shared a closer relationship than one might expect in a tenant-landlord combination. There is more extant in these letters than rents and payments or crop decisions. Both of these men share tragedies and triumphs, losses and profits. Vanzant acted as a conduit to a world of friends and loved ones that Wilson left behind when he removed to Missouri. Wilson felt close enough to his tenant to share his views of the Civil War and its effect in Missouri. Touchingly, both men lost their wives within a few years of each other, and the counsel they gave to each other rang through their shared pain.

Vanzant’s life in Iowa during the 1850s remained a quiet existence. Henry was an active record keeper, maintaining detailed of the records of the work he did on the farm property, which he charged his landlord for, as well as the income from crops and other assets. Vanzant knew the value of his own labor. The records he kept are replete with time spent mending fences, clearing brush, and maintaining the grounds of his rented home. These records no doubt acted as a means for Vanzant to defray the expense of rent, for although Wilson’s demeanor was one of a friendly landlord, Henry’s act of charging for work done on the property meant extra money in his pocket at the end of the year. In a bad

\[19\] Henry Vanzant’s financial records cover a period from 1850 until the late 1870s. All available documents are located the Vanzant Family Papers collection, MS-213, Box 3. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections.
crop year, the extra money reserved through the labor performed on the farm meant the
difference between a hard winter’s life, or the ability to invest in the farm operations. Wilson
might be considered a kind landlord, canceling rents in years of hardship. When Vanzant
charged his landlord for upkeep and maintenance of the farm and its improvements, it meant
a cash income as an offset to rental payments, as well as fiscal buffer against the lean years.

Life was generally quiet in Southeastern Iowa during the 1850s. Vanzant’s letters
from his family talked of life spread across the Upper South. George Wilson spent the late
1850s talking of issues both local and national. In 1858, the Chicago, Burlington, and
Quincy Rail Road (CB&Q) petitioned to place its right-of-way through a portion of the farm,
and ultimately the tracks cut through the farm. The presence of the CB&Q proved to be a
vexing issue for the tenant and his landlord. The railroad not only physically cut the farm in
half, but there were issues over fair payment by the company for the right-of-way through the
land, as well as the impact of locomotive traffic on livestock. In 1867, Henry Vanzant joined
a growing number of farmers across the country who sued the rail roads for the loss of
livestock hit by trains after wandering into the right of way. 21

The next year, Wilson began to extend his influence from afar in matters of farm
operation. Wilson directed that Vanzant plant one hundred apple trees on the farm.22

Orchard production never figured heavily in the income on the farm; there exists the

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20 George Wilson to Henry C. Vanzant, August 21, 1858. MS-213, Box 1, number 25. Iowa State University
Library/Special Collections. For further information on the expansion of the CB&Q Railroad into southern
Iowa, see Overton, Richard C. Burlington Route: A History of the Burlington Lines (New York, NY: Alfred P.
Knopf), 1965.
21 These court cases over whose responsibility it was to prevent livestock from entering the right of way is
discussed in reference to cases in Michigan in Martin J. Hershock, " 'Free Commoners by Law': Tradition,
97-123.
22 George Wilson to Henry C. Vanzant, March 23, 1859. MS-213, Box 1, number 27. Iowa State University
Library/Special Collections.
possibility that the idea for this project lay more in beautification or nutrition than in financial concerns. According to the Federal Census information for the years 1860, 1870, and 1880, the value of orchard products never rose above ten dollars; while ten dollars added to the potential income of the farm, it was not a financial windfall.23

In September of that year, however, Wilson became even more speculative in his managerial decisions. Turning from the normal corn crop and livestock emphasis, Wilson mused to Vanzant on the premise of replacing the corn crop with hay. While the change was never made, it is interesting to contemplate the changes this would have made in the life of a farmer. The change required an investment of $300 for the purchase of a hay press, a manual hay baler, in order to ship the hay to St. Louis, where it could be sold for $20 per ton. In Wilson’s words, “Hay is a healthy clean crop.”24 It also required much less labor when compared with other crops. “Take the entire labor put on a corn crop, and it amounts to a great deal from the first to last, much more than on a crop of hay and hay does not impoverish the land.”25 In 1860, Vanzant produced twenty-five tons of hay, which would have netted the tenant and his landlord $500 cash in St. Louis, by Wilson’s calculations.26 Five hundred dollars represented more than a year’s income on an Iowa farm in 1860. To reap that much reward from one crop must have seemed to be a gold mine.

Another consideration would have been the decrease in labor that Vanzant faced by changing to a forage crop for his farm’s mainstay. Corn remained a crop that required heavy

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24 George Wilson to Henry C. Vanzant, September 15, 1859. MS-213, Box 1, number 27. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections.
25 Ibid.
physical labor on an almost daily basis. It is not clear if Vanzant had the use of a mechanical
corn planter, one of the few labor saving devices available for the crop. If he did not, the
crop needed to be planted in rows by hand. Following the emergence of the young plants,
the task of cultivating fields began. Every day, from May until early July, weeds needed to
be chopped out of the corn to prevent competition for water and nutrients. By changing to
hay, Vanzant would reduce the amount of work required on the farm. Some crops needed
only to be sown once, and a new crop could be cut every few weeks in the summer time.
Rather than being forced to labor intensely every day in the corn field, the change to hay
might have rewarded Vanzant with relative leisure time and the opportunity to pursue other
means of making a living.

For Henry Vanzant, the decade brought terrible destruction to his native South began
with a sudden loss of his own. In late May, 1860, Vanzant's barn burned to the ground,
destroying not only the building, but also his implements, his grain, and his hay. As a tenant,
Vanzant did not have to face replacing the loss of the barn; his landlord stood the loss
entirely. But he did lose all of his implements, although no inventory exists to show how
large an impact that was. He also faced the loss of his stocks of grain and hay and this
necessity required that he purchase sufficient amounts to feed his animals until the autumn of
the year brought forth a new harvest. The United States census for 1860, taken shortly before
the fire, showed that he claimed one hundred dollars as the total value of all of his
implements and machinery.27 This would indicate that Vanzant made some investment in mechanization, though how much and what implements he owned are pure speculation.

The secession crisis lay firmly upon Vanzant’s doorstep as it unfolded in late 1860 and early 1861. Not only did his landlord reside in the border state of Missouri, but Vanzant’s own family lived either in Missouri or Arkansas, having moved there in the late 1850s.28 On April 16, 1861, George Wilson wrote again to his tenant, commenting on a recent trip both men had embarked upon, as well as the state of his family. Things turned to national events and the impending crisis of the Union.

God only knows what will become of the country; Lincoln will bring on a civil war if possible, and we here in the midst of a powerful excitement. The people of Missouri are changing everyday, and now going for secession, I am very sure; the state Convention did not speak the sentiments of the people at all, and they repudiate their action. Lincoln now is regarded as no better than John Brown, and all now see that he is a man of very little talent. The question will be South and North and no child’s play will it be, if the people in the free states are unprincipled enough to enlist under the abolition banner, and if they do they can never succeed.29

Just four days after the firing on Fort Sumter, Wilson turned his hopes to those of old men in the face of an oncoming war. “Political excitement is not to your taste nor mine, the quiet peaceful walks of life are what we covet, but circumstances around us are not what we desire


28 Various letters in the collection detail the removal of the family from Tennessee and North Carolina to Missouri and Arkansas. See MS-213, box 1, for examples. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections.

29 George Wilson to Henry C. Vanzant, April 16, 1861. MS-213, Box 1, number 36. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections.
them; a wild fierce feeling is sweeping over the free states, it will be met by a power, of which the people there have no idea.\textsuperscript{30}

While "political excitement" may not have held personal sway over Wilson and Vanzant, it did for literally millions of other men throughout both sides of the conflict, and the Vanzant family was not immune to it. On August 17, 1861, William, Henry's brother who migrated from Tennessee to Iowa with him. William enlisted in the First Iowa Light Artillery Battery.\textsuperscript{31} He would see action with the army at the battles of Pea Ridge, Chickasaw Bayou, Arkansas Post, Port Gibson, the siege of Vicksburg, across the Trans-Mississippi Theater of the war. As in the cases of so many other men who served on both sides, it was not a bullet, shell, or bayonet that struck down the younger Vanzant. Two months after the fall of Vicksburg, William began to fall ill. He would spend the last six months of his life moving from one army hospital to another; he succumbed to a disease, noted only as an inflammation of the stomach, on February 12, 1864.\textsuperscript{32}

William was not the only member of the family who served during the war. Four of Henry's cousins that still lived in Kentucky enlisted in Company D, Thirteenth Kentucky Infantry (U.S.). All four survived the war, passing through such battles as Shiloh, Corinth, and the March to the Sea, and mustered out together on June 12, 1865.\textsuperscript{33} Closer to home, Henry received a letter from his brother James, living in southern Missouri, in July of 1863. According to James, those members of the family living in Arkansas, including his father,

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} The Vanzant collection is rife with letters from William describing his life in the army, as well as the letters he received and the diary he kept during his service. These are located in boxes 1 through 3, MS-213. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections Department.
\textsuperscript{33} James M. Vanzant to Henry C. Vanzant, May 22, 1863. MS-213, Box 1, Number 73. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections. Service record information for the four brothers at http://home.flash.net/~geneperk/13Aframe.html.
mother, and two brothers, were all “cecessh”, Confederate sympathizers. At least one brother, Washington, was a Confederate soldier in a Federal prison camp; Jahu, one of the youngest brothers, had died during the early months of the war.34

George Wilson also felt the wrath of the war. On Christmas Day, 1861, Wilson wrote Vanzant, describing “a good deal of trouble” in the Lexington area. “. . . the Governor has sent militia here which makes every one down in the mouth about business and makes it a bad time to have the care of a bank . . . . If this part of our state dont get more quiet I shall leave it.”35 Wilson did leave Lexington. Until the end of the war, the few letters from Wilson were written in Nebraska City, Nebraska Territory. No mention is made of the reason for the desertion of the family home, but it is not hard to imagine that the Wilsons acted in the role of displaced citizens, forced to leave Lexington due to the military conflict in Missouri, or perhaps due to political sentiments.

After the war, life struggled to return to normalcy. Wilson once again became interested in planting apple trees on the farm.36 Wilson also commented upon the Confederados, those Southerners, displeased with the outcome of the war, who immigrated to Brazil in order to maintain their slave based lifestyle. Wilson extols much about the benefits of Brazil, including slavery, but does comment that the climate contained the potential to make people of the upper classes lazy.37 Letters from the family in Missouri and Arkansas resumed after the war, although in perhaps a turn of irony, Henry’s father, Jacob, wrote to

34 James H. Vanzant to Henry C. Vanzant, July 25, 1863. MS-213, Box 1, Number 74. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections.
35 George Wilson to Henry C. Vanzant, December 25, 1861. MS-213, Box 1, Number 41a. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections.
36 George Wilson to Henry C. Vanzant, October 9, 1866. MS-213, Box 2, Number 44. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections.
37 George Wilson to Henry C. Vanzant, March 18, 1867. MS-213, Box 2, Number 47. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections.
Henry initially to gather information about William’s service record and death in the army so that the Confederate father might profit from the Federal son’s death and the pension due to the survivors. How this sat with Henry, forced to cover the many debts of William while he was in the service, and after his death, is unknown.\footnote{Jacob Vanzant to Henry C. Vanzant, October 30, 1866. MS-213, Box 2, Numbers 45 and 46. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections. Several other letters in the collection deal with Henry attempting to pay notes left by William prior to his enlistment.}

American agriculture between 1850 and 1870 underwent a massive revolution in technology and method. Henry Vanzant was as much a part of this revolution as were his neighbors. In 1860, Vanzant reported to the census marshal that he owned $100 worth of implements and machines, many of these he no doubt lost during the barn fire mentioned earlier. The 1870 census showed that Vanzant did not fear modernity: he estimated his investment in machinery and implements at $500.\footnote{United States Census Bureau. \textit{Eighth Census of the United States. “Schedule of Agriculture, Iowa.” Ninth Census of the United States. “Schedule of Agriculture, Iowa.”}} While no definitive inventory exists to show what machines Vanzant owned, Allan Bogue offers a glimpse into what they might be. In \textit{From Prairie to Corn Belt}, Bogue quotes a price list offered by the Commissioner of Agriculture in 1862 that listed implements and machines necessary, in his mind, for farming in 1862. Plows ranged from ten to twenty-four dollars, dependant upon their purpose. Farm wagons listed for around sixty-five dollars apiece; a full outfit for a threshing machine cost $160, should the individual farmer choose to purchase one rather than rely on neighborhood communal labor.\footnote{Bogue, \textit{From Prairie to Corn Belt}, pg. 167.} Interestingly, the Commissioner of Agriculture did not list mechanical reapers or mowers as necessary implements; available as early as the 1830s and 1840s, these were some of the first implements available to farmers that greatly reduced the work required to cut hay or harvest wheat. Given that from letters with his landlord about increasing the...
amount of hay produced on the farm, it would be a logical step that Vanzant more than likely owned one of the two devices.

Another hint that Vanzant’s farming operation had changed was the level of investment in livestock. In 1860 the census showed an investment of $300 in livestock; in 1870, the census marshal reported a total livestock investment of $1260. The most substantial difference in the two years was the presence of eighty-five sheep that produced 400 pounds of wool. Not listed in 1860, the presence of these sheep may have been an attempt to cash in on the wool market created by the need for uniforms during the Civil War. Another increase was the number of non-dairy cattle. More than likely present as beef cattle, Vanzant went from five “other” cattle in 1860, to thirteen in 1870. With this increase in livestock, Vanzant required horse-powered implements to fulfill the needs for oats and cut hay to feed his animals during the winter. Indeed, his oat crop increased from 50 bushels produced in 1860 to 150 bushels in 1870. Vanzant’s corn crop increased even more significantly: from 800 bushels to 1500 bushels at the next census. The increase in both beef cattle and corn production may reflect the transition of southern Iowa into a commercial beef raising section, utilizing corn as a cheap means of finishing cattle for the market, but without further available information other than the decennial census, it is hard to tell.41

In 1870, death came to Henry’s door. Vanzant lost his wife Nancy, and his daughter Margaret, within six months of each other.42 Little is known about Vanzant’s wife and children. There are only a few letters addressed to Nancy in the collection, and there is no

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41 Statistics for these two chapters come from the eighth and ninth United States census. For further information about the emergence of the corn-beef economy in Iowa, see Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, as well as Ross, Iowa Agriculture.

42 Two letters deal with the deaths of Nancy and Margaret. J. S. McKeown to Felix Barnhardt, March 24, 1871, MS-213, Box 2, Number 61; George Wilson to Henry Vanzant, December 19, 1871. MS-213, Box 2, Number 62. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections.
mention of the children at all. Yet, within the space of 10 years, Vanzant lost two brothers to the Civil War, both of his parents to age, his wife, and a child. The causes of death were never mentioned.

Vanzant now faced the world with only his son, James. His daybooks for the years following the death of his wife show payments for a housekeeper. No more did the smell of home-made bread come from the kitchen; weekly if not daily notations marked the purchase of bread, something unheard of in farm households. Things so often made in the home by a wife and mother were now bought in town. Perhaps it is in the light of these changes that Henry Vanzant took a new approach to life. Family traditions called for Vanzants to farm, and often on land owned by other people. Very few members of the family actually owned the land that they lived upon; perhaps as a reflection of that, family correspondence shows a call to borrow money from one another to survive hard times. Henry Vanzant was in his mid-fifties when he lost so many members of his family. The physical ability to farm began to slip away, more than likely. Countless years in the fields, even with the use of horse-drawn implements, took an incredible toll on his body, as it did so many other men. The time was quickly coming when Henry Vanzant would require a new way to make a living, one that did not tax the body of an aging man. A way of earning an income that cultivated a sense of financial well-being that would help an old man in the later years of life.

In 1878, the people of Wapello County, Iowa presented a history of themselves for publication. As usual, following the descriptions of the brave deeds of her sons in times of war, the remembrances of the old settlers, and the glowing descriptions of towns and internal improvements, a short biographical directory of people in the county filled the end of the volume. As with so many other examples of this genre, the biographical notes were
laudatory works, proclaiming the successes of the people filling its pages. Bankers, military officers, and the large farmers and leaders of industry presented themselves to the reader. Tucked into these pages, amidst all of these men of great intentions, or at least intent upon self-aggrandizement, a simple note about a simple man appeared.

Vanzant, H. C., far., Sec. 36, P. O. Agency City; born May 18, 1816, in Rutherford Co., N. C.; when an infant came to Kentucky with his parents; in 1824, came to Tennessee; in 1848, removed to Wapello Co.; in 1850, came to his present farm—which he rents—consisting of 210 acres. Was Treasurer of the School Board from 1863 to 1872; was two years Township Treasurer. Married Nancy McKeown February, 1848; she was born, September, 1816, in Rutherford Co., N. C.; had three children, one living—James A., lost Mary M. in infancy, Martha E., died June, 1870, aged 19 years. Democrat.

A few scant lines represented a man who played witness to so much change through the course of his life. In the course of his life, slavery had thrived prior to perishing in the furnace of civil war; farmers could now perform formerly back-breaking labor while sitting down; trains now allowed people to cross the United States in a matter of days, rather than months.

The further ravages of time would not miss Henry Vanzant. Within two years of the publication of the 1878 county history, the farm that Henry Vanzant labored upon for nearly thirty years appeared under a new tenant’s name. In the United States Census of 1880, the census marshal listed James Vanzant, the only living child of Nancy and Henry, as the head of household on the farm. Henry still resided on the farm, but within a few years, he moved into the town of Agency, less than a mile from his long-time home. He resided there until his death in 1902. Henry Vanzant slipped into oblivion, only receiving a notice of his

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43 The History of Wapello County, Iowa. Chicago: Western Historical Company. 1878. P. 615
funeral in the newspaper. No obituary graced the columns of the news; a witness to history was gone, and few people seemed to mark his passing.

Henry Vanzant passed away in 1902. His legacy as a farmer ended far before then. Beginning in 1860, and for the rest of his life, farming financially took a back seat to another means of earning an income. It was far more controversial than the humble life of a farmer, yet it was much more a pecuniary boon than selling grain or swine. It was once said that it takes money to make money. Henry Vanzant took that lesson to heart. While he continued to be a tenant farmer for George Wilson, real estate began to take an important position in Henry Vanzant’s plans for the future.
On September 23, 1875, a small announcement appeared in the *Ottumwa Democrat*. Mixed in among notices of foreclosure, grocers touting their wares, and the announcement of a sale on tea at J. R. Young & Brother, appeared a notice of the redemption of a set of town lots for tax reasons. The language was formal and legalistic, and like a thousand other similar announcements that have appeared in newspapers across the country. For four dollars and forty-nine cents, Henry C. Vanzant purchased three lots in the town of Agency for unpaid property taxes for the years 1869, 1870, and 1871. Yet posterity recorded the life of Henry Vanzant as a tenant, a man who failed to own the very land that he lived upon. How is it that Vanzant was in fact a landowner nearly thirty years after he moved to Agency, and yet all other documentation lead him to be considered the tenant of another man on the land that he actually lived upon and produced his subsistence? How does the existing historiography of American agricultural tenancy deal with men such as Henry Vanzant? ¹

Agricultural tenancy has existed in America since the earliest settlements. Those with extra land looked to make that soil profitable without physically laboring on the soil, and as such, letting someone else pay a fee in order to scratch out a livelihood has followed suit. According to Donald Winters, “from the colonial period to the present, it [tenancy] has provided a way for some to derive income from agricultural land without farming that land and a way for others to become farmers without acquiring agricultural land.” ² For nearly as

¹ “Notice of Purchase of Town Lots for Taxes.” *Ottumwa Democrat*, September 23, 1875. MS-213 Box 4, Number 36. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections Department.
long as tenancy has existed, historians and economists have argued about the nature of this institution. For some historians, tenancy resulted from rich and powerful men amassing large tracts of land in order to profit by their sale or lease to smaller farmers without means.3 Others however have considered tenancy as an interim economic stage, a rung on the ladder of land tenure between wage laborer and landowner, for those who lacked the necessary capital with which to purchase land immediately.4 From this perspective, tenancy acted as step toward ownership; a temporary position to occupy while newly arrived emigrants or farmer’s sons investigated local farms and earned money towards the eventual purchase of land. While it is beyond the scope of this work to examine national trends in tenancy, the historical trends pertaining to the nature of tenancy in Iowa is pertinent to understand how historians have categorized men such as Henry Vanzant without knowing the particulars of any individual’s cases.

Much of the historical debate over tenancy in the United States has been informed by a larger debate about the goal of federal land disposal policy. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, large amounts of territory stretching from the Ohio River to the Pacific Ocean came into the possession of the United States through Indian cession and international treaty. How these new lands would be used revolved around two competing visions. One vision held forth free distribution of federal lands to the citizenry in order to encourage widespread settlement and agricultural production towards a picture of self-sufficiency. The hopeful symbol of this vision was Thomas Jefferson’s yeoman farmer; an independent landowner free from government interference and market dependency, and representative of

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3 This school of thought is best represented by the works of Paul W. Gates, and will be discussed in the ensuing pages.
4 The works of Allan G. Bogue, Donald L. Winters, and Seddie Cogswell, Jr. highlight this school, and will be discussed accordingly.
the ideals of the new American democracy to distinguish itself from an image of a class-
conflict ridden Europe. Jefferson’s agrarian view of America was itself countered by a more
capitalist vision of federal policy, one that viewed the public domain as a source of income
for the new government. Alexander Hamilton set forward the sale of the western lands as a
means to raise much needed funds to finance the operations and interests of the national
government. These initial debates over these divergent opinions of land use have fueled the
debate over American land policy and issues arising from it to this day.\(^5\)

While this debate about the public domain persisted throughout the nineteenth
century, it may be best exemplified by the debates over the Land Law of 1820. This signal
act ended the use of credit in federal land sales, established the price of an acre of land at one
dollar and twenty-five cents, and allowed purchasers to patent land in tracts as small as
eighty acres.\(^6\) The dollar and a quarter price per acre remained the price of federal lands
through Iowa’s relatively short frontier period. The end of credit sales, in the minds of many
Jeffersonian-minded historians, acted as the key to putting the West into the hands of
speculators and others bent on amassing large tracts of land. Prior to the Land Law of 1820,
those who wished to purchase lands from the federal government could do so through the
extension of credit terms, enabling the purchaser to clear his title to the land through
payments over a specified period of time. With the end of credit sales, those wishing to
purchase lands directly from federal land offices in the various states needed to present full
cash payment at the time of purchase. Several historians make the opposite argument and
suggest that cash sales encouraged speculation in land by those who possessed the necessary

\(^5\) For further discussion of Federal land policy and the schools of thought surrounding it, see Malcolm J.
Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-
assets to pay cash for parcels of land, and could then resell that land at a profit at some undetermined point in the future.\footnote{For further information about land speculation in the state of Iowa, see Robert P. Swierenga, \textit{Landlords and Tenants: Land Speculation on the Iowa Frontier} (Ames: The Iowa State University Press), 1968.}

Perhaps the one historian most associated with Federal land policies and the impact of those policies upon American farmers is Paul Wallace Gates. Gates published numerous articles and books on the nature of American land disposal and land policy through out his distinguished career. Most important among these are his articles “The Role of the Speculator in Western Development,” “Land Policy and Tenure in the Prairie States,” his book \textit{The Illinois Central and Its Colonization Work}, and the opus of his academic work, \textit{History of Public Land Law Development}.\footnote{Paul W. Gates, “The Role of the Speculator in Western Development,” \textit{Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography} 66 (July, 1942), 314-333; “Land Policy and Tenure in the Prairie States,” \textit{Journal of Economic History} 1 (May, 1941), 60-82; \textit{The Illinois Central and Its Colonization Work} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1934; \textit{History of Public Land Law Development} (New York: Arno Press), 1979.} Implicit in all of Gates’s work is the concept that American land policy, corrupted by the end of the extension of credit and the demand for a cash sale, allowed speculators and moneyed interests to amass large tracts of land to dispose of in such a manner as to enrich themselves at the expense of the yeoman. Likewise, the use of public domain and grants to finance internal improvement projects, such as railroads and canals, forced the price of land to rise to an unattainable point for the average yeoman. The existence of tenancy, a result of this policy, came about because those farmers who could not afford to pay cash and clear a title to land from the government were forced to either pay exaggerated prices demanded by these large-scale holders of the land, or be forced into tenancy because they could not afford to pay the price that land demanded.

Ironically, Gates argues that land disposal was neither Hamiltonian nor Jeffersonian. For Gates, federal land disposal focused on the concept of establishing the individual owner-
producer on the frontier as a productive citizen. In order to settle the vast expanses of western lands by these owner-producers, the government abandoned its initial policy of land sales at two dollars per acre in favor of a lower fee per acre. Theoretically, this new policy should have allowed settlement by individuals who would pay land taxes, produce food for themselves and the market, and would participate in the burgeoning market economy of the United States in myriad other ways.\(^9\)

In Gates's opinion, there was one point where federal land policy went astray. In his mind, the Land Act of 1820 was the corruptive force that redirected the great opportunity of the western lands into a financial windfall for men of means. As he states in his book *The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860*, "disillusioned by the difficulties that stemmed from the credit policy, Congress in the Land Act of 1820 required full payment for land at the time purchase and reduced the minimum price from the high level of $2.00 to $1.25 an acre."\(^{10}\) In the wake of the financial crisis of 1819, Congress completely abandoned the credit system for land disposal due to the number of purchasers who defaulted on government forwarded credit, and instead chose to implement cash sales in its place. With the advent of cash based land disposal, the federal government opened the door for land speculators. These mean acted as moneylenders and large-scale purchasers, fulfilling a need in local communities for those individuals devoid of cash yet desirous of purchasing land. This class not only possessed the necessary means to acquire land, they could also afford to wait for land prices to increase prior to reselling land. Although possibly not the original intent of speculators, while that land was increasing in price, it could be leased to farmers who would make

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improvements upon it, thereby making the land profitable prior to sale. Any improvements made by tenants also drove the price of land up as well; the simple act of opening the soil with the plow for the first time or building a house caused the price per acre to jump dramatically, and those tenants who made the improvements often could not afford to purchase the lands they diligently worked upon.\textsuperscript{11} Gates argued that “tenancy got its start in the Middle West as a result of the activities of land speculators and money-lenders.” To Gates, tenancy was not a condition brought on by market forces manipulating land prices, commodity value, or the cost of more and more necessary machinery to improve a farm operation. The moneylender, the man who economically facilitated change and improvement, lay at the root of tenancy for all time.\textsuperscript{12} Writing in the wake of the Great Depression, when thousands of American farmers lost all they owned to the mortgage holder and moneylender, Gates laid the blame for American tenancy and the corruption of the Jeffersonian vision with those creditors who controlled the supply of money. The farmers themselves, despite their heavy reliance upon credit, escaped the ire of Gates.

Not all historians agree with Paul Gates’s tragic narrative of American land disposal and the ensuing amassment of lands by moneyed interests. Rather than arguing that tenancy lay as the product of rich men amassing estates of renters on the European model, or that railroad grants gave away one-quarter to one-half of the west, these authors challenge Gates with the argument that tenancy was necessary financially, based upon the increasing costs of establishing a farm as the nineteenth century progressed.

\textsuperscript{11} Gates, \textit{Landlords and Tenants}, pg. 64.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid}, 63-64.
One early representative of this school of thought was William G. Murray. In a chapter submitted for *A Century of Farming in Iowa*, Professor Murray spoke of tenancy in Iowa and its persistence.\(^{13}\) In essence, Murray argued that tenancy was a result of many factors, such as the rising cost of buying a farm during the second half of the nineteenth century. Sons rented farms from their retiring fathers, while others struggled with the fact that in Iowa cheap land was often “undeveloped and far from transportation facilities.”\(^ {14}\) Murray broached another idea, one that bears further investigation in this work, because it is potentially relevant to the experience of Henry Vanzant. Murray hypothesized that there existed a class, perhaps a subclass of Iowa farmers that “preferred to be tenants on well-improved farms rather than owner-operators of farms in the process of development.”\(^ {15}\)

A generation later, Allan G. Bogue also explored the nature of tenancy in Iowa.\(^ {16}\) Rather than approaching tenancy as a form of economic repression and considering it as the monopolization of land by a wealthy set of speculators, Bogue conceptualized tenancy as a part of the natural economic cycle involved in agriculture. Not all farmers arrived during the early settlement stage and as such were unable to take advantage of purchasing land directly from the government. It follows then that as people begin to settle an area, the value of land per acre will increase due to a number of reasons, including demand, improvements, fertility, and so on. Any valued asset appreciates in price as the demand increases; those people without means of purchasing the asset must then find other ways of utilizing it, including renting.

\(^ {14}\) Ibid, 12.
\(^ {15}\) Ibid.
Bogue hypothesized that just as settlement occurred in stages, there also existed stages of tenancy. Each stage possessed its own logic for existence. For Bogue, some farmers moving to an area might choose to become tenants for a short period of time, perhaps a year or two, in order to not only investigate the qualities of the new region they lived in, but to also grow a crop or two in order to make some money and take care of a family. In fact, Bogue estimates that “as many as ten per cent” of farmers during the early stages of settlement lived as tenants. For Bogue’s emigrant farmer, “tenancy, indeed, was the surest way for some farmers to guarantee themselves a crop during the year of settlement in a new community, no matter what their financial status.” Tenancy also served as a sort of net for two groups of people: farmers in the throws of financial hardship, no matter the reason, and for the sons of farmers waiting to control the ancestral home after the retirement of the father.

Bogue methodologically diverged from Gates and Murray in his investigation into the root causes of tenancy. He conducted a statistical experiment to ascertain just how prevalent tenancy was during the second half of the nineteenth century. His experiment acts as a source for new insight into the nature of tenancy in Iowa from 1850 until 1880, since no statistical analysis of tenancy existed before then. The federal decennial census of 1880 was the first census ever to evaluate farm tenancy in the United States by collecting data about tenant farmers and their operations. With this gap in the available data, it was impossible to truly quantify the number of tenants in an area, and thereby lead to historical inaccuracies when attempting to estimate the true nature of tenancy in an area. To try and bridge this

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17 Ibid, 57.
18 Ibid, 64.
19 Ibid, 56.
20 Ibid, 57.
impressive gap in quantifiable data, Bogue devised an experiment to accurately estimate just how many farmers in an area rented their farms.\textsuperscript{21} Bogue began with the population census for 1850; anyone listed with the occupation of farmer was recorded. The next step consisted of looking to see if those men calling themselves "farmer" listed the value of any real property owned when they interviewed with the census marshal. According to Bogue, farmers with real property, defined as land or real estate, could be assumed to own their farms and were not tenants. If a farmer listed no real property however, then chances were high that this individual was either a tenant or perhaps a farmer new to the area and not yet installed upon a farm. To narrow out the beginning farmers, Bogue then compared the names that remained to the names of farmers who appeared in the agricultural census as heads of households and farms. Should the name of a farmer appear without real estate or property appear in both census schedules, Bogue argued, then logic would follow that this individual was more than likely a tenant farmer.\textsuperscript{22}

When examining the causes and persistence of tenancy, Bogue argued that tenancy also played an important role in the economic development of a farmer. Bogue supported the thesis that agricultural tenancy acted as a rung on the ladder of land tenure. Writing about the biographical entries located in the county histories of the 1870s and 1880s, many of which mentioned tenancy in the lives of successful men, Bogue argued that "tenancy for these successful men had been a step up the tenure ladder, which carried them from their

\textsuperscript{21} The results of Bogue's experiment are in Table 1, page 35.
\textsuperscript{22} For a thorough explanation of the experiment and its results, see From Prairie to Corn Belt, pp. 63-64.
original status as hired men to positions where they not only owned their homes but often owned rental property as well.”

“The agricultural ladder was an ‘old reliable’ among the concepts of the agricultural economists for many years.” The ladder of tenure was a concept that examined social mobility in an agricultural community. This theory mapped out the way that new entrants into the community began acting in the role as landless laborers, working for others, and eventually became tenants, renting farms where they controlled some, but not all of the means of production on a farm. These farmers, farmers with out farms, eventually climbed to the position of a land-owning farmer encumbered with debt. The final rung on this ladder was the position of a farmer who owned his land free and clear from debt or outsider control, a man who controlled all the assets he needed to produce a living from the soil, and more than likely renting excess land to a new generation of tenant farmers while employing laborers himself. Stating what is perhaps the silent undertone of the debate over tenancy, Bogue wrote, “we can be sure that few tenants preferred their status to that of neighbors who were owner-operators. Land ownership was the goal of most. But there is little evidence of class consciousness among the tenants in nineteenth-century Illinois and Iowa.”

Building off of the work of Bogue, Seddie Cogswell, Jr., and Donald L. Winters focused their work entirely upon the development of tenancy in the state of Iowa in order to test the hypotheses of both Gates and Bogue. Both historians agreed with Bogue’s premise, and based their work on his statistical experiment, with an eye towards developing a more

23 Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, pg. 56. In the same section, Bogue also notes that the county histories and their corresponding biographies rarely, if ever, listed the permanent tenants, or those who never successfully climbed the tenure ladder
24 Ibid.
specific vision of the Iowa tenant-farmer between 1850 and 1880. Bogue’s work tried to define a general view of the tenant; Cogswell chose to develop the image with a view of the age and nativity of this class of farmer, while Winters attempted to develop a picture of just how a tenant farmer farmed, and how that operation compared with his owner-operator neighbors.

Writing a dozen years after Bogue first published *From Prairie to Corn Belt*, Seddie Cogswell, Jr., opened a new excursion into the study of tenancy, the goal of which was to understand the determinant features of tenancy in Iowa. As his title, *Tenure, Nativity and Age as Factors in Iowa Agriculture, 1850-1880* implied, Cogswell’s main concern was the impact of age and nativity upon the prairie farmers of Iowa. Cogswell wrote, “the result of these and other deficiencies in our knowledge of agricultural history has been the tendency to over generalize in dealing with ‘the American farmer.’ . . . The result has been that while we know a great deal about the changing economic milieu, we know all too little about the farmers who lived in it.”

Cogswell duplicated Bogue’s experiment for determining the nature and variables of tenancy in Iowa. Cogswell’s sample for his study included six counties of eastern Iowa: Cedar, Clinton, Jackson, Jones, Muscatine, and Scott, all of which are located in the “nose” of Iowa. This opens a possible doorway for criticism of the study, as these counties, all settled rather quickly after Iowa legally opened for settlement and might not reflect upon the settlement and dispersal of farmers throughout Iowa. While this criticism is a small one, it

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27 Cogswell, *Tenure, Nativity and Age*, pg. 5.
28 Cogswell’s results are listed in Table 1 on page 35.
does not detract from the findings and progress that Cogswell’s study made. What did Cogswell find with his statistical analysis? To begin with, Cogswell found that tenancy in his study area in 1850 was 17.6 percent of all farm operators within his study area and that level grew through the period of his study.\(^{30}\) During the three following decades, tenancy fell to 15.1 percent in 1860, rebounded to 19.0 percent in 1870, and peaked at 27.3 percent in 1880, as recorded by the federal census of that year.\(^{31}\) While showing that tenancy grew during the period of his study, Cogswell makes two interesting arguments. In the first place, Cogswell argues that “tenancy ran its tap root into the economic and social soil of the frontier period; it did not spring out of the Iowa prairies after the frontier had swept by.”\(^{32}\) This is not a groundbreaking argument as to the evolution of tenancy; the research of both Gates and Bogue confirms this as well Cogswell’s second argument, however, goes directly to the heart of Gates’s argument about the nature of land speculation and money-lending practices in the prairies of Iowa:

\[\ldots\text{speculators may have directly reduced the proportion of tenant farmers by offering land on credit to those with limited financial resources. Again, by enabling land purchasers to maintain a larger reserve of working capital, the credit sales of the speculators may have indirectly reduced tenancy by insuring a higher survival rate among farm owners. Finally, far from driving farm owners into tenancy, the economic realities which dictated the speculators’ policy of ‘keeping people on the land’ probably kept many owner-operators out of the ranks of tenancy during periods of personal financial stringency, depression or poor harvests.}\]\(^{33}\)

In Cogswell’s view, land speculators acted in a community to allow for a sense of stability and financial security. Speculators extended credit to farmers in order to buy land, and as such, it allowed farmers to retain what cash assets they had in order to use them for other

\(^{30}\) *Ibid, 22.*

\(^{31}\) *Ibid, 23.*

\(^{32}\) *Ibid, 28.*

\(^{33}\) *Ibid, 27.*
necessities, be it tools, livestock, or any number of other items. As a result, tenant farmers lived on smaller farms, generally, than owner-operators, but those smaller farms included more improved land.\textsuperscript{34} This meant that tenants possessed more arable land that was broken and available for crop production and would effect production decisions accordingly.

How did Cogswell’s work add to the historiography of tenancy in Iowa? The body of the work concerns itself with two major studies: the impact of age, as well as the impact of nativity, upon Iowa’s tenant farmers. The results of his research showed that, on average, tenants in Iowa were younger than owner-operators. Cogswell stated that “during the formative years of Iowa agriculture, tenancy was most prevalent among younger farmers. Tenancy was not a ‘young man’s institution’ in the strict sense, for farmers of all ages were to be found in the ranks of those who rented farms. But with the passing of each decade the proportion of young farmers who were tenants increased markedly.”\textsuperscript{35} Secondly, Cogswell investigated the impact of nativity upon tenancy. According to statistical analysis, there was a mixed correlation between where a person was born and their tenure status that seems rather inconclusive. It appears that more foreign-born farmers were tenants in the 1850s, but as the decades progressed, the number of American-born farmers seemed to increase as tenants at a faster pace than foreign-born farmers did.\textsuperscript{36}

Cogswell’s study of Iowa tenancy goes much further, however. Unlike Gates, Bogue, or other historians who investigated tenancy, Cogswell’s study also looked at land use by tenants. Many have suggested that tenancy took a hard toll on the land due to the fact that tenants, in an effort to make money, practiced exploitive techniques rather than steward the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 49.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 39.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 30.
soil. Crops grew year after year with little rotation or diversification. Correspondingly, there was a minimal investment in livestock. Bogue mentions the issue of land-use practices in *From Prairie to Corn Belt*, but fails to investigate the issue in depth. Cogswell’s study confirms these core beliefs. Indeed, tenant farmers, concerned with annual production in order to pay rent and perhaps set aside money in order to buy land or labor-saving machinery, concentrated their utilization of land on the production of commodity crops.

The smaller investment in livestock and the reduced emphasis on diverse operations, showed a desire for a fast return on investment and a decrease in the development of a long-term pattern of development. Why build up an expensive operation on a farm another person owned that you may not be living on next year? The only separation from this point was the level of investment in swine; hogs reproduced rapidly, gained weight quickly, and provided a shorter and more substantial return on investment than cattle did. An investment in hogs meant a cash return in a period of months, rather than the period of years that cattle required to be saleable.

Three years after Cogswell’s in-depth investigation of tenancy in Iowa, Donald L. Winters entered the debate with his book, *Farmers Without Farms*. In his study, Winters investigated a new set of questions pertaining to Iowa tenancy. Winters looked at the nature of tenant-landlord relations and the types of contracts involved in defining the relationship of the two, as well as the efficiency of tenancy and the ability for tenants to actually climb the ladder of land tenure that Bogue applied to Iowa. Like Bogue and Cogswell, Winters

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37 Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt*, pg. 62.
38 Cogswell, *Age, Tenure and Nativity*, pg. 69.
performed a quantitative analysis of a set of sample counties, and he included the samples of all three historians in his appendices as a means of comparing the findings of the group. In many ways, Winters summarized Cogswell and Bogue, combining their work with some analysis of data that he collected and presenting a unified picture of tenancy in Iowa. He did not challenge the work of those who preceded him, but he synthesized the studies of land tenure in the state.

Winters's investigation of landlord-tenant relations showed that the vast majority of landlords in his survey were in fact in-state residents, and more than likely neighbors of their tenants. Likewise, Winters's study supported earlier conclusions about the nature of tenant contracts. Winters's sample of contracts shows that the vast majority of landlords, no matter if they were in-state or non-resident, preferred to receive cash rents rather than a share of the annual crops in payment of rent, especially towards the end of the period of study. This emphasis on cash rents coincides with the increased reliance upon annual commodity production as outlined in Cogswell's theses. Likewise, Winters's support for the agricultural tenure ladder reinforced both Bogue's and Cogswell's work. In essence, while Winters's work added to the body of literature, its place is more as an addendum to other works done, rather than a stand alone study.

Ultimately what image did these three historians paint of agricultural tenancy in Iowa? Allan G. Bogue did not leave a personal portrait of the tenant farmers he wrote about. Instead, Bogue described a state where sample counties showed an initial period of low

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41 Winters's table is reproduced in Table 1, on page 35.
42 Winters, Farmers Without Farms, pg. 76.
43 Ibid, 66.
44 Ibid, 91.
# Table 1

**Agricultural Tenancy Rates, 1850-1900 (In Percent)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1890</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buchanan*</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickasaw*</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarke*</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton*</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene*</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry*</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pottawattamie*</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poweshiek*</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor*</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnebago*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weighted Average</strong>*</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield Twp, Cedar County**</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Twp, Davis County**</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Iowa***</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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45 This table reproduced from Winters, *Farmers without Farms*, Pg. 14.

* Data compiled by Donald L. Winters, *Farmers without Farms*

** Data from Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt*

*** Data from Seddie Cogswell, Jr., *Age, Tenure, and Nativity*
tenancy that quickly increased following the Civil War. While tenancy began at more than ten percent in the areas of study for Bogue, the 1870 census showed an explosive growth of tenancy in both counties of the townships studied, as illustrated in Table 1. The counties studied by Bogue are located in Eastern and Southeastern Iowa, areas settled very early in the history of the state. The rapid growth of tenancy in these portions of Iowa illustrated an important reason some people chose tenancy. Not all pioneers wished to be pioneers. Rather than choosing to move to where land was free, or at least cheaper to purchase, farm tenancy in established areas allowed access to social and economic networks. Proximity to towns granted easy entrance into the market to sell crops or purchase goods, as well as the presence of family and friends to aid in the myriad aspects of daily life. The choice to move beyond the edge of civilization was a hard one, and for many, if the option to live near a town was available, higher prices or the possibility of short term tenancy proved more palatable.

Seddie Cogswell, Jr., took Bogue’s image of tenancy and strove to refine it. Cogswell added more variables to the image of Iowa’s tenant farmers. Statistically, Table 1 shows that Cogswell’s findings about rates of tenancy in eastern Iowa were similar to Bogue’s township studies over the same period. The area of study is comprised of six contiguous counties in eastern Iowa. As in Bogue’s study, these counties are located in an area that was settled very quickly after the government opened the state to expansion. However, Cogswell goes further to illustrate that while the nativity of farmers did not have a major impact upon one’s choice of land tenure, age did. In the 1850s, the early portion all three studies in Iowa tenancy, Cogswell found that tenants filled all age categories. By the 1870s, however, age began to play factor, and the latter portion of the era, tenancy is position held by young farmers in a community. Some are the second and third sons of farmers, those
who will not inherit the family farm. Others are first sons renting the family farm from the father during a period of apprenticeship.

Donald L. Winters completes the picture of Iowa farm tenancy with a more diverse group of twelve counties scattered around the state. Winters’s study shows the spread of tenancy as all portions of Iowa became subject to the plow. The results of Winters’s study, presented on an individual county basis in Table 1, shows that while there existed areas of varying growth, the general trends established by Bogue and Cogswell are held true. His work also helped to round out the image of tenancy by showing that the majority of Iowa tenants rented from resident, in-state landlords who preferred to receive cash payments of rent rather than a share of the crops produced. Winters’s work completes our picture of a Iowa farm tenant. In general, that tenant was a younger man who lived in a settled area of the state, perhaps waiting for a farm to become available to purchase. They rented their farm from a local farmer, and they paid that rent in cash. By 1880, approximately thirty percent of all the farmers in any particular county rented the farms that they lived and worked on.

Ladders of land tenure and skewed federal policy portray tenant farmers as passive actors in Iowa’s agricultural economy. Henry C. Vanzant did not fit neatly into this model of Iowa tenancy. Henry was in his forties when he became an Iowa tenant farmer. The greatest variance came when his landlord left not only Wapello County, but the state of Iowa. Non-resident landlords were rare. Non-resident landlords that demanded share rents were possibly the rarest of all landlords. The reasons why Vanzant chose tenancy are unknown. Was he financially broken when he moved to Iowa? Maybe he purchased a farm upon moving to Iowa and subsequently lost it due to poor crops or some other reason. Of all the possibilities, one does stand out. Perhaps Vanzant chose to be a tenant farmer. It was a
position he knew familiarly from his early life in the South, and it allowed him a certain economic security.
Chapter III
The Atypical Tenant:
Henry Vanzant as Tenant and Speculator

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Henry Vanzant became involved in a series of lawsuits. He acted in the capacity of witness in one case and as a plaintiff in another. Henry Vanzant, after twenty years of tenancy, now sought damages from another person in Agency over money lent and not repaid. The business loan that Vanzant sought repayment for in the courts became vicious. The aged wife of the man who sought the loan pled innocence and poverty for her husband in the face of the court when Vanzant sued for repayment of money borrowed more than twenty years earlier. It would take two court decisions against the insolvent gentleman in his favor before Vanzant found satisfaction. Such actions could be expected from a Paul W. Gates's stereotypical land speculator. Yet history labeled Henry Vanzant as a tenant farmer. The convergence of these two archetypes, the oppressed tenant and the hoarding speculator in one man, as illustrated by Vanzant's legal activities, draws us to a previously undiscussed member of the agricultural community. This novel position challenges the established historiography of American agricultural tenancy.

Precisely when Henry Vanzant became a land speculator is unclear.¹ Though his personal papers contain several expense books covering the entire period of his life in Iowa, none of them contain entries for rents received or payments made for the acquisition of property.² There is no mention of Vanzant's financial activities beyond his daily

¹ For the purpose of this chapter, I am combining land speculators and moneylenders into one group, known in this paper as ‘speculators’. When reading the works of other historians, both groups of people are described in nearly identical terms, and are seen as part of the same class of businessmen. As such, for simplicities sake, I will simply use the term ‘speculator.’
² Expense or day books can be found in the Vanzant Family Papers, MS-218, boxes 3 and 4. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
responsibilities as a dutiful tenant farmer. It is evident, however, that from an early point in his tenure in Agency, Henry Vanzant knew the value of his labor and time and this may provide insight into Vanzant’s attempts to earn extra money, or to at least defray some of the expenses of his annual rents. Vanzant’s economic journals are dotted with entries charging his landlord for labor performed on the farm. Every time that he repaired a fence, cut out brush, or swung a hammer, Vanzant’s pencil moved in his day book. It seems remarkable that a man who noted exactly how much he paid for every loaf of bread or plug of tobacco in his later years failed to track such a major source of income or expense, yet no records remain of his speculative activities aside from his legal proceedings.

What evidence then does exist that suggests this dual role for Henry Vanzant? Very little, it would seem at first glance, but enough to appear significant. One subtle reason presented in the correspondence between Vanzant and his landlord was the ever-present chance that his rented home might cease to exist. Tenant contracts were usually defined by a term of tenure. A farm might be rented for any period of time; a one year lease was the most customary. At the end of an annual contract, the tenant faced the option of renewing a lease or attempting to find a new home somewhere else that might offer better terms. In fact, there exist letters written by George Wilson, Vanzant’s landlord, that illustrate that Vanzant threatened on occasion to find another farm to rent, more than likely in an attempt to find better rental rates. Land not rented was a financial drain to a landlord, and these negotiations allowed the tenant some form of leverage over his landlord. Aside from this self-imposed contractual insecurity, the land owner held the option of not renewing the

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3 One example of Vanzant threatening to leave the farm is apparently answered in a letter written by his landlord in September of 1859. George Wilson to Henry Vanzant, September 15, 1859. MS-213, Box One, Number 28. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
contract or selling the land outright. A cat-and-mouse game developed between the Vanzant and Wilson. Vanzant occasionally threatened to end his relationship with his landlord, perhaps as a means to achieve better rental terms. Conversely, after 1871, Wilson began to speak of selling the farm outright regardless of Vanzant’s presence. This exchange continued until March, 1880, when George Wilson died. George Wilson, Jr., his son, either inherited the land from his father, or acted as executor of his estate, and continued the landlord-tenant relationship with Vanzant until 1882, when Henry left the farm, and his son James took over as tenant. The sale of the farm which he rented, the loss of his home from underneath him, might well have motivated Vanzant to seek an alternate means of making a living.

Another option to consider is that Henry Vanzant was an unsuccessful farmer, and as a result, the need for money drove him to find other means of making a living. The factors that impact the ability of a farmer to bring in a profitable crop are innumerable. Droughts damage crops, just as too much rain can. Grasshoppers and other insects can infest a field and devour every bit of vegetative matter that lay in their path. In spite of these considerations, there are those farmers who made poor decisions about land use and other factors on their land. As a result, they produced smaller crops and were unable to meet fiscal requirements set upon them. Perhaps it is more appropriate to say that Henry Vanzant utilized the land upon which he farmed in a non-traditional manner. Vanzant’s nontraditional farm management may in fact show that he was not solely dependant upon agriculture for the source of his income.

4 George Wilson to Henry Vanzant, December 19, 1871. MS-213, Box 2, Number 62. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
5 James Vanzant was the person listed in the 1880 agricultural census as the primary resident on the farm, with Henry Vanzant listed as an elderly person living with his son.
### Table 2 Total Farm Productions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>1860(^6)</th>
<th>1870(^7)</th>
<th>1880(^8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn (bushels)</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1085.4</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat (bushels)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats (bushels)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hay (tons)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swine</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, the column on the left under any given year represents production reported by Vanzant on the agricultural census for that year. The right-hand column represents the production of an average farm in Wapello County for the same year. In a comparison between the two columns, it appears that Vanzant definitely lagged behind in production when compared to his theoretical neighbors in some areas, while he surged ahead in others. What then can be determined about his farm operations?

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\(^6\) Information used to establish county means drawn from U. S. Census Bureau. *Agriculture of the United States in 1860, Eighth Census of the United States.* (Washington: Government Printing Office.) 1864. Means established by dividing the total production for the county by the number of farms in the county, which in 1860 was 914.

\(^7\) Information used to establish county means drawn from Department of the Interior, Bureau of the Census. *Ninth Census of the United States, Volume III: The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States.* (Washington: Government Printing Office.) 1872. Means established by dividing the total production for the county by the number of farms in the county, which in 1870 was 1703.

\(^8\) Information used to establish county means drawn from Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on the Productions of Agriculture as Returned at the Tenth Census, Volume III.* (Washington: Government Printing Office.) 1883. Means established by dividing the total production for the county by the number of farms in the county, which in 1880 was 2042.
As with almost any farm operation, Vanzant’s production numbers are unstable and vary widely from year to year. Any one of a thousand variables might hold responsibility in a given year. Rather than looking at these production numbers as a whole, individual crops must be examined. During the period of this study, wheat remained the majority cash crop in Iowa, although its importance dwindled near the end of the period as Iowa began to develop an agricultural economy based on corn and hog production.\(^{9}\) As such, it would be expected that Vanzant relied heavily upon wheat to pay his rent during his tenancy. Letters confirm the use of wheat to pay rent, but the census data presented in Table 2 indicate that it was not the primary crop on Vanzant’s farm.\(^{10}\) In fact, Vanzant never approached the level of wheat production presented by the mean farmer in Wapello County in any census year. Vanzant’s decision to not rely on wheat production might illustrate his background in Southern agriculture and knowledge of crop management that excluded majority production of wheat.\(^{11}\)

Table 2 is illustrative of Vanzant’s crop management system as a whole. Hay production far outstripped the average farmer living in his county. In a letter dated December 27, 1879, George Wilson lectured Vanzant on the appropriate methods for dealing with splitting the profits or income derived from pasturage and hay crops. “My views about a fair allowance for the use of pasturing is not by any means to claim any thing for profits of

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\(^{9}\) For further information about the changing emphases in Iowa’s agricultural economy, see, among other sources, Earle D. Ross, *Iowa Agriculture: A History* (Iowa City, IA: The State Historical Society of Iowa.) 1951.

\(^{10}\) In one notable letter, George Wilson mentions wheat as a portion of the share rent due him from Vanzant. George Wilson to Henry Vanzant, July 10, 1879. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 3, Number 1. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.

stock raising from feeding your own share of grain or hay, but I only claim 1/3 of the advantage of the grass and the pastures were to you." With the cultivation of so much cut hay, combined with the raising of cattle of all types, the census seems to reveal that Vanzant and Wilson relied upon pasturing and raising livestock for an income.

Livestock production seemed to dominate Vanzant's financial plans. Table 2 shows that with the exception of 1860, Henry raised more cattle of all types than his neighbors did, although cattle numbers decreased across time. As noted by Donald L. Winters, this is slightly unusual for a tenant farmer, as cattle take several years to grow to a marketable weight than do other animals. Rather than relying on cattle, Winters and other authors argued that tenant farmers tended to raise more swine for the market than cattle, as swine reproduced faster and reached a marketable weight more quickly than their bovine counterparts. Vanzant's hog production numbers in Table 2 give credence to this theory, especially towards the latter periods of his tenancy. Swine also provided a lucrative cash source after 1877, when the Morrell family opened its meatpacking company in Ottumwa. To put it bluntly, corn sold better on the hoof than it did on the ear. Vanzant's production of livestock and corn show an early switch to the livestock feeding operations that would come to dominate Iowa agriculture at the end of the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth century.

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12 George Wilson to Henry Vanzant, December 27, 1879. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 3, Number 5. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.


14 Ibid.


16 For information on marketing corn in the form of livestock, see Nicholas P. Hardeman, Shucks, Shocks and Hominy Blocks: Corn as a Way of Life in Pioneer America. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.) 1981. Chapter 18. For the conversion of Iowa's agricultural economy, see P. S. Shearer, "Iowans Feed Beef
Analyzing Vanzant's agricultural practices are somewhat inconclusive. Field crop production shows that he did not emphasize the row crops his neighbors did, yet his livestock production outpaced the mean farmer for his county. Several letters from his landlord indicate that Vanzant paid his rent with shares of the crop produced in a given year. In fact, the payment of rent in shares of crop production, according to Winters, was an unusual choice for Vanzant and Wilson to utilize for rent collection. In the first part, Wilson was a non-resident landlord, a minority position for agricultural landlords in Iowa. In Winters's study on agricultural tenancy, the overwhelming majority of landlords resided at least in the same county as their leased farms, or at least in the state of Iowa. An out-of-state landlord that demanded share payments, rather than cash, George Wilson defined an atypical landlord for Iowa. The simple action of shipping a rent payment, as recorded several times in letters from Wilson to Vanzant illustrates an unusual tenant-landlord relationship. In order to simply pay the rent, Wilson in effect required Vanzant to subject himself to the shipping rates of the railroads in between Agency and Lexington, Missouri. While there are letters that indicate that Wilson required cash for other parts of the rent, especially in the payment of shares of pasturage payments, there also exist letters excusing Henry from paying rent at all in lean years of loss or drought. While not unusual, it does illustrate a pre-market

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17 See Table 3-8, "Landlord Residence, 1850-1900." Winters, Farmers without Farms" pg. 75.
18 George Wilson to Henry Vanzant, December 27, 1879, is one of several letters requesting rent payments of wheat or oats be shipped to Wilson. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 3, Number 5. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
19 As noted earlier in this chapter, Wilson's letter of December 27, 1879, is the best illustration of how Wilson wanted profits from pasture use divided. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 3, Number 5. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department. In a letter dated March 23, 1859, Wilson claims regret at his sons collecting rent from Vanzant when they were under instruction to collect no rent due to general crop failure that year. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 1, Number 27. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
relationship not reliant upon money; a friend excused another from paying rent when the rent payment might ruin the tenant.

Agricultural issues and judgments aside, what actual evidence exists that illustrates Henry Vanzant attempted to earn a living as a speculator? While understanding how Vanzant farmed lays a groundwork to comprehend his tenancy, every farmer chooses to operate in certain ways that differ from his neighbors. What is it about Vanzant’s historical record that makes his legacy so challenging to an understanding of agricultural tenancy?

The first piece of evidence is easy to miss. As noted in the beginning of chapter two, Vanzant appeared briefly in the Ottumwa Democrat in 1875. A small advertisement in the legal announcements announced that Henry Vanzant purchased two town lots in Agency that local officials auctioned for tax delinquency. For the kingly sum of $4.49, Henry Vanzant became a landowner. While there is no way that Vanzant could have purchased the farm on which he lived for that sum, Vanzant did not abandon his farm life for a home in town. In fact, the purchase might be seen as an attempt to prepare for old age. Fifty-nine years old in 1875, Vanzant must have known that his days as a farmer neared their end. As such, Henry’s purchase of town lots allowed him a set of options. A lot in town afforded Henry a home in his later years when farming was not an option and he could not fulfill rental requirements. A shelter against the storm of years, a home of one’s own must assuredly have been a comforting thought for an aging man. The sale of those very town lots, however, would provide a significant return on investment, setting aside a store of cash, and options, for future years.

20 "Notice of Purchase of Town Lots for Taxes." Ottumwa Democrat, September 23, 1875. MS-213 Box 4, Number 36. Iowa State University Library/Special Collections Department.
The purchase of cheap land alone does not make Henry Vanzant a speculator. It simply made him thrifty. It does provide evidence that while he lived and worked on a farm he rented, Vanzant invested money in property. It begs the question, why would a farmer choose to buy a house in town instead of purchasing a farm of his own? The fact that the Census taker found Henry Vanzant on the same farm five years later would indicate that Vanzant never meant to abandon his chosen profession. Conversely, it could also indicate that the person who lost his town lots for nonpayment of taxes bought them back from Henry within the ninety days provided to do so. More evidence is required in order to change history's view of Henry Vanzant's tenure in Wapello County.

In February, 1880, another letter from landlord to tenant provides the beginning glimpse of evidence needed to reconsider the tenant as a speculator. In a letter where George Wilson once again asks Henry Vanzant to stay on the farm as his tenant "as long as I own it," a peculiar statement that stands out from others.²¹ Wilson stated rather simply, "I am sorry to hear you are likely to meet some pecuniary loss in your loans, and I hope your fears may all prove unfounded."²² What loans was Wilson speaking of? This one simple line, so innocuously written in 1880, raises serious questions. Henry Vanzant acted as a moneylender at one point in time in his community, and now stood to lose money upon an investment. A tenant farmer, a man who in the eyes of history could not afford to buy his farm, actively lent other people money in order to purchase land or make some other form of purchase. Here is not the oppressed tenant that Paul W. Gates wrote about in his works on a flawed federal land policy. This is not the image of a man that Allan G. Bogue presents,

²¹ George Wilson to Henry Vanzant, February 10, 1880. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 3, Number 8. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
²² Ibid.
wherein tenancy acted as a rung on a theoretical ladder towards land ownership. Here stood Henry C. Vanzant, a man who chose to live in his community as a tenant farmer, renting the land upon which he lived and worked while he acted as a speculator, lending money to his neighbors and buying up properties when previous owners could not meet tax liabilities. Commodity production was not important to a man who cultivated the soil only with an interest to make enough money to pay his rent.

Such a radical distancing from previous historical thought is an unsupportable stance when taken from a single sentence in one letter. As mentioned previously, despite the presence of several day books tracking work performed, income received, and debts owed, there is no mention in any of these books about money spent on investments or loans made to others, nor is there any notation of income received from these investments and loans. What other evidence supports Henry Vanzant's provocative position in the town of Agency? As with many other people, Henry Vanzant kept any papers that documented entanglements in the legal system, and from these documents emerges an image not of a tenant farmer who grubbed a life from the soil who leant money to a friend or relative in times of need. Instead, what emerges is a man who leant money to others in expectation of profiting from a neighbor's need to expand his property or from another's hard financial times. Henry Vanzant knew the value of his labor, and charged his landlord for improvements made upon his farm. In the same vein, Vanzant knew the value of his money and the interest rates he charged when he made a loan; when forced to litigate in order to claim what he was due, Henry Vanzant savagely sought what belonged to him. He understood the value of the labor of others, and how he could best earn a living from it.
Vanzant's legal trail began to unfold in 1869 when he received a letter from William B. Street. At some point in the past, Street and his partner, a gentleman named Dudley, borrowed a sum of money from Henry Vanzant, and now Vanzant sought repayment. Street's letter stated that he thought the loan had already been repaid, but would make every effort to repay the debt as he could. A little more than a month later, Street sent Vanzant another letter, this time with ten dollars included as a payment against whatever amount was due by him. While the date of the initial loan is lost, Street's letter shows that Vanzant was active as a speculator during the 1860's, and was actively prosecuting those who remained in his debt beyond the terms of their agreement by the end of that decade.

In 1871, things began to grow dire for Street. He contacted J. Q. A. Dawson, desperately in need of aid from someone. His business partner, a man named Dudley, refused to pay on the note to Vanzant. What was more, a set of books that Vanzant apparently demanded of the defunct business disappeared. Just over two weeks later, Street contacted Vanzant directly and offered a partial resolution to the issue. A third party, Henry Donsipe, offered Vanzant a horse or a wagon as a one hundred dollar credit toward the Street and Dudley debt. Henry Vanzant flatly refused the offer; he was not interested in physical goods bartered to relieve a debt, but the payment of money owed to him. While not implicitly stated, it can be inferred that if Vanzant wanted to liquidate goods in order to

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23 William B. Street to Henry Vanzant, March 19, 1869. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 11. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
24 Ibid.
25 William B. Street to Henry Vanzant, April 22, 1869. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 12. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
26 William B. Street to J.Q.A. Dawson, February 9, 1871. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 13. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
27 William B. Street to Henry Vanzant, February 27, 1871. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 14. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
accrue one hundred dollars cash, he could do so with goods he possessed on his farm. The deal was for cash and cash only. Street agreed, and stated he would work on paying the debt as he could.\textsuperscript{28} His actions must not have come fast enough, as Vanzant took him to court in 1873 and sued him for the money owed him by Dudley and Street. Vanzant won a judgment of $487.85.\textsuperscript{29}

The matter disappears from Henry's records for nearly a decade before it resurfaces in another lawsuit. Vanzant took Street to court a second time, for the same issue, in 1881. Once again, Vanzant won a judgment against Street for $435.95, including interest on the loan and court costs.\textsuperscript{30} This second legal victory prompted a letter from J. A. L. Crookham, the attorney for the wife of William Street. Through her attorney, Mrs. Street sent an impassioned letter to the speculator seeking easier terms of repayment. The letter reveals that Street and Dudley sought the original loan from Henry Vanzant after the Panic of 1857 financially broke Street.\textsuperscript{31} Twenty-two years after the fact, Mrs. Street revealed, William was now working as a clerk in the coal yard of his nephew, barely earning enough to sustain his family, and yet the speculator was still seeking repayment of a debt that he could not pay.\textsuperscript{32} Mrs. Street, through her attorney, beseeched Vanzant to let the remaining $125 debt to be settled for a payment of $75; it was Dudley's fault that Vanzant was owed the money, and since he refused payment, argued attorney Crookham, the debtor should soften his demands.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{28} William B. Street to Henry Vanzant, July 8, 1871. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 16. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
\bibitem{29} Judgment in the case of Henry Vanzant vs. W. B. Street. September 3, 1873. MS-213, Box 4, Number 35. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
\bibitem{30} Judgment in the case of Henry Vanzant vs. W.B. Street, with interest accrued. June 3, 1881. MS-213, Box 4, Number 41. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
\bibitem{31} J.A.L. Crookham to Henry Vanzant, August 28, 1882. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 22. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
\bibitem{32} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
somewhat. Again, the letters fall silent, and it is unknown how this case is finally resolved. In the final irony of this situation, William B. Street, the debtor at the center of the issue, was the brother-in-law of George Wilson. As referenced earlier, the only mention of the issue in the letters received from Wilson was an informal statement of sympathy towards Vanzant. There was no mention of leniency for a relative by marriage. While Wilson continually sought Vanzant’s continued tenancy on his Iowa farm out of friendship, kinship could not save Street from the attack of the moneylender.

Henry Vanzant was involved in other legal cases that revolved around real estate deals or loans that went bad. While Vanzant acted litigiously towards William Street over an unknown amount of money, he also became entwined in a series of lawsuits with J. O. Briscoe, a land agent and money lender from Ottumwa. In the first case, Vanzant was subpoenaed on behalf of F. T. Reynolds as a witness in his case against J. O. Briscoe. It followed a case between Reynolds and Briscoe that was decided in the Iowa Supreme Court in December, 1879. Reynolds sued Briscoe over the sale of land, and the Supreme Court decided in favor of Briscoe, in the long run due to reasons of representation. While there is no other information in the 1880 case available, the two parties were no doubt still attacking each other in the courts. Vanzant also directly sued Briscoe in 1881. Again, little remains

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33 Ibid.  
34 William B. Street was one of the sons of General J. M. Street, agent at the Sac and Fox Agency, and father-in-law of George Wilson. *History of Wapello County, Iowa.* (Chicago, IL: Western Historical Company), 1878. Pg. 359.  
35 Briscoe’s letterhead announced his position as “J. O. Briscoe Real Estate and Loan Broker.” Seen on J. O. Briscoe to Henry Vanzant, November 14, 1881. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 20. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.  
36 Subpoena, November 30, 1880. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 39. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.  
from the case, and almost nothing exists in Vanzant's records of the case. He tracked his financial expenditures in the case, and paid fees for J. H. Rogers to testify on his behalf in the case, but little is known beyond that.38 There is an offer from Briscoe in 1882 to settle the debt owed to Henry from $1000 cash.39 Vanzant rejected the offer, and the courts decided the issue at hand in 1884. Vanzant was once more victorious in court. Judgment awarded Vanzant $1418.73 plus 10%, but after a sheriff's sale to liquidate assets, Vanzant came out with $687.60.40 There can be little doubt that Henry Vanzant was not gun shy about seeking litigation as an answer for issues over money and land. There is also little doubt that he was successful in court as well.

In many ways, Henry Vanzant was an atypical farm tenant, aside from his litigiousness. As a farmer, Vanzant was not reliant upon the major field crops that his neighbors grew for profit. Corn grew more plentifully than wheat did, and what little he pulled from the soil paid his annual rents. As the years went by, Vanzant moved away from commodity crop production in favor of raising livestock. Corn grew in importance as it fed cattle and hogs for the demanding meat packers whose influence stretched to Ottumwa and other points along the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Rail Road. Vanzant cut hay and sold it to others, as well as pasturing animals for neighbors and clients. To the uneducated eye, all was agricultural and normal. Vanzant was one of a numberless group of people who happened to rent the land upon which they farmed.

38 J. H. Rogers receipt, March 30, 1881. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 40. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department. Fee Book for Vanzant v. Briscoe, November 22, 1884. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 42. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department. 39 S. W. Summers to Henry Vanzant, December 25, 1882. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Numbers 23 and 23a. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department. 40 Judgment docket for the case of Henry Vanzant vs. J. O. Briscoe, February 2, 1884. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, Number 43. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
Yet all was not pacific and pastoral. Vanzant, while renting his farm, lent money to others. He also bought and sold parcels of land to others, acquiring properties through tax sales and other means. As a tenant, Vanzant received letters from his landlord that attempted to keep him on the land as a tenant through the bonds of friendship. As a moneylender, Henry Vanzant used the courts to dispossess those unfortunates who owed him money of their cash, even in their infirmity. Ties of family and community, of shared experience, did not prevent Vanzant from becoming the personification of the evils that historians point to when discussing the down side of land speculation.

Henry Vanzant is an enigma in the eyes of history. To people such as Paul W. Gates, Vanzant became a tenant because of a lack of land available in a community, or to inflated land prices. Tenancy was the only choice open to the native North Carolinian. To Allan G. Bogue and Donald L. Winters, Henry was simply working his way slowly up the ladder of agricultural land tenure. Both schools of thought fail to make room for someone in a unique situation. Henry Vanzant chose to become a tenant in Iowa, and though moments existed when he threatened to leave the farm owned by George Wilson, he never materially pushed to become a landowner unencumbered by debt, the pinnacle of the agricultural ladder formulated by Bogue and others.

Vanzant's tenancy was a financial windfall. He may well have chosen tenancy when he moved to Iowa in the late 1840s due to financial hardship. By 1860, however, evidence suggests that he occupied a position of financial stability in the community to the level that others sought his financial help. Agricultural tenancy allowed Henry Vanzant to achieve a level of security that land ownership may not have offered. To begin with, tenants do not owe local governments property taxes. Some letters do exist that show Vanzant paid the
property tax due on the farm he lived on, but these payments were subtracted from the rent due to George Wilson and his estate.\textsuperscript{41} Vanzant paid the bulk of his annual rent in shares of the crop. While cash might be sent in lieu of grain at times, this cash was not from Vanzant’s own pocket. Rather, it was the proceeds from the sale of grain and livestock. Without the need to pay taxes or spend money on the upkeep of home and outbuildings, Vanzant could arguably manipulate his portion of crops and farm income into a sizeable savings or cash flow source.\textsuperscript{42}

When tended properly, Vanzant knew that money could make money. His very living conditions spoke volumes about this statement. George Wilson took possession of the Pattern Farm after the federal government closed the Sac and Fox Agency, and after a few short years, he moved his family to Lexington, Missouri, while continuing to collect an income from a piece of property he did not physically work on. Vanzant took the lesson to heart. He fostered his income from the farm, and he used that cash flow as a tool to earn more money. Ironically, at one point in the 1860s, Vanzant even lends his landlord’s family money during a period of hardship.\textsuperscript{43} When tended improperly, money might be lost, and this was an incident no one could afford. And thus, when faced with the fruits of a bad

\textsuperscript{41} While several letters deal with this, the most illustrative is dated January 18, 1882. This is the only extant letter in the entire collection that deals with agricultural tenancy from the point of view of Henry Vanzant. Other letters survive in the collection written by Vanzant, but the bulk of these are letters written to his brother William, during William’s service during the Civil War. Henry Vanzant to George Wilson, Jr., January 18, 1882. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 4, number 21. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.

\textsuperscript{42} An example of building upkeep provided for by the landlord is in George Wilson to Henry Vanzant, April 21, 1866. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 2, Number 41. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.

\textsuperscript{43} In particular, there are two instances when Vanzant sends money to the children of his landlord. Posey Wilson to Henry Vanzant, September 16, 1863. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 2, Number 1. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department. Robert Wilson to Henry Vanzant, November 5, 1864. Van Zandt Family Papers, MS-213, Box 2, Number 32. Iowa State University Library/ Special Collections Department.
investment, Henry Vanzant vigorously prosecuted his neighbors and business associates in court. In doing so, Henry Vanzant made a transformation. He was no longer a tenant, a victim of land policy of corrupt lending practices. He was not slowly working his way up a theoretical ladder of land tenure as put forward in praise of capitalistic fervor. Henry Vanzant became the one thing that Paul Gates and the historians who followed in his track wrote about as the evils of tenancy. Henry Vanzant became an oppressor himself, using money and land as tools to enrich himself at the expense of those around him in dire financial trouble. Henry Vanzant was a tenant whose profitable land speculation and money lending practices caused the suffering of others. His role in history is an enigma that defies all previous schools of thought on agricultural tenancy in America. He is the confluence of the tenant/speculator. His presence alone raises new questions about the nature of agricultural tenancy in America.
Conclusion

Henry Vanzant came to Iowa in 1848 to make money. There is no need to delve deeply into some dusty and ancient text to understand this; he brought his family to Iowa for the same reason that thousands, if not millions of people tread upon the soil of this state. For a good number of those people, agriculture was the principle means of making a living. Vanzant did this as well; Iowa was an Eden, a paradise in the eyes of so many in the middle of the nineteenth century.¹ Yet plowing deeply the earth under your feet in order to scratch out a living is not a path to riches and excess. Often, it is not a clear path to earn enough money to support one’s family. In light of this, one would expect that people searched, sometimes in vain, to find a means to financially support a family. Various and sundry occupations exist wherever people gather together, yet Vanzant, along with so many others living in or near agricultural communities sought an income through the purchase and sale of land, as well as the lending of money to those who looked to purchase land enough to farm upon. Henry Vanzant may have been that rarest of all people placed in the debate over land speculation and tenancy. Henry Vanzant was a tenant, a man who never owned the land upon which he lived. While he attempted to scratch a living from the dirt, Vanzant was a land speculator.

The facts remain obscured as to how Henry Vanzant acquired the money he used to begin acting as a land speculator. Perhaps he acquired a windfall of some sort and came into some money, as people are want to say. Maybe generous lease terms allowed Vanzant to accrue cash over a period of time. No matter how it occurred, there is no doubt that loans

and land sales played an important role in his. The best indication of the importance of land speculation to Henry Vanzant’s economic vitality is how vigorous he pursued those who owed him money. Perhaps Vanzant was simply part of a land craze that occurred in the county, and while he never bought the home he lived in, maybe he acted as a speculator as a hedge against future uncertainty.

This work has been an attempt to place one man into the historiography of farm tenancy. It resulted in a paper that questioned that very historiography. Of the authors whose work was integral to the understanding of agricultural tenancy presented in this work, none considered the dual relationship of tenant and speculator in one person. For historians such as Paul W. Gates, speculators are those responsible for the problem of farm tenancy in the Midwest. It is impossible to combine the two roles into the same person. The combination would be the equivalent of self-oppression. It would be possible to equate Bogue’s expression of the ladder of land tenure with Vanzant’s actions, but it takes a stretch of the imagination to do so. Bogue, William Peterson, and others, expressed the ladder theory as a way to express how farmers moved from one level of economic viability to another in a community. While it is possible to stretch land ownership beyond farm ownership, it does vary from the original intent of those who espouse the theory.

Further investigation is necessary in order to truly contextualize Henry C. Vanzant. Neither Bogue, Cogswell, nor Winters completed an in-depth statistical analysis of farm tenancy in Wapello County. This analysis must be a starting point for further research about Vanzant and his true role in agricultural history. Likewise, it remains to be seen if any registered leases survive in county records. A survey of those found from the period would
provide a body of data pertaining to lease terms, landlord residence, and other variables that Bogue and other historians have used to evaluate tenancy in Iowa.

Ultimately, a daunting task awaits anyone who would seek to find more Vanzants in the historical record. Historians have long lamented the lack of primary documents left by farm renters. Providence alone led to the accidental discovery of Vanzant’s papers. It would be necessary to find the papers of other tenants who chose to follow the same path as Vanzant, and those documents, should they exist, may be difficult to find. While it may be possible to determine if any person living as a tenant possessed property, the amount of time necessary to examine county land records would be prohibitive. Only the discovery and evaluation of the papers of other tenants who followed a similar path would allow this investigation to be expanded.

It may very well be the fact that Henry C. Vanzant, Iowa farm tenant and land speculator, was a singular deviation from the realities that farm tenants faced during the nineteenth century. He is by no means the normative example of a tenant. Nonetheless, his case should not be ignored. For thirty years, Henry C. Vanzant made his living as a tenant farmer and as a land speculator. His story should not be ignored because it is a rare case. On the contrary, the situation described by the life of Henry Vanzant expands our understanding of what the role of tenant farmers were in a community. It opens the door to the fact that though trends may allow for the development of a generalized image of any topic, those statistical outliers that exist help to expand our knowledge of how tenants, as an example, operate in various economic situations.
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