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FARMING SOMEONE ELSE'S LAND: FARM TENANCY IN THE
TEXAS BRAZOS RIVER VALLEY,
1850-1880

DISSERTATION

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This dissertation develops and utilizes a methodology for combining data drawn from the manuscript census returns and the county tax rolls to study landless farmers during the period from 1850 until 1880 in three Texas Brazos River Valley counties: Fort Bend, Milam, and Palo Pinto. It focuses in particular on those landless farmers who appear to have had no option other than tenant farming.

It concludes that there were such landless farmers throughout the period, although they were a relatively insignificant factor in the agricultural economy before the Civil War. During the Antebellum decade, poor tenant farmers were a higher proportion of the population on the frontier than in the interior, but throughout the period, they were found in higher numbers in the central portion of the river valley. White tenants generally avoided the coastal plantation areas, although by 1880, that pattern seemed to be changing.

Emancipation had tremendous impact on both black and white landless farmers. Although both groups were now theoretically competing for the same resource, productive crop land, their reactions during the first fifteen years were so different that it suggests two systems of tenant farming divided by caste. As population expansion put increasing pressure on the land, the two systems began to merge on terms resembling those under which black tenants had always labored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of thousands of Texans across three generations lived and died as farmers producing staple crops on someone else's land. Many, if not most, lived on the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder with little real hope of doing more than getting by from year to year. Moreover, they saw little real hope that their children would be substantially better off than they were. Although these tenant farmers were at times the largest single class in the state, they receive no more than a few paragraphs in the best general surveys of the state's history.¹ This is not surprising. Their story is not one that enhances the image of Texas, and it is not an easy one to tell. Generally speaking, most of these people were illiterate or at least functionally so, and thus left few if any written records. Tenant farmers are probably best remembered for the way their status served as a political issue during the Populist crusade of the 1890s and during James "Pa" Ferguson's two successful campaigns for Governor. At this point, the most complete, and probably the best,

1. For the treatment of this issue in two of the most popular general histories of the state, see Rupert Richardson, Ernest Wallace, and Adrian Anderson, Texas: The Lone Star State, (Englewood Cliffs, 1943, 4th Edition, 1981), 264, 363, 379; T. R. Fehrenbach, Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans, (New York, 1968, 1986), 420, 440, 579, 603, 610.

treatments of Texas tenant farmers have been fictional accounts such as those of George Sessions Perry in Hold Autumn In Your Hand, and William A. Owens in Walking on Borrowed Land.

Today, those who farmed others' land are the subjects of tremendous controversy among historians and economists who write history. Most of the controversy surrounding Southern tenancy concerns two basic issues--the origin of the system and how it operated.

Questions about the origins of the tenancy system in the South are relatively new to the historiography of the subject. Was the system of sharecropping and tenant farming, as is generally believed, a post-Civil War phenomenon, or did it arise in the antebellum period and then just expand during the postbellum period?² Farm Tenancy and the Census in

2. Almost every basic ingredient of the postbellum system, including renting land for a share of the crop and crop liens for the purchase of supplies, can be found, at least in rudimentary form, in antebellum Texas. On September 12, 1844, for example, Jeremiah Hendrick, rented forty-two acres of improved land in Bowie County from Carter Cannon for one-third of the corn and cotton raised. This agreement resulted in several legal cases as Hendrick, claiming that he was actually the rightful owner of the land, initiated proceedings to obtain title, while Cannon initiated proceedings to regain possession of the land that Hendrick refused to leave after the contract expired. See Oliver C. Hartley, editor, Reports of Cases Argued and Decided in the Supreme Court of the State of Texas During a part of the December Term, 1849, at Austin, and a part of Galveston Term, 1851 (Galveston, 1852), 5:248-252; and Cannon Carter v. Jeremiah Hendrick, File M-299, Case Papers of the Supreme Court, Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

Although they seldom provide information about specific terms, the probate records from virtually any Texas county whose records from the antebellum period are still intact will yield instances of estate

Antebellum Georgia by Frederick Bode and Donald Ginter is the latest and most extensive examination of this question. Relying exclusively on the 1860 manuscript census schedules, they offered persuasive evidence that antebellum farm tenancy was more widespread--and thus more important--than historians have generally conceded. They argued that their findings were important for demonstrating that antebellum society was much more complex than previously thought and for suggesting a fundamental alteration of our understanding of the postbellum agricultural system. According to Bode and Ginter, their findings indicated that "postbellum tenancy was not merely an ad hoc invention suddenly and hastily devised in the South as a response to emancipation. It had deep and

managers who rented out farms. A records book from the Austin County Clerk's Office records several crop liens made in the 1850s. Although most of these crop liens were made by landowning farmers, a few liens were recorded against the crops of renters. Finally, newspapers also carried occasional notices concerning land available for rent. See, for example, San Felipe de Austin, Texas Gazette, March 20, 1830 and July 31, 1830; see also Brazoria, The Advocate of the People's Rights, Feb. 22, 1834. Although most have downplayed its significance, the following works contain references to or discussion of southern antebellum tenants: Joseph D. Reid, Jr., "Antebellum Southern Rental Contracts", Explorations in Economic History 13(1976): 69-83; Enoch M. Banks, The Economics of Land Tenure in Georgia (New York, 1905), 82-83; Marjorie S. Mendenhall, "The Rise of Southern Tenancy," Yale Review, New Series 27(1937): 116-117; Guion G. Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History (Chapel Hill, 1937), 68-69; Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation (New York, 1977), 336; Lewis C. Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 (Gloucester, Mass, 1958), 2:646-647; Richard Lowe and Randolph Campbell, Planters and Plain Folk: Agriculture in Antebellum Texas (Dallas, 1987), 192.

substantial roots in southern society." Furthermore, they suggested that "the picture of a white antebellum yeomanry falling into a dependent tenantry during the critical years of Reconstruction is fundamentally misleading."³

It is too soon to predict how Bode and Ginter's work will affect the historical treatment of southern postbellum tenancy. Most historical examinations of that subject have begun with the end of slavery when emancipation forced planters to utilize free labor in their fields. Thus, the origin of the system has been assumed and most of the controversy surrounding the historiography of postbellum tenancy has concerned the nature of the system.

Many have argued that the postbellum system, arising in response to the demise of a coercive system was also a coercive arrangement. As such, it was by definition exploitative and, of course, new. Those who argue that the system was coercive disagree as to the motivation behind the development of the system. Was the system coercive because landlords were racist and believed that blacks could only function in such a system? Or, was it coercive because the planter class sought to maintain economic and political power by exploiting the lower class--white and black? Was racist

3. Frederick Bode and Donald Ginter, Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia (Athens, Georgia, 1986), 185.

rhetoric a foil for a class struggle? In other words, was it a matter of caste, class, or both?

Generally speaking, those who argue that it was a class struggle employ a Marxist model of analysis. Most of the Marxist historians, like many of those who approach the problem from the perspective of the classical economist, start with a theoretical construct which is considered proven if the evidence available can be made to fit within the framework. In The Roots of Black Poverty, for example, Jay Mandle began by defining a plantation economy as an economy that produced staple crops for an external market by a process that is labor intensive. As he put it,

A plantation economy is defined as one in which the state of technology allows profit-maximizing, large-scale farmers to produce a staple primarily for an external market. That same technology, however, requires the use of more workers than profitably low wage rates would attract. As a result some nonmarket mechanism is required in order for the planters to be sure of a sufficient supply of workers to carry out profitable production. In turn, those nonmarket mechanisms help to define the class relations of society. The culture which emerges reinforces these class relations.

Once he had established that the South was indeed a plantation economy, then the issue was settled. According to the plantation economy model, the labor system was coercive, and, therefore, nonmarket mechanisms were adopted to keep prices (wages) down. Mandle argued that the most important nonmarket mechanisms in the South were restrictions on black economic and geographical mobility. One problem with

Mandle's approach is that, although he emphasized class relations, he did not specifically address the biracial nature of the postbellum system.⁴

Those who have argued that it was a matter of caste have generally been classical economists who were attempting to explain why a free market system failed to develop in postbellum southern agriculture. Explanations of this sort have been less popular than those which rely on economic factors. The most influential and controversial work of this type was One Kind of Freedom by Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch. They asserted that the postbellum tenancy system was "fashioned in haste, and in a climate of racial animosity." According to Ransom and Sutch racial animosity may have been the most important ingredient in the postbellum equation. They wrote:

We believe that the animosity and mutual fear that existed between the races, and in particular the whites' antagonism toward the black's economic advancement, were at least as powerful as were economic incentives in motivating individual economic behavior. The effect of racism was felt throughout the entire system; it left no economic institution undistorted. As a cause of southern poverty, racism may well have been preeminent.⁵

4. Jay Mandle, The Roots of Black Poverty: The Southern Plantation Economy after the Civil War (Durham, 1978), 10, passim. For other examples of Marxist analysis, see Dwight Billings, Jr., Planters and the Making of a "New South" (Chapel Hill, 1979), and Jonathan M. Weiner, Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1865-1885 (Baton Rouge, 1978).

5. Ransom and Sutch, One Kind of Freedom, 33 (first quotation), 176-177 (second quotation).

One excellent work, White Land, Black Labor, by Charles L. Flynn, Jr. has tried to combine the explanations of caste and class in a complex explanation that cannot properly be called a model because it lacks the simplicity connected with those inventions. According to Flynn, "the central theme of Southern history can be found in interplay between the South's culturally defined caste and economically defined class systems....Each white group fought for its own interests against those above it while ignoring those below and all the time justifying its cause with the same inherently unjust ideology."⁶

Other scholars have argued that the system was not coercive or exploitative at all. They have preferred to see the system as a development of the free market system which brought labor and capital together at rates which insured each party a return equivalent either to their marginal revenue product or the rate of return capital could have received elsewhere. Again, as with the Marxists, works advancing this argument are heavily dependent upon a model. In this case, it is the model of the free market. Those who adopt this approach do not argue that planters would not have liked a coercive system. Rather they argue that the nature of the free market economy precludes the kind of

6. Charles L. Flynn, White Land, Black Labor: Caste and Class in Late Nineteenth Century Georgia (Baton Rouge, 1983), 21. The ideology Flynn was referring to here was, of course, racism.

conspiratorial activities necessary to fashion such a system. It would always be in an individual planter's immediate self interest to obtain the best laborers, and this would entail competition which would bring any coercive system crashing down.⁷

There is a supreme irony here. Although they often cloak their work in a mantle of positivist scientific reasoning, many of those who argue so vehemently for the free market approach believe it to be the best of all possible economic systems. Yet the system of tenant farming which developed in the South consigned--at some periods and places--well over half of all farmers to an economic class that precluded their ownership of the means of production, i.e., the land. Was the development of Southern tenant farming a result of the one system in the world whose greatest advantages are for the most part connected with the private ownership of the means of production? If so, it is hardly an advertisement for the "invisible hand" of the market place.

As with most historical controversies, there have been those who have tried to find some middle ground between a labor market that was entirely free and one dependent on a

7. See, for example, Stephen DeCanio, Agriculture in the Postbellum South: The Economics of Production and Supply (Cambridge, 1974); Joseph D. Reid, Jr., "Sharecropping as an Understandable Market Response: The Postbellum South," Journal of Economic History 33(1973): 106-130; Ralph Shlomowitz, "'Bound' or Free? Freedman Labor in Cotton and Sugar Cane Farming, 1865-1880," Journal of Southern History 50(1984): 569-96.

coercive system. Robert Higgs, for example, claimed that the postbellum tenancy system was a competitive market economy, but that there were factors which caused the market to operate less efficiently. He argued, among other things, that whites had developed "a taste for discrimination," and that they were willing to pay for it. Other historians have attempted to avoid the controversy altogether. In Cotton Fields No More, Gilbert Fite avoids the issue by noting that the southern tenancy system "fell into place" after the war.⁸

Theoretical discussions are important because they promote understanding of how our world is organized and operates. This work will attempt to grapple with the theoretical issues raised by the existence of sharecropping and tenant farming in nineteenth century Texas and will attempt to suggest answers to some of the questions concerning the origins and nature of the system. Emphasis, however, will be put upon an attempt to determine the proportion of farmers who lived within the system at various periods and in various locations and to assess the implications of these findings for the theoretical issues. This approach is more descriptive than

8. Robert Higgs, Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865-1914 (Cambridge, 1977); Gilbert Fite, Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1900 (Lexington, Ky., 1984). Another work which seems to have been aiming for some middle ground was: Michael Wayne, The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860-1880 (Baton Rouge, 1983).

theoretical, but it should serve to provide a better perspective from which to view the various proposed models.

The nature of the problem dictates a detailed study of individuals and changes over time. Limitations of time and resources make this kind of intensive investigation impossible on the state level. Therefore, three Brazos River counties have been selected for study. They are Fort Bend, Milam, and Palo Pinto. Their county records are generally complete with the exception of the early Milam County records which were destroyed in a court house fire in 1874. These counties were not chosen randomly, and there is no intent to imply here that they are necessarily representative of the state of Texas. Taken together, however, they should provide some clues as to the range of experiences in the state. The counties represent varying geographical regions of the state, with varying soil types, and slightly varying climates, and their populations have widely varying ethnic backgrounds. Still, they were all heavily dependent on agriculture during the nineteenth century.

One other important parameter of this study is time. Although some references will be made to the earlier period, this study will begin with the 1850s. The sources which would allow for a systematic investigation of the subject during the colonial and republic periods are simply not available. Although tenant farming remained a way of life in

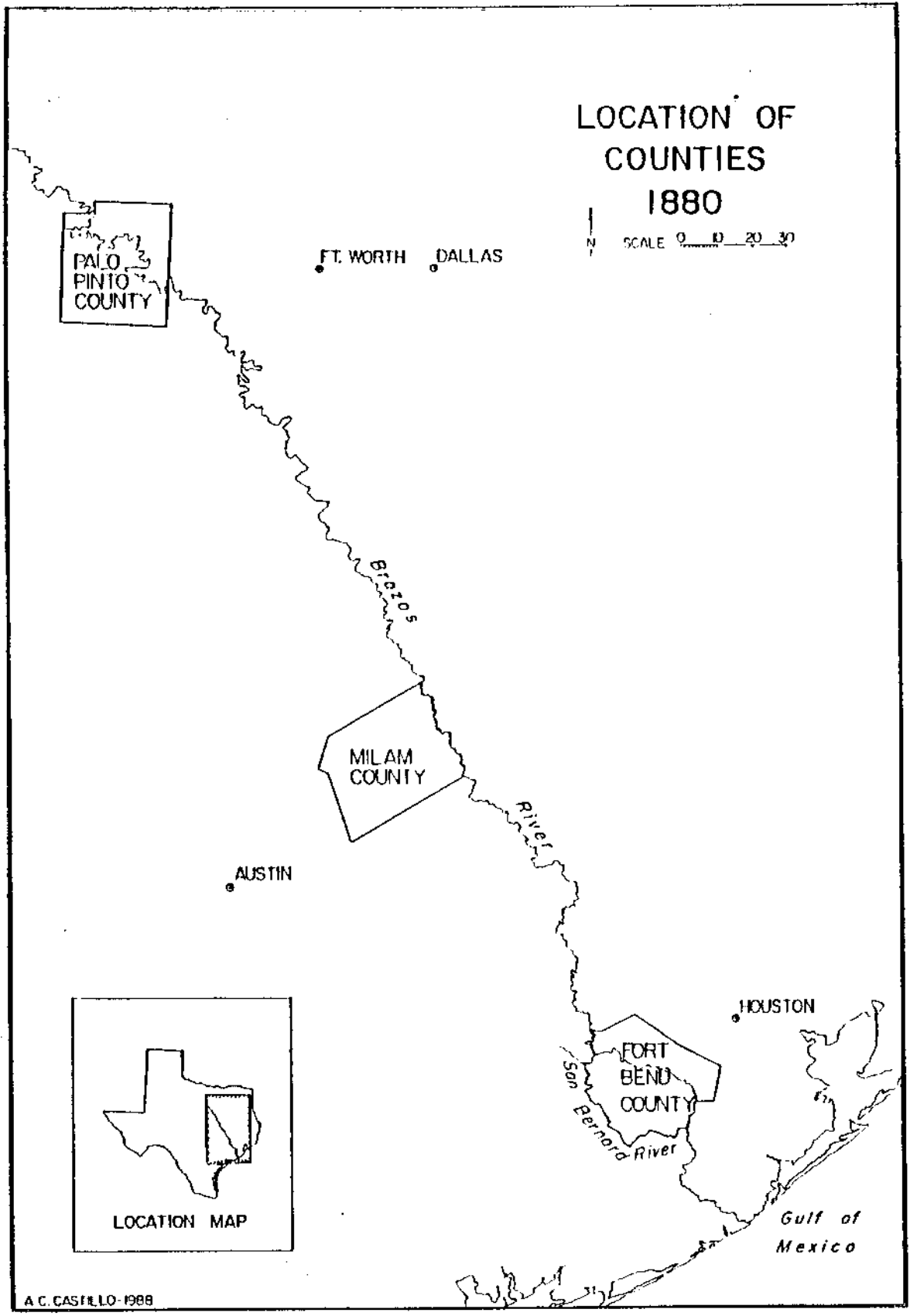
Texas well into the twentieth century, this study will end with the 1880s. To go beyond that point would require a dramatic change in sources and method. The United States censuses form a critical part of the sources for this study. Unfortunately, the 1890 manuscript returns were almost all lost in a disastrous fire. The loss of the 1890 returns was a tragedy, but an even greater tragedy followed. In the aftermath of the fire, the policy in regard to the preservation of manuscript schedules was reevaluated. For some incomprehensible reason, Washington bureaucrats in their infinite wisdom decided to destroy all but the population returns of each census taken after 1890. Without the agricultural schedule, the only concrete information remaining are the aggregate figures presented in the published statistics. The total loss of an 1890 census, coupled with the loss of the agricultural schedule for any census following that, dictate a radically different approach for the period after 1880. Such a course would not be impossible, but the final years and the end of the system will be left for another study and another author.

Serious problems are involved in any examination of farm tenancy in the antebellum period. Few traditional sources exist with even scattered references to the practice. As indicated above, the United States censuses were the most important sources utilized, and they were not designed to

include information on the subject until 1880. Therefore, before conclusions about antebellum tenancy can be advanced, a methodology for locating individual tenants on the censuses must be developed. Realizing the importance of this issue, Bode and Ginter made it one of the major themes of their book. In their introduction, they warned that: "Another aim of this book is to propose a methodological framework for organizing and interpreting manuscript census data. Therefore, we have not followed the common practice that relegates discussion of data and method to an appendix."⁹ This study also seeks to make a contribution to the development of a methodology for utilizing the census in studying farm tenancy in the period before 1880.

9. Bode and Ginter, Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia, 8.

LOCATION OF COUNTIES 1880



PALO PINTO COUNTY

FT. WORTH DALLAS

N SCALE 0 10 20 30

MILAM COUNTY

AUSTIN

FORT BEND COUNTY

HOUSTON

LOCATION MAP

Gulf of Mexico

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY OF FORT BEND, MILAM AND PALO PINTO COUNTIES

During the 1950s, the United States Corps of Engineers constructed a series of dams which would forever alter the upper middle reaches of the Brazos River. Realizing that the portion of the river which had been so important to him during his childhood would soon disappear, John Graves took a canoe ride through the two-hundred-mile portion of the Brazos which wound through Palo Pinto, Parker, Hood, and Somervell Counties. The result was his book, Goodbye to a River. It is a rambling account of his boyhood, the legendary characters who had inhabited the area, and of the trip itself. Early in his narrative, he wrote of the Brazos River as a whole, saying:

The Brazos does not come from haunts of coot and hern, or even from mountains. It comes from West Texas, and in part from an equally stark stretch of New Mexico, and it runs for something over 800 miles down to the Gulf. It slices across Texas history as it does across the map of the state; the Republic's first capitol stood by it, near the coast, and settlement flowed northwestward up its long trough as the water flowed down.¹

1. John Graves, Goodbye to a River (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1960), 4-5.

Fort Bend, Milam, and Palo Pinto counties were chosen, because, among other reasons, all three lie along the course of the Brazos River as it winds its way in a southeasterly direction to the Texas coast. More important, commercial agriculture, particularly the production of cotton, was a vital part of the economic base of all three at some point in their history. In each of these counties, too, for at least a portion of the period during which commercial agriculture was important, tenant farmers and sharecroppers provided a major portion of the labor necessary to produce these crops. Finally, these three counties all share the same general history in that they are all a part of Texas and of the southern United States.

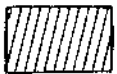
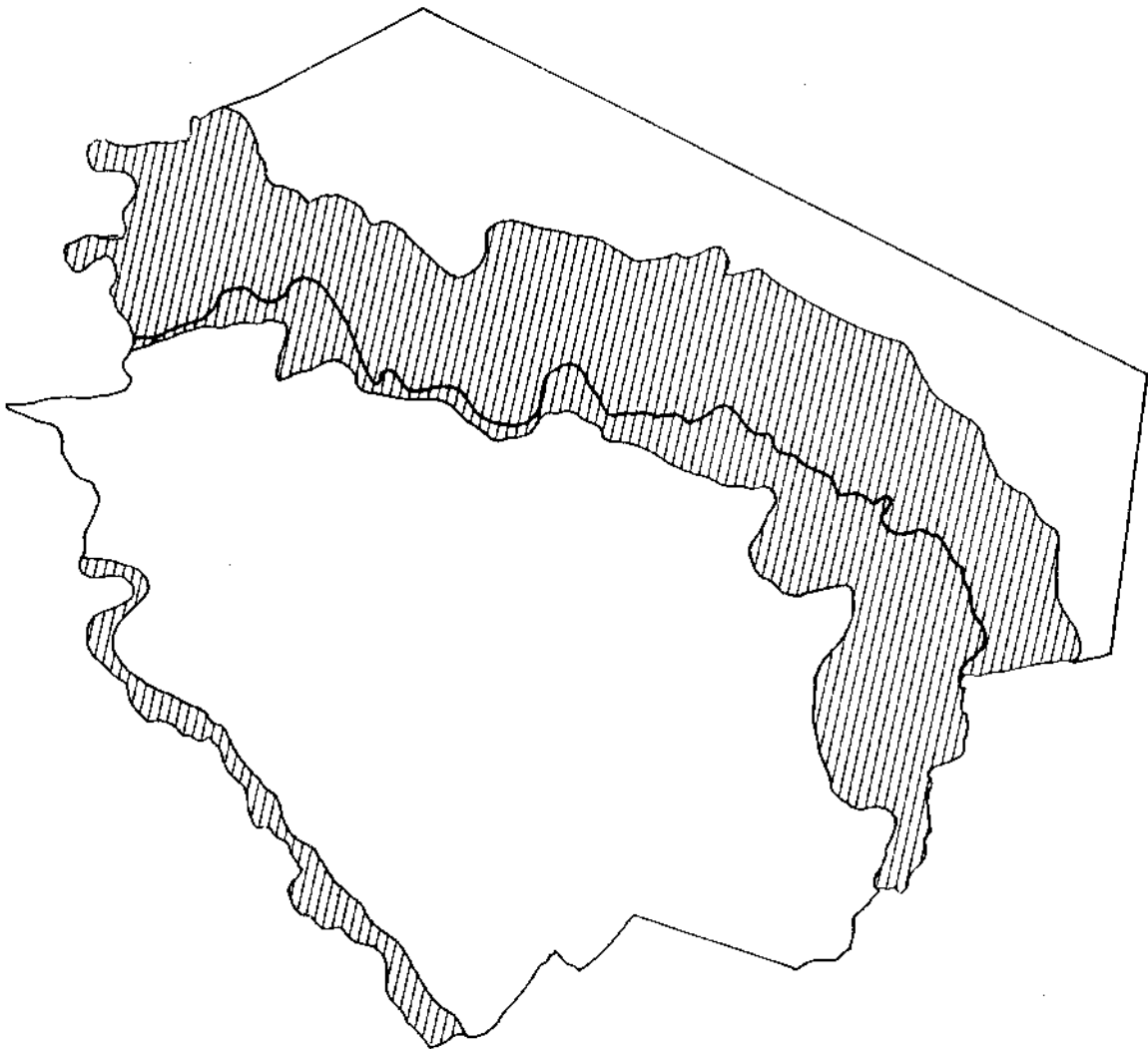
The similarities in regard to commercial agriculture and location along the Brazos River were important factors in the selection process, but these counties were chosen as much for their differences as for their similarities. They are located in different regions of the state and are therefore quite different in climate, topography, and soil types. They were settled at different times and by different types of individuals. These differences are particularly noticeable between Fort Bend which was settled in the 1820s as a part of Stephen F. Austin's original colony, and Palo Pinto, which was settled in the 1850s, virtually abandoned during the 1860s, and then resettled during the 1870s. These

differences are important because they allow a study of the development of what seems to have been roughly the same system under conditions that varied significantly.

This study is not a general history of these counties, nor is it a study of the geography and climate of the regions in which they are located. Nonetheless, these issues are important to an understanding of the nature of commercial agriculture as it developed and was practiced during the nineteenth century in these three counties. This chapter provides a brief overview of each county's physical attributes and history. The counties will be discussed in order of their settlement, thus moving north and west along the Brazos.

Fort Bend County is located in the coastal plain region of southeastern Texas. The county comprises 869 square miles of level to slightly rolling terrain with an elevation ranging from eighty to two hundred fifty feet above sea level. The Brazos River flows across the county diagonally, entering in the northwestern quadrant and leaving through the southeastern quadrant. The San Bernard River forms the county's southwestern boundary. The climate is temperate, with an average high of 94° in July and an average low of 44° in January. The growing season is long, averaging 296 days,

FORT BEND COUNTY



River-Bottom soils that were farmed during the Nineteenth Century.

and rainfall is abundant, averaging over forty-five inches a year.²

The soil in the county can be divided into two broad groups, bottom land and prairie soil. Of these two, the bottom land is still recognized as generally superior crop land, and, until the very end of the nineteenth century, it was the only soil in the county considered fit for commercial staple crop agriculture. The largest and most important sections of bottom land in the county are along the banks of the Brazos River. The top soil in these areas, having been collected in northwest Texas, has been laid down through the centuries by the flood waters of the Brazos River. These soils are generally high in lime and extremely fertile. They occupy a wide band along the eastern and northern bank of the Brazos, a wide band along the western and southern bank past the town of Richmond, and a much narrower band along the western and southern bank from the point where the Brazos enters the northwestern portion of the county to Richmond. Although these areas were sometimes difficult to clear, they were easy to cultivate. In fact, early accounts indicate that the first crops were sometimes planted with a sharp stick if that was the only implement available.

2. This information has been taken from the article prepared for inclusion in the forthcoming Handbook of Texas. It is currently located in the offices of the Texas State Historical Association, Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

Bottom land predominates in two other areas. One area is a wide band of land along the middle and lower reaches of Big Creek in the southeastern portion of the county, and the other is a narrow band along the banks of the San Bernard River, the county's southwestern boundary. These soils were also fertile, but the soil was sandy and eroded rapidly if farmed intensively. Thus these areas were not as highly regarded as the land along the Brazos.³

The other soils in the county, the prairie soils, are for the most part regarded as fair crop land today. But they were considered worthless for farming during most of the nineteenth century. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the plows in use were not capable of breaking the tough prairie sod, and the fact that these soils lay outside the timber line made the procurement of timber for fencing and shelter more difficult. In addition to this, the land had a tendency to crack in dry periods and to allow water to stand in rainy periods. Most nineteenth century residents felt this meant that their crops would either burn up or drown. The mosquito posed another serious problem on the prairies, where the tendency for water to stand during the rainy seasons created small pools that proved ideal breeding

3. S.A. McMillan, comp., The Book of Fort Bend County Texas (Richmond, 1926), 25-30; U.S. Department of Agriculture, General Soil Map of Fort Bend County, (Fort Worth, 1979). A copy of this map is located in the offices of the Texas State Historical Association, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

grounds. As one resident recalled in 1926, "there were seasons when mosquitoes swarmed out in blinding clouds at the approach of man or beast."⁴

No significant attempts were made to farm the prairie lands until the late 1890s, and many of the early attempts ended in failure. A Mennonite Colony, for example, settled on the upper reaches of Big Creek in the mid-1890s. They attempted and failed to produce crops they were familiar with, such as flax and wheat. They had somewhat better luck with oats and corn, but yields proved very unreliable. Worst of all, the mosquitoes brought malaria. Because they had tied up all their capital in the colony, many of the Mennonites could not even afford to leave. Finally the Galveston storm of 1900 destroyed their homes, and they moved away. Later attempts to farm the prairies proved more successful, and by the 1920s, much of the prairie land in the county was under cultivation. In the nineteenth century, however, farming in Fort Bend County was confined almost without exception to the bottom land areas.⁵

The land encompassing present-day Fort Bend county was a part of the land set aside for Stephen F. Austin's colony, and its earliest Anglo settlers were among the first of the colonists who came to take up the land promised Austin's

4. McMillan, Book of Fort Bend County Texas, 113-119.

5. Ibid, 125-140.

settlers. The first arrivals settled around the bend in the Brazos River near present-day Richmond. They built a log cabin to serve as a fort and the area soon became known as the Fort Settlement. In July of 1824, when Baron de Bastrop came as an emissary of the Mexican government, forty-one of the two hundred ninety-seven formal land grants that he signed were located in what would become Fort Bend County. Four were scattered along the San Bernard River, four along Oyster Creek, and the other thirty-three were along the Brazos.⁶

Settlers continued to trickle in, and many acquired land. By 1836 and the Texas Revolution, one hundred grants had been made to ninety-seven individuals. A few of these were relatively small, but most were large. They totaled slightly over 326,000 acres or roughly 64 percent of the county's total area. Most important for the purposes of this work, within those grants lay all but a few small pieces of the land considered suitable for commercial crop agriculture. These small pieces were contained in grants made during the period of the Republic. Thus, after 1836, anyone wishing to

6. Clarence R. Wharton, History of Fort Bend County (San Antonio, 1939), 1-69. There are a number of older histories of Fort Bend County but this one seems to be the best. It was also the most useful in that it provided more information about individuals and their family ties, particularly for the antebellum period.

farm land in the county would have to obtain the land--through purchase or as a tenant--from private owners.⁷

One persistent problem in many areas of antebellum Texas was a lack of cash for paying the minimal taxes assessed and for efficiently exchanging goods and services. Most of the county's farmers recognized from the beginning that the best means of acquiring cash was to grow cotton. As Thomas H. Borden put it in a letter to Moses Lapham in March of 1835, "cotton is cash."⁸ For some of the farmers in the northern part of the county, whose land lay along the banks of Oyster Creek, sugar cane could also be grown profitably. The cultivation of sugar cane in Fort Bend county began in the 1830s, and although only a few farmers were involved in this expensive industry, it was for many of them the road to great wealth. Most of the wealthiest individuals in the county were among those whose land lay between Oyster Creek and the Brazos River and could be used to grow both sugar cane and cotton.⁹

The majority of Fort Bend County's settlers came from other southern states, and they brought with them their institutions, including slavery. Cotton and sugar cane were

7. General Land Office, Land Grant Map of Fort Bend County; United States Department of Agriculture, Soil map of Fort Bend County; General Land Office, Abstract of Land Titles (Austin, 1942).

8. This letter is quoted in Wharton, Fort Bend, 19.

9. For information on early Fort Bend sugar planters, see *Ibid*, 121ff.

clearly vital to the county's economy, and southerners considered the institution of slavery vital to the production of both crops on a large scale. Some of the original colonists brought slaves with them, and from the 1830s until the coming of the Civil War, the slave population in the county grew faster than the free population. In 1850, a little more than 61 percent of the county's residents were slaves, and by 1860, the percentage had increased to 67 percent.¹⁰

The combination of cotton, sugar cane, and slaves clearly meant prosperity for many of the county's white residents. In 1850, for example, of the seventy-seven counties enumerated in Texas, Fort Bend ranked ninth in average value per farm. While the county ranked twentieth in total improved acreage, it ranked eighth in cotton production and seventh in the production of hogsheads of sugar. The county ranked twelfth in corn production. On the Census that year, John H. Herndon, the county's wealthiest citizen, listed the value of his real property at \$100,000.¹¹

With so much land in Fort Bend considered unsuitable for farming, the county also had a number of individuals engaged

10. James D. B. DeBow, ed., Statistical View of the United States... Being a Compendium of the Seventh Census ... (Washington, D.C., 1854), 308; United States Bureau of the Census, Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington, D.C., 1864), 484.

11. DeBow, Compendium of the Seventh Census, 308-319; Wharton, Fort Bend, 124.

in stock raising. The cattle were generally allowed to run free on the prairies, to be separated and branded at most once a year. In addition to the cattle of the stock raisers, most farmers also ran at least a few cattle on the prairies, and some farmers ran so much livestock that they could more properly be called farmers and stock raisers, as a few were on the 1850 Census. In 1850, the county ranked fifth in the state in total number of cattle reported. While livestock production was an important part of the county's economy, its contribution was small relative to that made by the cotton crop in all but the very worst seasons.¹²

Like most southerners, white residents of Fort Bend County actively supported the institution of slavery. When the ordinance of secession was submitted to Texas voters, the vote in Fort Bend County was unanimous in favor of disunion (486 to 0). When secession led to war, the men demonstrated their willingness to fight for the Confederacy. Some county historians have estimated that fully 90 percent of the white men in the county between the ages of sixteen and fifty did some type of war duty.¹³

The war that Fort Bend County's white populace had so enthusiastically supported proved devastating to its adherents. Hundreds of the men from the county who marched

12. DeBow, Compendium of the Seventh Census, 309-319; McMillan, Book of Fort Bend County Texas, 157ff.

13. Wharton, Fort Bend, 196-172.

off to war never returned. Defeat brought the end of a way of life, and, as far as most of the county's white citizens were concerned, it was but the beginning of a tale of defeat and humiliation that was to last for almost a quarter of a century. Following the brief period of Presidential Reconstruction, the county was governed first by military appointees, and then by a combination of mostly black voters and white office holders until the county was "redeemed" in 1889. The political situation may well have been one factor that led to a decline in the white population. Between 1860 and 1870, the white population fell from 2,007 to 1,604. Although it rose slightly between 1870 and 1880, by 1890 it had fallen to 1,605--almost exactly the 1870 figure.¹⁴

While the white population decreased, and then remained relatively stable, the black population of the county rose steadily, increasing from 4,136 in 1860 to 8,981 in 1890. Thus, the percentage of blacks in the county rose from 67 percent in 1860 to almost 85 percent by 1890. The stark contrast between black population growth and white population

14. The climactic event of Reconstruction in Fort Bend County was the Jaybird-Woodpecker War of 1889. For information on that feud see Pauline Yelderman, "The Jaybird Democratic Association of Fort Bend County," (Masters Thesis, The University of Texas, Austin, 1938); Eighth Census, Population of the United States in 1860, 484; United States Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, The Statistics of the Population of the United States: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census (June 1, 1870) (Washington, 1872), 64; United States Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Population (Washington, 1902), I:B,784.

decline seems to be a clear indication of differing perceptions of opportunities available inside--and outside--the county.¹⁵

The 1870 census agricultural returns seem to reflect the same sort of wrenching dislocations that whites complained of in the political arena. The amount of land in cultivation had increased about 11 percent from the figures reported in 1860, but corn production had risen by only 1 percent, and cotton production had plummeted by more than 70 percent. Perhaps more important as an indicator of present and future expectations, the total value of the county's farms had fallen by 72 percent, from \$3,310,820 in 1860 to \$924,241 in 1870. The recovery in agricultural production, however, began relatively quickly. By 1880, production was up and the total value of the county's farms had risen by a little over 57 percent. Still, the 1880 total was less than half the value reported in 1860, although the deflationary trend of this period makes comparisons more difficult. While the production of cotton had risen from the 4,017 bales produced in 1870 to 6,431 bales produced in 1880, it would not reach its 1860 level of 13,602 bales again during the nineteenth century. While cotton remained important to the county's

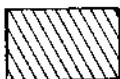
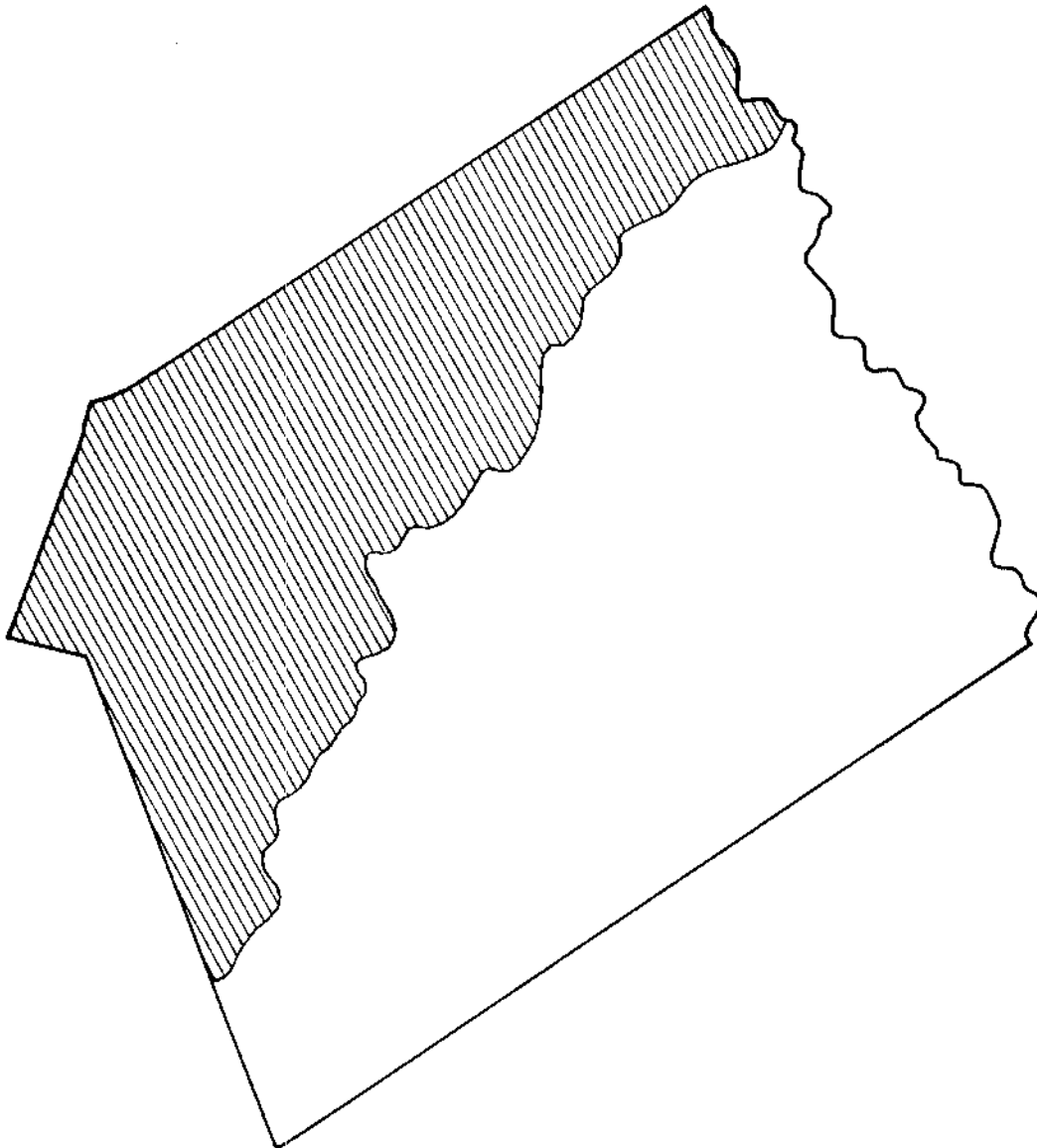
15. Eighth Census, Population of the United States in 1860, 484; United States Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census, Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Washington, 1896), 430.

economy, sugar cane became increasingly more important and was often the county's most valuable cash crop. By 1880, Fort Bend had become the second largest producer of sugar cane in the state.¹⁶

Milam County lies in central Texas, approximately one hundred-ten miles northwest of Fort Bend County. The county comprises 1,019 square miles of level to slightly rolling terrain at an elevation which ranges from two hundred-fifty to six hundred feet above sea level. The southern and eastern portions of the county lie in the post oak savannah region of the state, while the northern and western portions lie in the blackland prairie. The Brazos River forms the northeastern boundary of the county. The Little River enters the county near the northwestern corner and winds to its mouth on the Brazos in the southeastern quadrant of the county. The San Gabriel River flows through the west central portion of the county to its mouth on the Little River. The climate is temperate with an average minimum temperature of

16. United States Bureau of the Census, Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington, 1864), 144-145; United States Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, Compendium of the Ninth Census of the United States (Washington, 1872), 782-783; United States Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census, Report on the Production of Agriculture as Returned at the Tenth Census (Washington, 1883), 242, 134; United States Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census, Reports on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Washington, 1896), 229; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Agriculture (Washington, 1902), 299, 434.

MILAM COUNTY



Blackland-prairie soil.

39° in January, and an average high temperature of 96° in July. The growing season averages 256 days annually, and rainfall averages about thirty-five inches.¹⁷

Milam County is the largest of the three sample counties, and in terms of nineteenth century agriculture, it had the greatest proportions of soils considered suitable for commercial crop agriculture. During the antebellum period, the most highly prized land was the bottom land along the banks of the Little River, the San Gabriel River, and Brushy Creek. Although clayey, it was easily broken and extremely fertile. If the crops were not ruined by overflows, the land typically yielded from one-half to three quarters of a bale of cotton per acre. In especially good seasons, yields of a bale per acre were frequently reported. These bottom lands comprised approximately 10 percent of the soils in the county.

Those northern and western portions of the county which lie in the Blackland Prairie region of the state contained large areas with top soils composed of the highly regarded Houston series. These soils were capable of yields of from one-half to three-quarters of a bale of cotton per acre in good seasons. Although extremely fertile, until they had been well broken by repeated use they were extremely

17. Mike Kingston, ed., The Texas Almanac for 1986-1987 (Dallas, 1985), 330; John Clements, ed., Flying the Colors: Texas (Dallas, 1984), 327.

difficult to cultivate with the plows in use during most of the antebellum period. Developments such as the famous Kelly plow, however, made it easier to cultivate these soils, and they were increasingly utilized during the postbellum period.

In those portions of the county lying within the Post Oak Savannah region of the state, the soil was typically sandy. Heavily wooded areas alternated with prairies. These soils were typically easier to cultivate than the blackland prairie soils once they were cleared, but they were not as productive. Some areas were simply not suited to cotton, but in most areas, cotton could be grown profitably with yields ranging from one-quarter to one-third of a bale per acre. Thus, in any part of the county, there was land that could be used to grow cotton.¹⁸

Like Fort Bend County, Milam County was also included in an early colonization grant, but with far different results. On March 2, 1822, a group of fifty-two men from Davidson County, Tennessee applied to the government of Mexico for a grant of land on which to settle a colony. The group sent two representatives, Robert Leftwich and Andrew Erwin, to Mexico to present their case. Three years later, a persistent Robert Leftwich was rewarded with a grant of immense proportions in central Texas on which the company had

18. United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, General Soil Map: Milam County, Texas, (Fort Worth, 1977); A.W. Spaight, Resources, Soil, and Climate of Texas (Galveston, 1882), 220-2.

the right to settle eight hundred families. Internal problems of the company, the immense distances involved, and competition from the earlier colony which Austin was still working to fill kept the company from making any serious attempts to settle their colony until 1827. In that year, the company, under the leadership of Sterling Robertson, negotiated several changes in the grant and the first feeble, unsuccessful efforts to plant a colony were made.¹⁹

By 1830, the company had made no headway, and their contract was suspended. The next year, Stephen F. Austin and his partner, Samuel May Williams, persuaded the Mexican government to transfer the grant to them and give them permission to settle the eight hundred families. From 1831 to 1834, the grant was controlled by Austin and Williams. They made no attempt to settle families there, but they--or more accurately it seems, Williams--did dispose of large tracts of land in the area by selling it to wealthy speculators, most of them of Mexican descent. Nine of these tracts, totaling a little over 193,000 acres were in present-

19. Katherine B. Henderson, "The Early History Of Milam County," (Master's Thesis, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1924), 31ff. The colony soon became known as Robertson's Colony, and the primary sources concerning it are being published as: Malcolm D. McLean, ed., Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas (Volumes 1 through 3 were published by Texas Christian University Press, and volumes 4 through 13 by The University of Texas at Arlington Press). Although the thesis by Henderson cited above gives more detail about the early history of the county, the best overall treatment of the history of Milam County is Lelia M. Batte, History of Milam County, Texas, (San Antonio, 1956).

day Milam County. In 1834, with Austin out of favor with the Mexican government, Robertson regained control of the grant and actual settlement of the area began.²⁰

Despite the large tracts of land that had been sold, there was an abundance of unclaimed fertile land in the area to serve as an inducement to land-hungry farmers. Settlement in the area moved very slowly, however, in spite of the aggressive efforts made by Robertson after he regained control in 1834. The major obstacle was the presence of hostile Indians, who remained a threat to settlers in Milam County until well into the 1840s. By the time of the Revolution, the only settlements in the county were the very thinly populated community of Nashville on the Brazos River at the eastern edge of the county and a few families on the Brazos near present-day Cameron. The families above Nashville on the Brazos were forced to leave their homes during the Revolution, and when they returned following the battle of San Jacinto their hold on the area was tenuous at best. Although other families continued to trickle into the area, roaming bands of Kickapoo, Lipan, Kiowa, and other Indian tribes forced them to flee the area frequently. As one historical sketch of the county put it: "during the vicissitudes of frontier life prior to the annexation of

20. Ibid; Eugene C. Barker, The Life of Stephen F. Austin (Austin, 1949), 284-321.

Texas to the United States, the settlers in the upper portion of Milam County wore out their wagons fleeing to Nashville for protection from the Indians and returning to their cabins when the danger was past."²¹

Although Indians remained a problem throughout the Republic period, a series of partially effective measures reduced the dangers. In 1837, a militia unit was organized in the county for the defense of the frontier, and in 1843, a treaty was signed with a number of Indian tribes in which the tribes agreed to stay west and north of the settlements. Although the terms of the treaty were not always obeyed by either side, the combination of an organized militia and reduced incursions because of the treaty served to extend the frontier to the west. As the frontier was extended, the Indians were pushed further to the west and the areas they raided were further west. The eastern areas of what was then Milam County began to grow. By the time of the state census of 1847, there were 1,097 inhabitants enumerated. Three years later, the census of 1850 recorded a total population of 2,907.²²

21. Work Projects Administration, The Texas Historical Records Survey, Inventory of the County Archives of Texas: No. 166. Milam County (Published in and by Milam County, Texas, 1941), 4.

22. William R. Hogan, ed., "State Census of 1847," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 50(1946): 117-118. The figures for 1847 are somewhat misleading in that Milam County in 1847 encompassed not only all of present-day Milam County but also all or part of twelve other present-day counties. Undoubtedly most of the residents of the area lived within the present-day boundaries of the county, but not all.

Although Milam County would eventually become one of the largest producers of cotton in the state, the county was slow to enter the cotton-growing economy. There are reports of cotton grown in the county on a small scale as early as 1843, but for several years it seems that cotton was planted only in small quantities for home consumption. The census of 1850 for example, reported no cotton grown in the county. There are probably a number of reasons for this. First, the Indians clearly retarded the development of staple crop agriculture until the mid 1840s. Also, the county lacked a cheap and reliable method of transportation. The Brazos River was navigable for light vessels from the southern portion of the county to the Gulf of Mexico, but the trip was long and, given the limited cargo light vessels could carry, relatively expensive. Transportation problems did not prevent growing cotton profitably in Milam County, but they did make it more difficult than in counties located nearer the major market centers. Still, these other areas were filling, and gradually, the cotton kingdom was extended to include Milam County. In 1860, census enumerators reported a total of 2,238 bales of cotton produced in the county.²³

(See the map found at the front of: Texas Historical Records Survey, Inventory of the County Archives of Milam County.)

23. Batte, History of Milam County, 56-57; Eighth Census, Agriculture of the United States in 1860, 144-145.

The people who settled Milam County, like those who settled Fort Bend, were for the most part southerners. And like those who settled Fort Bend, they brought slavery and slaves with them to their new homes. In 1847, 154, or roughly 14 percent of those enumerated on the state census, were slaves. In 1850, the number of slaves had grown, but the proportion was about the same. The 436 slaves enumerated represented about 15 percent of the total population. As the cotton kingdom was extended to include the county, however, the number of slaves in the county began to rise at a faster rate than the number of free inhabitants. By 1860, while the free population had increased by 47 percent, rising to 3,633, the slave population had more than tripled, rising to 1,542. Thus, slaves comprised roughly 30 percent of the county's total population--equaling the percentage for the state as a whole.²⁴

As in Fort Bend, Milam County voters enthusiastically supported the secession movement in 1861. The vote, while not unanimous, was lopsided, with 468 of the county's voters approving secession and only 135 opposing. Once the war began, support of the Confederacy was nearly unanimous, and a large majority of the county's males volunteered for active duty. Precise participation figures are not available, but

24. Hogan, "State Census of 1847"; DeBow, Compendium of the Seventh Census, 314; Eighth Census, Population of the United States in 1860, 485.

one Confederate officer estimated that seven hundred men from Milam County served in confederate military units.²⁵ The war was a tragedy which left hundreds of Milam County's male citizens dead or seriously wounded, and spelled the end of a way of life. In many ways, then, the secession crisis and the war years in Fort Bend and Milam County seem similar.

By contrast, Reconstruction was a vastly different process in Milam County than it was in Fort Bend. Fort Bend had a Freedmen's Bureau at times supported by Federal troops, a black voting majority, and twenty-five years of "black Republican rule." Milam had no Freedmen's Bureau and less than five years of "black Republican rule." As one local historian in the 1950s put it: "Despite inconveniences, hard feelings, and what the ex-Confederates regarded as insults, Milam County managed to get through Reconstruction without any permanent damage."²⁶

Between 1860 and 1870, the population of Milam County grew at roughly the same rate as it had between 1850 and 1860, increasing by 74 percent, from 5,175 to 8,984. During this period, both the white and black population of the county grew, but the black population grew at a slightly faster rate than did the white so that in 1870, blacks made up 33 percent of the county's total population. The rate at which the

25. Batte, History of Milam County, 60-64; Carl Moneyhon, Republicanism in Reconstruction Texas (Austin, 1980), 204.

26. Batte, History of Milam County, 65-67; (quote on page 67).

white population grew each year between the two censuses can not be determined, but it is clear that the increase in black population occurred during the Civil War. This increase can be followed on the county's tax rolls during the period from 1860 to 1864.

County residents paid taxes on 1,136 slaves in 1860 and on 2,147 slaves in 1864. Most of the increase occurred after 1862, as slaveholders from other states brought their slaves to Texas to keep them out of the path of the United States Army. Two factors explain why the number of slaves on the 1864 tax roll is significantly lower than the 2,977 blacks recorded on the 1870 census. First, slaveholders typically paid taxes on fewer slaves than they actually owned. (This partially explains the fact that the census recorded 1,542 slaves present in 1860, or, almost 36 percent more than appeared on the tax roll that year.) Second, the practice of bringing slaves to Texas for safekeeping did not end on January 1, 1864, the last date on which taxes were assessed on slaves.²⁷

Despite differences in the Reconstruction process, the economic impact of developments between 1860 and 1870 was almost as devastating in Milam County as it had been in Fort

27. The figures on slaves and the tax roll were taken from a chart prepared by Randolph B. Campbell, and the information on "refugeeing" slaves to Texas was taken from Randolph B. Campbell, An Empire for Slavery (forthcoming from Louisiana State University Press).

Bend. Population and the number of farms increased sharply, but the total value of farms in the county fell by more than 50 percent, from \$1,142,767 in 1860 to \$505,584 ten years later. The impact of the changes in the relationship of labor to land on crop production is impossible to measure. Between 1860 and 1870, the number of improved acres in the county almost doubled, going from 19,542 to 32,644. During this same period, the size of the cotton crop more than doubled, from 2,238 bales to 5,143 bales, and corn production nearly doubled, increasing from 112,430 bushels to 201,117 bushels. On the surface at least, it would seem that Milam County farms did as well or better in 1869 as they had in 1859. The problem with this interpretation is that the statistics on improved acres do not necessarily reflect the number of acres actually in cultivation in the county. It could be that Milam County farmers had a much higher percentage of their improved land in cultivation in 1869 than they had had in 1859.²⁸

In a sense, Milam County was still on the periphery of the cotton kingdom in 1870, and transportation problems were in large measure responsible. Railroads had been constructed to within fifty miles of the county, but as yet, Milam had no rail connection. The decade of the seventies brought the

28. Ninth Census, Population of the United States, 64-65; Ninth Census, Compendium of the Ninth Census of the United States, 783.

International and Great Northern Railway, an explosion in terms of population growth, and another doubling of the size of the cotton crop in Milam County. The population of the county more than doubled between 1870 and 1880, and cotton production jumped to 10,844 bales.²⁹

Palo Pinto County lies approximately one-hundred-fifty miles northwest of Milam County. It comprises 949 square miles of the cross timbers region of the state. The terrain varies from gently sloping in the southeastern portion to undulating and hilly throughout the remainder of the county. The Brazos River enters the county in the northwestern quadrant and flows in a tortuous course to the southeastern corner where it exits, leaving almost two hundred miles of river front land in the county. Temperatures range from an average minimum of 33° in January to an average high of 96° in July, and the growing season averages 221 days annually. Rainfall, which averages thirty inches a year, is barely adequate at best, and, in dry years, is inadequate for all but drought resistant crops.³⁰

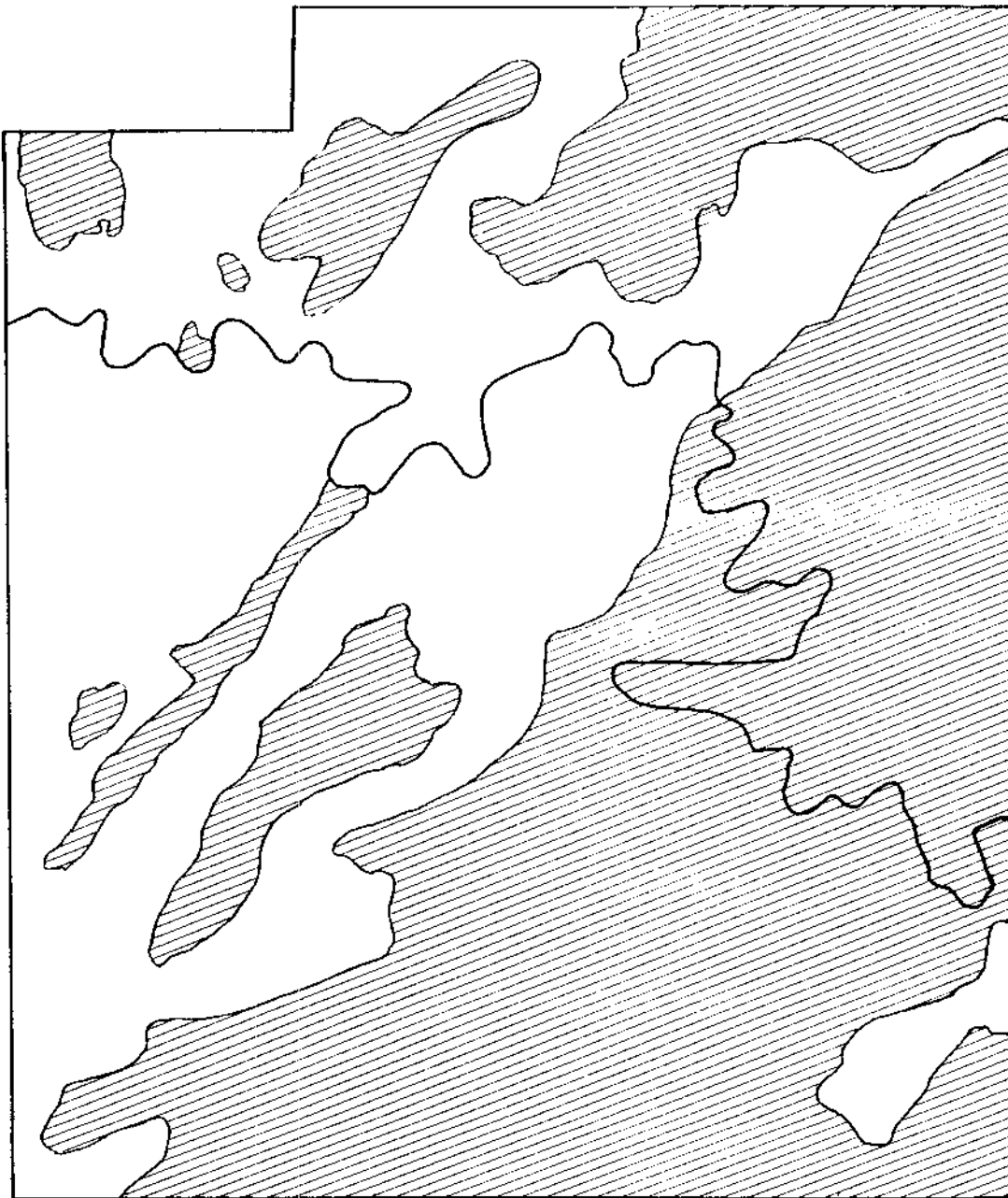
29. During the 1870s, the black population of the county, increasing from 2,977 to 3,934, grew at a much slower rate than did the population of the county as whole. U.S. Census Office, Tenth Census, Statistics of the Population of the United States as Returned at the Tenth Census (Washington, 1883), 345; Tenth Census, Agriculture at the Tenth Census, 243.

30. Kingston, Texas Almanac for 1986-1987, 337; Clements, Flying the Colors, 353-4; Spaight, Resources, Soil, and Climate of Texas, 245-247.

As in Milam, the soils in Palo Pinto vary widely. Unlike Milam, however, large areas in the county are not well suited to staple crop agriculture. Almost 40 percent of the county falls into a category referred to locally as live oak country. These areas are marked by broad limestone capped ridges, stony escarpments, and deep narrow valleys. The soil in these areas is typically rocky, shallow, and poorly suited for crop land. If a line were drawn diagonally across the county from the northeastern to the southwestern corner, then most of the land north and west of this line would fall into areas designated locally as live oak country. Within this area of the county there are areas of prime farmland, particularly along the banks of the Brazos River, and along the banks of Ioni Creek. There are also other areas in this section of the county that can be profitably farmed commercially, but taken together these areas are relatively small compared to the vast expanse of the agriculturally unsuitable live oak country.

East and south of the imaginary diagonal line, most of the soil is well to moderately well suited to cropland. Even in this portion of the county the land is marked by ridges and escarpments, but the ridges are more gently sloping, and the valleys, while narrow are also gently sloping. During the nineteenth century, these valleys were the most frequently

PALO PINTO COUNTY



Contain soils considered well to moderately well sulted for cropland.

cultivated lands, and most of the cotton grown in Palo Pinto County was planted in this area.³¹

Like Milam County, the area that was to become Palo Pinto was part of the land set aside for the Robertson Colony. Obviously, the land of Palo Pinto County, being much farther west, was never the site of even feeble colonization efforts in the 1830s. Nonetheless, Anglo settlers were familiar with the major water courses, and one, the Palo Pinto River, appears on Stephen F. Austin's map which was printed in 1839. Survey expeditions reached the area in the 1830s. William "Bigfoot" Wallace visited the area with a surveying expedition in 1837 and remarked that it was ideal ranching country. Shortly thereafter, the Abner Ashworth Survey, the first actual Palo Pinto County land grant, was surveyed and in 1840 patented.³²

Beginning in 1841, in order to bolster the Republic's hold on western Texas, another series of colonization contracts was signed, and an immense territory was set aside for a colony. The contract was signed with W.S. Peters and others, and the tract included all or part of present-day Palo Pinto

31. United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Soil Survey of Palo Pinto County, Texas (Washington D.C., 1981), 1-10; United States Bureau of the Census, Report on Cotton Production in the United States also Embracing Agricultural and Physico-Geographical Descriptions of the Several Cotton States and of California (Washington, 1884), 1:800.

32. Winnie B. Feidler, "A History of Mineral Wells, Texas, 1878-1953," (Master's Thesis, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1953), 3-5.

County. By the late 1840s, the company, then called the Texas Emigration and Land Company, began to survey Palo Pinto County land and, thus, much of the land in the county has been designated the T.E. and L. Co. Surveys. One major obstacle to settlement remained, and that was the Indians who inhabited the area. Bands of Caddo, Keechi, Waco, and Tawakoni Indians had villages in what was to become Palo Pinto County, and a Comanche trail to the Red River ran through the county. In 1855, the Indians were placed on a reservation near Fort Belknap, and the way was cleared for Anglo settlement.³³

Settlement proceeded rapidly after that, and on August 27, 1856, the county of Palo Pinto was created. The county was organized in April of 1857, and in 1858 the State Legislature donated 325 acres for a county seat which was subsequently named Palo Pinto also. The 1860 census reported a population of 1,525. Indians continued to harass the settlement, but settlers continued to trickle in.³⁴

The most famous of Palo Pinto County's earliest settlers--men like Charles Goodnight, George and Christopher Slaughter, and Oliver Loving--were all cattlemen. This is fitting in the sense that stock raising was by far the most important industry in the county until the latter years of

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid, 35-36.

the nineteenth century. The lack of cheap transportation to take cotton to market was clearly an important factor. While this would have been a problem for a cotton farmer, cattlemen had no such problems. The Indian reservation and the Federal forts along the frontier provided a ready market for beef. As cattlemen poured into the county, their stock roamed the open range. The increasingly larger herds of cattle and the lack of cheap fencing material further inhibited the development of commercial crop agriculture. According to the 1860 Census returns, there were more than 23,700 cattle and 3,200 sheep in the county and only 4,666 improved acres. The largest crop was corn, with 9,630 bushels produced with wheat a distant second (3,717 bushels). Seventeen bales of cotton were produced that year. The livestock in the county was valued at \$350,992 while the total value of all the farms in the county was reported as \$53,095.³⁵

Located as it is, with ranching as the major industry, Palo Pinto County seems much more western than it does southern. With just 130 slaves present in 1860, slavery was clearly not as vital to the county's economy as it was in Fort Bend or Milam County. Still the county was settled by southerners who were loyal to the South's Peculiar Institution. When the secession vote was taken in February

35. Ibid; Eighth Census, Agriculture of the United States in 1860, 144-147.

of 1861, Palo Pinto voted not only overwhelmingly for secession, as did Milam, but unanimously (107 to 0) for secession, as did Fort Bend County. Their loyalty to southern institutions made such a course possible, but there were also other factors which help explain the secession vote. Citizens of the county had often clashed with the Federal Army over Indian policy, and many of the county's residents were also upset at the closing of Fort Belknap in 1859.³⁶

It is not presently known how well the citizens of Palo Pinto supported the war. With the removal of troops from the frontier, the Indians literally rolled back the line of settlement, leaving Palo Pinto County at one point without any organized government. The county did not begin to recover from the effects of the war until the early 1870s, when federal troops once again removed the Indian threat. The county was not returned separately on the 1870 Census, so population figures are not available until 1880.³⁷

36. Moneyhon, Republicanism in Reconstruction Texas, 204. For information about affairs in the county and relations between citizen and the Federal Army, see The Diary of J. H. Baker, Archives, Barker Texas History Center, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas. The diary is also an excellent source for information about life in Palo Pinto County in the immediate postbellum period. For a historical treatment of the problems on the frontier and their effect on the issue of secession, see Walter L. Buenger, Secession and the Union in Texas, (Austin, 1984).

37. Lucy A. Erath, ed., "The Memoirs of George Bernard Erath," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 27(1923): 157-160.

By 1880, the county had reached and surpassed its 1860 population. The census that year enumerated 5,885 inhabitants. The county was overwhelmingly white, as there were only eighty-five blacks present. Other changes were occurring that are more important for the purposes of this work. The cattle industry was going through a period of drastic change. The desire for a better breed of cattle, coupled with the introduction of cheap fencing material, was ending the period of the open range. In addition to that, the Texas and Pacific Railroad had been constructed through the southern portion of the county in the late 1870s, making it easier to transport a crop to market. Taken together these two changes led to the beginnings of commercial crop agriculture in the county. According to the cotton report included in the 1880 Census, 1879 was only the third year that the county's farmers had tried to grow any appreciable amount of cotton, and that year's crop amounted to only 885 bales. But by 1880, Palo Pinto County was taking its first steps toward an economy based on cotton, and by 1906, cotton gins in the county would report a total of 24,795 bales ginned.³⁸

With Palo Pinto's entry into the cotton culture in the late 1870s, all three counties had at least the beginnings of

38. Tenth Census, Population, 345; Twelfth Census, Population of the United States, 432; Census, Report on the Production of Cotton (1880), 1:800; Feidler, "A History of Mineral Wells," 84.

a commercial crop economy. But, even before this last county reached that stage, there were farmers present, and, as an examination of the information compiled from the United States censuses will demonstrate, some of these farmers were tenants, farming someone else's land because they were unable to obtain their own.

CHAPTER 2

LOCATING ANTEBELLUM TENANTS: A METHODOLOGY FOR USING THE CENSUSES OF 1850 AND 1860

This study posits the fundamental assumption that most nineteenth century farmers, if given the chance, would have preferred to own the land they farmed. As one historian of Milam County pointed out, it was the desire for land that brought most early settlers to Texas in the first place.¹ Thus, this study focuses on those who apparently had no viable options to tenant farming--individuals who farmed someone else's land, not because they wanted to, but because they had no other acceptable alternatives. Determining which farmers actually fell into this class of tenants is not a simple matter. Consider, for example, the cases of two men who proposed to rent land on Chocolate Bayou near present-day Fort Bend County from James Perry, a wealthy Brazoria County planter, during the 1830s.² James W. Robinson, an apparently

1. Batte, History of Milam County, 16-17.

2. James Franklin Perry, a brother-in-law of Stephen F. Austin, was the owner of the famous Peach Point Plantation. The land on Chocolate Bayou was a part of Perry's original land grant and was intended to be the site of the Perry Plantation. (See Walter P. Webb, H. Bailey Carrol and Eldon S. Branda, The Handbook of Texas (Austin, 1952), 2: 364 for more information about J.F. Perry.) Although the author was unable to locate any written contracts with tenants who occupied the land, several references in the papers make it clear that Perry ran cattle over a part of the land. Tenants who farmed the land paid no cash rent, but were

prosperous man, wrote Perry in January 1832, saying only that he "wished to see the country [sic]" before he located permanently. On the face of it, Robinson's situation was far different from that of Isaac Mansfield who wrote to Perry in July 1833. "My business here", Mansfield explained, "has been as disastrous as you can well imagine, I am at present at a loss to know what to do. I am in a strange country without money, without friends, and in debt ... that I can [not] expect to pay for some time to come." He went on to outline the precariousness of his situation, "I must try to get at farming next season but don't know how to do it. I have neither ploughs, teams, or anything to go to work with, or any means of living while I am making a crop...I was in hopes to have entered some land, but I have not now the means of clearing it out of the office nor do I know of any elligable [sic] situation, on good land that is vacant...."³

These two letters, apparently coming from individuals with radically different resources, represent different conditions and different motivations and expectations. For Robinson, tenant farming was a way of employing his resources while

instead required to keep an eye on the cattle and prevent other settlers from chopping down trees on the property without Perry's permission.

3. James W. Robinson to James F. Perry, January 17, 1832 and Isaac Mansfield to James F. Perry, July 4, 1833, Perry Papers, Archives, Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas. The references to Mansfield in the text are, of course, illustrative. It is entirely possible that Mansfield was not so poor as he seemed. In a letter to Perry the year before he had indicated that, at that point, he owned two slaves.

looking for the best place to build his own farming operation. For Mansfield, on the other hand, tenant farming was a means of survival. Of course, he probably hoped for better things in the future, but at that moment, according to his letter, he had no other options. Those tenant farmers who found themselves in Robinson's position are not the focus of this study. At every stage, an attempt will be made to separate them from "poor" tenants, who, like Mansfield, farmed someone else's land because they lacked the resources necessary to purchase their own. Many of them were admittedly better equipped than Mansfield, but for the purposes of this study at least, these differences in degree are not as important as the one factor they had in common--their inability to purchase land.

Every attempt has also been made to exclude from the true tenant group the children and other immediate relatives of wealthy landholders. This delineation is more difficult to make, but it is equally necessary. Again two examples may serve to illustrate the importance of this distinction as well as some of the difficulties involved in establishing it. In 1850, Thaddeus Hunter appeared on the population schedule of the Fort Bend census as the head of a household.⁴

4. United States Bureau of the Census, Seventh Census of the United States, Schedule I (Free Inhabitants), Fort Bend County, National Archives, Washington, D.C. In every case, reference to the free population schedule of the census will refer to schedule I of the census for the year indicated. (1850 through 1880). All of these schedules are

Although he gave "farmer" as his occupation, he owned no real property. In the absence of other evidence, he would appear to have been a tenant farmer, but Thaddeus Hunter was not what he seemed to be on the census. In reality, the most important factor was his relationship to his neighbor, Dr. Johnson Hunter, his father. Johnson Hunter, one of the "old three hundred," owned \$6,730 worth of real estate.⁵ As his son and neighbor, Thaddeus almost certainly shared in the use and control of the property. When Johnson Hunter died in 1855, his estate, appraised at \$47,934.25, was divided among his numerous heirs. The bequest that Thaddeus Hunter received as one of the heirs formed the foundation of the wealth he had accumulated by 1860, when, according to the census, he owned \$12,000 worth of real property and \$6,000 worth of personal property. While it is impossible to determine the terms under which he farmed before his father's

housed in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. References to the agricultural schedule will refer to Schedule 4 of the 1850 and 1860 Census, Schedule 3 of the 1870 Census, and Schedule 2 of the 1880 Census. All of these agricultural schedules are in the Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas. All of these schedules are available on microfilm.

5. The term refers to the first three hundred colonists who settled in the original Austin colony. Johnson and his family arrived in Texas in June of 1822, and moved to Fort Bend County in 1829. See: Handbook of Texas, 1: 866; 2: 310.

death, Thaddeus Hunter was probably never a tenant farmer at all, and certainly he was never a poor one.⁶

Thaddeus Hunter's relationship to his father was not difficult to detect. The fact that he lived next door to an individual old enough to be his father who had the same surname was an obvious indication, and a brief biographical sketch of Johnson Hunter in a county history confirmed the relationship.⁷ Unfortunately, such relationships are not always so obvious, and even when they seem obvious, they can not always be assumed. Clearly, it would be inappropriate to assume that everyone in the county who had the same surname was related. Such problems are compounded by the fact that related individuals did not always have the same surname. Take, for example, the case of Rachel T. Glasscock, also of Fort Bend County. When she died in 1852, her estate (appraised at \$6,027.50) went to her two sons, Avery and

6. Abstracts of the Fort Bend County probate records were made in the late 1930s by individuals working with the Texas Historical Records Survey Project, a branch of Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration. These abstracts were probably intended to aid workers in an inventory of county records, and in the preparation of an index to the probate records of the county. The information contained in these abstracts varies from a listing of the name of the deceased and the types and number of documents appearing in the file to summaries of all the papers. The abstracts were first made in pencil and then typed. The typed version was then compared with the original. Any errors found were corrected in pencil. The abstracts are preserved in the archives at the Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, filed by county and then by the first letter of the surname of the deceased. The information on the estate of Johnson Hunter was taken from these abstracts, as was the case of Rachel T. Glasscock mentioned later in the text.

7. Wharton, Fort Bend County, 84.

William Breed.⁸ Obviously, Rachel T. Glasscock had formerly been Rachel T. Breed. Although both of the Breed boys lived in the same household as Rachel Glasscock and her husband, Benjamin, at the time of the 1850 census, nothing the enumerator recorded that year made their relationship clear. Just as it would be inappropriate to assume that every person in the county with the same surname was related, it would also be a mistake to assume that everyone living in the same household was related. Without the probate records, the relationship between Rachel Glasscock and her two sons named Breed would never have been discovered.

Clearly, not every individual who appeared to be a landless tenant actually fell into that class, and determining which farmers to exclude can never be completely successful. Nevertheless, every effort has been made to remove from consideration those individuals who had the resources to become landholders but were not ready to commit themselves to a particular area and those who were already in the landowning class in the sense that they were relatives of landowners. When individuals in these two groups are excluded, the tenant farmers who remain will be counted as "poor" tenants. That is, they did not purchase land because they were unable to.

8. See the probate records abstracts in the archives at Barker Center.

The United States census is the single most important and reliable source for determining farm tenancy in Texas from 1850 to 1880. In fact, the censuses represent the only attempts made in the nineteenth century to collect and record systematic information about every individual living in the United States. Other sources are either far less systematic, such as manuscript collections and extant newspaper files, or less inclusive, such as probate records and other records created at the county level. These sources, particularly the manuscript collections and the newspaper files, can sometimes provide rich detail about certain individuals, but they seldom provide information about poor people, the types of individuals who are the focus of this study. Other sources can supplement or sometimes confirm, but they can not replace the census, which was intended by its creators to record information about every individual.

Every historian is aware of the census, and most United States historians have probably used the manuscript schedules at some time. All of the nineteenth-century manuscript census returns which survived have been microfilmed and are generally available at libraries across the country. Still, since the various census manuscript returns provided virtually all of the data upon which the discussion of antebellum Texas tenant farming in the following chapter is based, a discussion of their creation and the way in which

they have been utilized is necessary. For the purposes of this study, the two most important sections of the census were Schedule 1--Free Inhabitants and Schedule 4--Productions of Agriculture.

As the census taker traveled through a county, he went from house to house completing the first schedule which recorded the name, age, place of birth, literacy, and other social statistics for every free individual in the household. In 1850 he recorded on this schedule the value of any real property owned by an individual. Ten years later, in the census of 1860, he recorded personal property as well.⁹ The census enumeration, which began on June 1, could take weeks and sometimes months. During that period, life went on. Some families moved out of the county while others arrived. There would also be deaths in the county. On one of the Milam County population schedules used for this study, the enumerator had gone back through the pages and drawn a heavy line through some of the names. Across the line, he simply wrote: "Dead". There were probably not very many enumerators who were as conscientious as the one in Milam County, but in any case, the most carefully prepared census schedules were probably inaccurate in minor ways the day the returns were finally completed. Although it would be impossible to

9. For a general discussion of the census, see Carroll D. Wright, The History and Growth of the United States Census, (Washington, 1900).

determine conclusively, these small inaccuracies probably affected a relatively small percentage of the total entries on the census and certainly could not have involved a large enough segment of the population to have a significant impact on the statistics prepared for use in this study. Nevertheless, they do serve to illustrate some of the problems which plagued every census enumerator.

The forms for the free population schedule did not include a column for recording the relationship of the individuals in a household to the head of that household until the census of 1880. But from 1850 to 1870, census takers almost invariably listed the husband first, followed by the wife, and then the man's children, almost always in chronological order by age. If an older child was married but still living at home, that child and his or her spouse were often listed in the same place the child would have been listed if unmarried. If the wife had children from a previous marriage, then these children were usually listed after the youngest of the children by her current husband. The wife's children were then followed by any other relatives present and finally by those living in the household who were unrelated to the nuclear family. An examination of practically any 1850 or 1860 free population schedule from the manuscript census returns for a Texas county will provide evidence that living patterns in antebellum Texas were extremely varied and

sometimes complex. In fact, sometimes two nuclear families would share a household. Because antebellum census forms were not constructed to record these complex living arrangements, the recording scheme outlined above can never be relied on with absolute certainty. But its use was widespread, and, when used, it appears to have been consistently applied.

On the agricultural schedule, the enumerator was required to list the operator of every farm with produce valued at \$100 or more, together with information about farm size and value, number of improved and unimproved acres, value of implements, and the total value of livestock owned. He also recorded the numbers of various types of livestock owned and the amounts of production of numerous crops.¹⁰ Although census takers probably tried to insure that these statistics were as accurate as possible, they generally had little choice but to take the farmer's report at face value. Some farmers were probably poor record keepers. Nonetheless, any farmer would probably know exactly how large his farm was, and the size of the crop was too vital an economic issue for many farmers to fail to make note of it. Some undoubtedly

10. The figures recorded for improved acres during the antebellum period included both fields planted in crops and fields which were lying fallow. That fact, coupled with the fact that the forms did not provide a blank for the recording of the number of acres planted in each crop, make it very difficult to estimate the percentage of total cropland devoted to a single crop.

did, but most farmers would have had no reason deliberately to mislead the enumerator.

The instructions provided to the census takers defined a farm operator as "the person residing upon or having charge of the farm, whether as owner, agent, or tenant."¹¹ Again, the form itself did not provide a column for recording the tenure of farm operators until 1880. During the antebellum period, some census takers in other states apparently tried to make distinctions between owners and tenants and adapted the form to indicate who was an owner and who was not. In their work on antebellum Georgia, Bode and Ginter suggested that enumerators used various conventions to make distinctions not only between owners and tenants but also between individuals who farmed land under various forms of farm tenancy arrangements. These conventions revolved primarily around whether or not the census taker assigned improved and unimproved acres and a cash value to the farm. In addition to a discussion of their work in Georgia, Bode and Ginter offered a critique of other works based primarily on the census in other southern states, including Wealth and Power in Antebellum Texas, by Randolph Campbell and Richard Lowe. Bode and Ginter concluded that "Campbell and Lowe, without having been aware of it, may have encountered a

11. Quoted in Bode and Ginter, Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia, 21.

tenancy convention, in which the enumerator failed to record improved acreage."¹² Although Bode and Ginter's work must remain highly speculative at this point, an effort was made to search for conventions on the agricultural schedules of Fort Bend, Milam, and Palo Pinto counties. Tables one and two present the results.

TABLE 1
FARMERS REPORTING NO REAL PROPERTY AND THEIR APPEARANCE ON ANTEBELLUM AGRICULTURAL SCHEDULES: FORT BEND, MILAM, AND PALO PINTO COUNTIES, 1850-1860

	TOTAL REPORTING NO REAL PROPERTY	NUMBER ON AGRI- CULTURAL SCHEDULE	PERCENTAGE ON AGRI- CULTURAL SCHEDULE
FORT BEND, 1850	19	1	5%
MILAM, 1850	243	117	48%
FORT BEND, 1860	58	18	31%
MILAM, 1860	94	9	10%
PALO PINTO, 1860	72	37	51%

As these figures indicate, the most common convention employed was to leave landless farmers off the agricultural schedule. Approximately half of all those called farmers but reporting no real property on the free population schedules appeared on the agricultural schedules in only two instances--in Milam County in 1850 and in Palo Pinto County

12. *Ibid*, 13-16; 33-44; quote, 41.

TABLE 2
 THE SEARCH FOR CONVENTIONS: METHODS FOR REPORTING ACREAGE AND FARM
 VALUES ON THE ANTEBELLUM AGRICULTURAL SCHEDULES, MILAM COUNTY IN 1850
 AND PALO PINTO COUNTY IN 1860

	N	1*	2*	3*	4*
<u>MILAM, 1850</u>					
FARMERS REPORTING REAL PROPERTY	165	.818	.121	.03	.03
FARMERS REPORTING NO REAL PROPERTY	117	.547	.368	.06	.026
<u>PALO PINTO, 1860</u>					
FARMERS REPORTING REAL PROPERTY	25	.680	0	.320	0
FARMERS REPORTING NO REAL PROPERTY**	37	.054	0	.919	0

1* PROPORTION FOR WHICH VALUES REPORTED IN ALL THREE CATEGORIES

2* PROPORTION FOR WHICH VALUES REPORTED IN NONE OF THE THREE CATEGORIES

3* PROPORTION FOR WHICH VALUES REPORTED FOR IMPROVED ACRES AND VALUE OF FARM ONLY

4* PROPORTION FOR WHICH VALUES REPORTED FOR UNIMPROVED ACRES AND VALUE OF FARM ONLY

**One farmer reporting no real property in 1860 in Palo Pinto County had values reported for both acreage categories, but not for the value of the farm he operated.

in 1860. Table two presents the manner in which these landless farmers were enumerated in comparison to those farmers on the schedule who had reported the ownership of real property. As the table illustrates, there were some significant differences in these groups. The most extreme differences were those on the 1860 Palo Pinto agricultural schedule where over ninety percent of all landless farmers were reported without unimproved acres. Unfortunately, nearly one out of every three landowning farmers were enumerated in the same manner. In Milam County, landless

farmers were more than three times more likely to appear on the agricultural schedule in 1850 with no values recorded for these three categories than were landowning farmers. Still, less than four out of every ten landless farmers on the schedule appeared that way on the census.

Perhaps these differences in census entries do represent the use of conventions, particularly in Palo Pinto County. This is important because it reinforces the conclusion that there were tenant farmers in antebellum Texas. But taken together, the evidence from these three counties suggests that the use of conventions was probably not widespread. Only one of the five schedules examined (that for Palo Pinto County) contained clear evidence of such a convention, and that convention was hopelessly flawed in that many landowning farmers apparently were enumerated in the same fashion because they owned no unimproved acres. Moreover, a large portion of those who reported no real property never appeared on the agricultural schedule and would thus be missed if the search for antebellum tenants were restricted to an analysis of that schedule.

Two other aspects of the compiling of the antebellum census are important to note because they represent sources of potential errors. First, as the census taker traveled throughout the county, there was always the possibility that he would arrive at a farm where no one was home. In these

cases, he had two viable alternatives. He could plan another trip to the area for the purpose of collecting the information, or he could ask a neighbor to provide the information for him. For our purposes, the former method would have been infinitely better, but it seems probable that he sometimes took the latter course. This would account for at least some of the anomalies which are frustrating for those who attempt to use the census systematically in an effort to measure changes over time. Some of these anomalies include radical changes in the spelling of a name, individuals who age five or twelve years in ten, birthplaces that change, and children who suddenly appear as twelve-year-olds in households without two-year-olds ten years earlier.

Second, the forms upon which the census marshals originally recorded the information they collected were not always the documents that were preserved and later microfilmed. At least two of the antebellum schedules used for this study were obviously copies of the original forms. At the front of the microfilmed Fort Bend free population schedule for 1860, a recapitulation sheet has been filmed which records the charges due the enumerator. One of the lines reads as follows: "pages copied 115 x 2 = 230 @ 8 cts." Not only were the schedules copied, but at least one of the schedules was not copied by the original enumerator. The handwriting on the free population schedule is clearly

different than that on the agricultural schedule. The last page of the population schedule for Palo Pinto in 1860 contains the following statement: "I hereby certify that the foregoing returns of the census of the counties of Palo Pinto, Buchanan and Shackelford are true and correct copies of the original made by me according to my oath and instructions to the best of my knowledge and belief."¹³

Unfortunately, there seems to be no method for determining which, if any, of the preserved returns are actually original. Even though the original enumerator may have recopied the schedules himself, the work was tedious and the potential for transcription errors was great.

To belabor an obvious point, all the problems notwithstanding, the census remains the single most important source of evidence available for any systematic attempt to estimate the number of antebellum tenants and make relevant observations about their lives. It clearly contains errors both of commission and omission. Moreover, it was not even designed to provide information about tenant farming at all. In short, it is not perfect, but then few historical sources are. Newspapers, for example, are notoriously inaccurate, yet few historians would argue that they should be ignored. The census also must be used, but certain steps are necessary

13. Eighth Census, 1860, Fort Bend County, Schedule 1; Eighth Census, 1860, Palo Pinto County, Schedule 1, Microfilm Copies.

in an effort to utilize the censuses' advantages while minimizing their disadvantages. These steps must be carefully delineated so that others may judge their appropriateness and thus better evaluate for themselves the validity of the conclusions drawn.

In the search for antebellum tenant farmers, the two most important columns on the 1850 free population schedule were those for an individual's occupation and for the total value of his real property. For the 1860 census, the ownership of personal property was also considered significant. Clearly, the search for the type of antebellum tenant farmer this study focuses on began with the identification of those individuals who were termed farmers or planters by occupation and reported the ownership of no real property. In order to measure the incidence of farm tenants both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of all farmers in a county, lists of all those over the age of eighteen who were reported as either farmers or planters were compiled for each of the counties from each census taken. For each individual, the name, age, value of real property, number of household and position in that household, and status as the head of a nuclear family or not, was recorded as it appeared on the population schedule from the 1850 Census. Information recorded for each farmer from the 1860 population schedule

included all that taken for 1850, plus the value of personal property.

A number of questions concerning the individuals to be included had to be resolved before the lists could be compiled. In every case, the answers chosen were those which best met two criteria. First, as far as possible, the solution had to seem logically appropriate given the basic goal of locating poor tenants. Second, all the procedures in compiling the lists of tenants had to be capable of systematic and consistent application in all cases. These criteria made compiling the lists a much less painful--and more objective--process.

The first question concerned occupation. In every county, there were individuals who were listed as farm laborers or sometimes simply as laborers. In all three counties, these terms appear to have been used interchangeably. Some of those listed as laborers lived in towns or villages, but many of them lived with farm families in rural areas. None of those listed as laborers or farm laborers appeared on the agricultural schedule. The great majority apparently worked for daily wages and had no stake in the land or crops they cultivated. They were not tenant farmers or sharecroppers, and it was not possible to determine conclusively which

laborers actually worked in agriculture and which did not. Accordingly, they were excluded from this study.¹⁴

One other question concerning occupations had to be resolved. In every census in all three counties, there were individuals who appeared on the agricultural schedule as farm operators who were not listed as farmers on the population schedule. Many of these were individuals whose occupation was listed as "stock raiser," or some other designation which seemed to have the same basic meaning. Although these individuals clearly had occupations which would normally be associated with agriculture today, they were not included in the list of farmers. These individuals often had no real property, but this is not surprising given the fact that ranching in antebellum Texas was generally dependent on the open range rather than any land an individual might own. Obviously though, they were not tenant farmers. A small percentage of those who were listed as stock raisers were

14. For a detailed discussion of the problem of agricultural occupations as listed on the 1860 Georgia population schedules see: Bode and Ginter, Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia, 46-50. Although Bode and Ginter decided to include laborers who were heads of households and lived in rural areas, they noted, "The ambiguity of the census instructions and the inconsistent and sometimes contradictory practices of enumerators make the analysis of occupations from the census extraordinarily complex, even in the agricultural sector....The complexity increases as one moves downward from proprietor to tenant to laborer. Moreover, comparisons of occupation frequency distributions, even for heads of household, among counties and between census years, is of doubtful validity to the extent that enumerators employed noncomparable criteria."

listed as "stock raiser and farmer," or some equivalent term. These individuals were included as farmers.

Most of the remaining individuals who appeared on the agricultural schedule, yet were not listed as farmers, were men who had some other occupation, such as lawyer or doctor. Occasionally, however, they were women, or men with occupations of lower status, such as a clerk or a teamster. All of these individuals were also omitted from the list compiled, because, except for women who had no occupation listed, they obviously had another source of income other than agriculture and were therefore more than just tenant farmers. Most of the women who had no occupation, yet appeared on the agricultural schedule, had at least one son living at home who was termed a farmer and was included on the list prepared for this study.

The next question which had to be resolved concerned those who appeared as farmers by occupation but did not appear as heads of household. There were two alternatives in dealing with this group. One was to omit all those individuals who were not heads of household. This approach has merit in that it reduces the number of relatives of landowning heads of household who would otherwise appear on the list. This was the approach utilized by Bode and Ginter in their study of the 1860 Georgia census. Unfortunately, it excludes individuals who were tenant farmers boarding with families to

whom they were not related. This would be a minor problem if the approach always excluded the sons of comparatively wealthy men. As the case of Thaddeus Hunter, mentioned above, demonstrates, it does not. For this study, therefore, non-heads of household who met the other criteria were included.

One final problem, that of ages, arose primarily from the decision to include those not listed as heads of household. According to the instructions provided to enumerators, an occupation was to be given for every individual over the age of fifteen. The occupation could be "at home", or "at school", but an occupation was supposed to be recorded. Sometimes census takers ignored this instruction and left the space blank. At other times, they listed occupations for boys who were younger than fifteen. Obviously few of these young men could be expected to have acquired the resources necessary to purchase land. In fact, most of the youngest "farmers" in the county were clearly the sons of men who were farmers. The decision made in this case was to exclude every person from the list who was under the age of eighteen. This was an arbitrary determination, but it was decided that a higher age limit would make it necessary either to exclude young men who were already established as heads of household or to make divisions within an age group by position in a household.

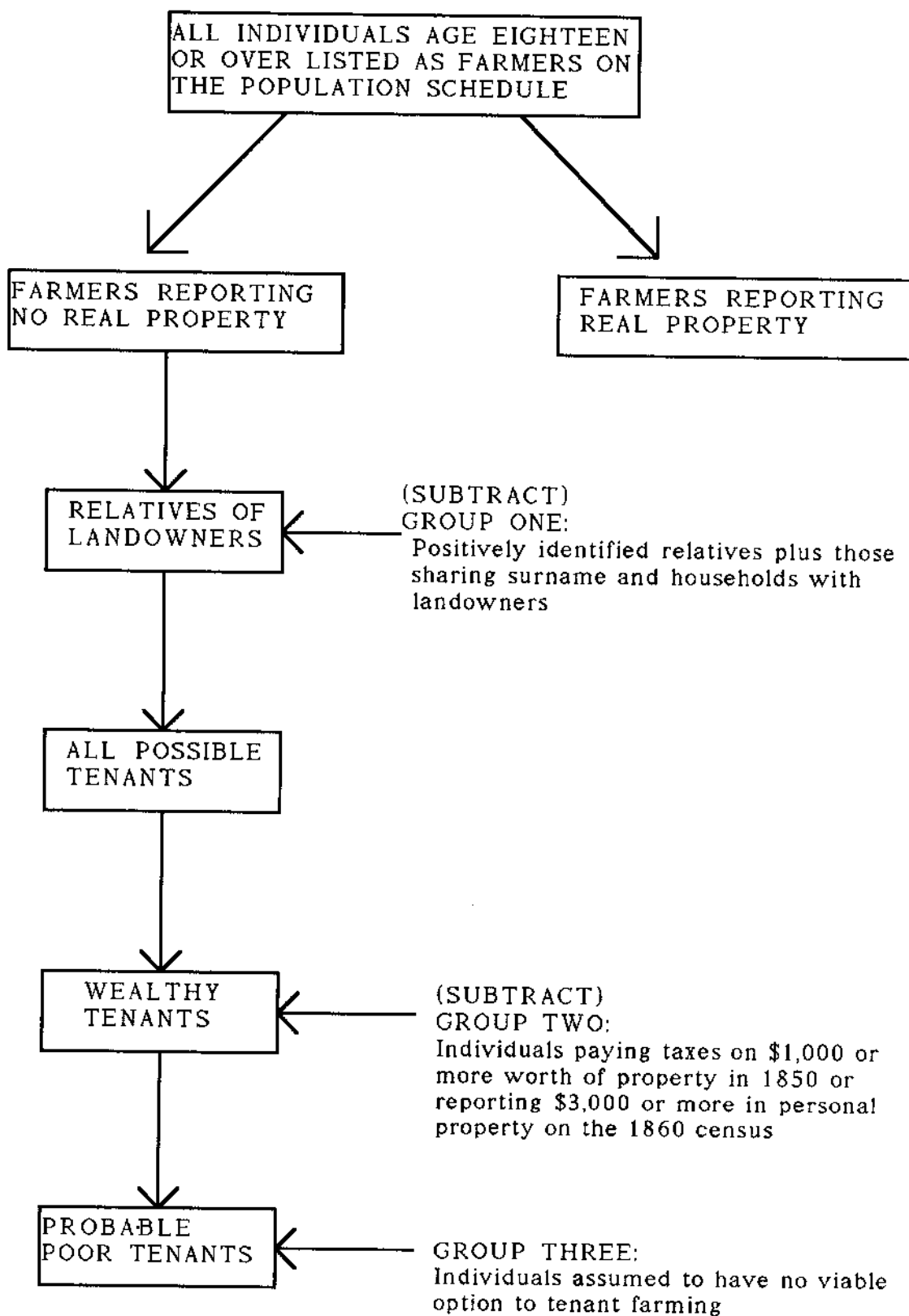
Once these questions had been resolved and the lists of farmers were compiled, they were then divided according to the ownership of real property. All those who owned real property were placed on one list while all those who did not were placed on another. (See figure one.) Once the basic lists of those who reported ownership of no real property were compiled, county tax rolls prepared the year the census was taken were searched for those individuals, and the amount of taxable property reported by each was recorded. Particular attention was paid to the column which recorded land. If an individual appeared on the tax roll as the owner of real property, then it was assumed that the blank space on the census form was an error, and that name was transferred to the lists of landowning farmers.

The revised lists of those who owned no real property yet called themselves farmers formed the maximum estimate of the number of tenant farmers in each county. However, these lists included a number of exceptions for the purposes of this study; i.e., relatives of landowners and those with ample resources who chose for whatever reason to rent land when they could have purchased it. In order to make a more accurate estimate of the poorer class of tenants, the list of farmers who owned no real property was divided into three groups.

Group one contained the names of all those on the larger lists who were definitely or almost certainly related to landowning farmers in the county. Two methods were used in compiling the names of farmers who were included in this group. First, all those who appeared in the same household with a landowning farmer of the same surname were considered relatives. Second, all individuals who were named as the child of a landowning individual, either in the probate records, or in a county history were added. Although not very many individuals in any one county were added from these sources, the overall effect of the additions was significant. These sources also confirmed some of the relationships which had been assumed by the first method.

The second group was composed of those who owned ample resources for the purchase of real property had they chosen to dispose of a portion of their personal property. For this group of wealthy tenants, the arbitrarily assigned value of personal property necessary for inclusion was the most critical problem. For 1850, the only figures available for an estimation of personal property were those which appeared on the tax rolls. The amount presented on the tax roll was typically less than the value of a person's property because tax assessors had a tendency to underevaluate, and tax payers

FIGURE 1



had a tendency to underreport their possessions.¹⁵ For 1850, a minimum total taxable value of \$1,000 was selected.

According to the figures presented by Campbell and Lowe in Wealth and Power in Antebellum Texas, the ownership of a farm worth \$500 would have placed an individual near the median in terms of value of real estate reported on the 1850 Census. To have acquired such a farm would have required the sale of less than half of an individual's total taxable property. Therefore, those who owned personal property taxed at \$1,000 or more were included on the list of wealthy tenants.¹⁶

Because the 1860 Census included information on personal property values, there were two methods of determining a cutoff point for the list of wealthy tenants at that time. The tax roll could be used, as it was for the determination of 1850 tenants, or the census data could be utilized. The census report of personal property was chosen as the determining factor because, unlike the tax rolls, it allowed a determination to be made on every individual enumerated in the county. Tax rolls did not include every person who appeared on the census, since the only people who owed taxes were those who owned real or personal property or owed a poll tax (only men between the ages of twenty-one and a maximum

15. For a brief discussion of nineteenth century Texas tax rolls as a historical source, see: Randolph Campbell, A Southern Community in Crisis: Harrison County, Texas, 1850-1880 (Austin, 1983), 12-13.

16. Campbell and Lowe, Wealth and Power, 38.

age which varied from time to time were assessed a poll tax). Furthermore, some individuals arrived in the county after January of the year that the census was compiled and thus were not liable for taxes until the following year. Others seem to have evaded the tax collector for two or even three years and then been included with assessments listed for the year the tax roll was compiled plus those missed. Obviously, then, personal property data, when they were available in the 1860 census, constituted the best source for determining the financial status of landless farmers.

Every landless farmer who reported \$3,000 worth of personal property or more in 1860 was included on the list of wealthy tenants. The amount is considerably higher than the \$1,000 limit chosen for 1850 for two reasons. First, the figures reported on the census form are far less likely to be an underevaluation than those which appear on the tax rolls. Second, property values had risen during the 1850s. The list compiled by this method forms the basis for the discussion in the text, but a list similar to the one compiled from the tax rolls in 1850 (using the same cutoff point and source) was compiled for 1860. Although some tenants who appeared on this list had less than \$3,000 worth of personal property according to the census, in every county, the number of those who were excluded for having \$1,000 worth of property on the

tax rolls was slightly lower than the number who were excluded by using the census.

Thus the final groups, one for 1850 and one for 1860, were obtained through a process of elimination. They consisted of all landless farmers who did not appear to be the relatives of landowning farmers or wealthy in the sense that they owned less than \$1,000 worth of taxable property in 1850 or \$3,000 worth of personal property according to the 1860 Census. These groups contain what are believed to be reasonable estimates of the numbers of poor tenants in Fort Bend and Milam counties in 1850 and Fort Bend, Milam, and Palo Pinto counties in 1860. The estimates are at least reasonably accurate, but they still probably overstate the number of poor tenants. A number of kinship ties likely were missed, and real and personal property values were undoubtedly not listed on the census for a few individuals who actually owned property but did not show up on the tax rolls. The estimates are thus not perfect reflections of the number of poor tenants present in these counties, but they are certainly valid indicators of relative tenancy rates among the three counties. In each county, the same standards were applied as consistently as possible. Thus, within the limits of the accuracy of the various manuscript census schedules, the numbers obtained are comparable.

Finally, an attempt was made to locate each 1850 farmer on the 1860 Census. To facilitate this, the entire household appearing on the population schedule from the 1850 Census was compared to the household of individuals with the same or similar names on the 1860 population schedule. Ideally, with the exception of older children who may have left home, each individual enumerated in 1850 would appear again in 1860, having aged from nine to eleven years. Unfortunately there were numerous deviations from this ideal. Women died and men remarried, children died, and sometimes, the names of children who survived were recorded differently. To give one example of the latter case, the child who appeared as J. F. Dyer in 1850 is the same man who appeared in 1860 as Foster Dyer on the Fort Bend Census. When he served as county judge in the postbellum period, he signed his name J. Foster Dyer.

Although it is rarely mentioned, any researcher who has ever attempted to measure persistence in a particular county is aware of the difficulties, and thus the uncertainty, involved in these measurements. Unfortunately, unlike the problems confronted in compiling a list of tenant farmers, it was not possible to devise absolutely consistent standards to deal with these difficulties. If only perfect matches were accepted, then persistence would have been considerably understated. On the other hand, if every occurrence of a similar name is accepted as an instance of persistence, then

persistence will be reported as much higher than it actually was. This researcher attempted to accept only those cases where it seemed that the likelihood of changes in the family and errors on the census was far greater than the likelihood that a new family of similar name had entered the county. In an operational sense, this meant that greater deviation was allowed for very large families where four or more individuals could be identified, for unusual names, or, in some cases, for unusual birthplaces. In other words, with a family consisting of a man named John Smith and his wife Mary, both born in Tennessee, the match had to be exact to be considered as a case of persistence without evidence from another source. If, on the other hand, someone named William F.G. Secrest aged only six years while his wife aged twelve, then this was considered an acceptable amount of deviation and was recorded as a case of persistence.

The economist Gavin Wright has complained that one problem with local studies such as this is that they often treat individuals who moved from the county as if they fell off the ends of the earth.¹⁷ To this charge, the writer can only plead guilty. Surely what happened to these individuals is important and would add to any study of this nature. But the problems discussed in regard to persistence in a single

17. Gavin Wright, "Rethinking the Postbellum Southern Political Economy: A Review Essay" Business History Review 58(1984): 415.

county are multiplied a hundredfold when an attempt to follow these individuals across the state--and possibly the nation--is made. The main advantage to quantitative approaches to history is that they allow systematic investigations. The percentage of individuals who could be traced in this manner would be so small that it would render the results highly questionable.

For the purposes of this study, the critical assumption made about those that left the county will be that most of them left for economic reasons. In other words, if they left, they did so primarily because they hoped for greater prosperity elsewhere. One obvious exception to this general assumption will be the families of those who died between the two census years. Those individuals who died in the county will be compiled in a separate category and then the total number of such individuals will be deleted from the total number of 1850 farmers. In other words, persistence percentages will be computed by dividing the number of those who persisted by the total number of 1850 farmers minus those who died between 1850 and 1860.

This approach is somewhat different than the one often adopted. Many researchers have examined persistence in terms of those families which persist. In other words, if a planter who had been present in 1850 was not present, but his oldest son was, then this was recorded as a case of

persistence. The examination of persistence in terms of family persistence is obviously valid, but it presented too many problems given the decisions made earlier about non-heads of household. If both the man and his son had appeared ten years earlier on one of the lists compiled, then the appearance of the son on the census could not be taken to mean that both men persisted. Additionally, most of those who were not heads of household and unrelated to the head of the household were either single or married with no children. If they did not appear on the census ten years later, there would be no family to search for--only a widow who may very well have remarried and thus be impossible to trace. For these reasons, this method of measuring persistence was rejected.

There are severe limitations on the kinds of information which the census can provide about those who formed the poorest segment of white society in the Brazos River Valley during the antebellum period. Most of these individuals were immigrants from other southern states who probably came to this portion of the South's frontier in search of a better way of life. How did they react to their initial failure to obtain land of their own? Were their children able to secure a more comfortable economic position than their parents had? Finally, what was the nature of their relationship with their landlords? These are important issues about which the census

is silent. Still, important aspects of the story of poor tenants can be told from census data, and it is a story that deserves telling.

CHAPTER 3

FARM TENANCY IN FORT BEND, MILAM AND PALO PINTO COUNTIES, 1850-1860

The most important determining factors in the incidence of tenant farming are the terms on which land can be purchased and the relative ease or difficulty with which land can be held and used to make a living. In an agricultural economy, if it is difficult to obtain land, or impossible to farm relatively small plots profitably, then there will be few landowners. If on the other hand, land is readily attainable, and if relatively small plots of land will provide subsistence and at least a small margin of profit, then, ceteris paribus, virtually all farmers will own their own land. As landowners, farmers would then receive both the rent on the land and the profit from their labor. Moreover, farmers could also hope to receive a reasonable return on investments of time and capital expended in improving their property.¹

1. Although farming in the United States has almost always been considered an industry characterized by pure competition, this discussion, of course, draws heavily upon the differences between pure competition and oligopoly. For a summary of these differences, see: Robert L. Heilbroner and Lester C. Thurow, The Economic Problem (Englewood Cliffs, 1984), 378, 420-428.

From the earliest days of Anglo colonization of Texas, whenever Anglo-Americans looked south or west to Texas, they saw land--literally millions of acres of land. From their point of view the land was vacant, and it was there for the taking. They saw the Indians only as an obstacle that would have to be overcome. The economic opportunity that fresh land represented brought most of those who came to Texas. For those with ample resources, the land represented the chance to build even greater wealth. For those who had been unable to purchase land in other states, Texas seemed to offer the chance to own their own farms--the first step on the road to riches. They were encouraged in these expectations by, as one anonymous writer phrased it in 1837, "letters written by persons in Texas to their friends in this country, with a view to induce them to emigrate, and circulated by means of the public prints throughout the Union, the representations of the landholder and speculator, and the enthusiastic descriptions of those who come within that class of men who always look at things through extremes either one way or the other...."²

William Bollaert's journal provides an example of such enthusiastic descriptions. Writing in the early 1840s, he told of large landowners who were "willing to give from 2 to

2. Andrew F. Muir, ed., Texas in 1837: An Anonymous Contemporary Narrative, (Austin, 1958), 164.

500 acres to any industrious farmer, or person of capital at a very moderate price and to be paid at the convenience of the emigrant." Bollaert also told several stories of men and families who had entered Texas virtually penniless and become wealthy plantation owners within a few years.³ In reality, of course, it probably was never quite that simple. There is much that we do not know about the economics of Texas agriculture, particularly during the antebellum period, but it seems obvious that landowners were not always so eager to part with their land. In fact, Edmund Miller estimated that the price of land was increasing during the period from 1842 to 1848. If the price was increasing, then it could not have been so totally a buyer's market.⁴ Regardless of whether antebellum southern society was a society dominated by men who were forever "on the move and on the make" or a society that was characterized by some form of pre-capitalist economic structure, neither farmers nor speculators were likely to be especially eager to give away property that was appreciating in value.⁵

3. W. Eugene Hollon and Ruth L. Butler, eds., William Bollaert's Texas, (Norman, 1956), 269-270 (quotation); 288-289; 116-120.

4. Edmund T. Miller, A Financial History of Texas, (Austin, 1916), 49.

5. The "on the move" quote was James Oakes' characterization of slaveholding farmers in: The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders (1982), 181. The most influential proponent of the view that the antebellum South did not have a capitalistic economy is Eugene Genovese. See, for example, Eugene Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South (New York 1961, revised 1965).

There was, of course, one other avenue for acquiring land. Unlike other states, Texas maintained control of its vast public domain, and farmers could hope to obtain land from the state's holdings. The laws governing the disposition of the public domain were complex and confusing. However, it is worth noting that the acquisition of land in Texas prior to the Civil War was never without cost. Even those comparatively few who received land certificates from the Republic for military service, or for settling in Texas prior to 1842, had to pay certain minimal fees to the land office. In addition to that, it was the responsibility of the potential landowner to locate unclaimed land and have it surveyed. Thus, the land was not surveyed in the orderly township pattern employed in large parts of the United States, but in a rather haphazard fashion, making it more difficult to determine where vacant public land existed. Because the search was never simply for vacant public land, but for vacant public land which would prove suitable for staple crop agriculture, the process became increasingly difficult as time went on and the amount of available public land in the staple crop regions of the state decreased.⁶

As numerous authors have pointed out in discussing other regions of the country, acquiring land was only a portion of

6. For more information on Texas land policies, see Thomas L. Miller, The Public Lands of Texas, 1519-1970, (Norman, 1971).

the expense involved in establishing a successful farming operation. A family or an individual had to have more than just the land and a willingness to work hard. Clearing the land and preparing it for crops was hard work. It was also time consuming. Additionally, it took materials to build a house and a fence around the fields to keep out the stock which wandered over most parts of Texas. No estimates of the cost of these materials in Texas are available. The tremendous price differential, however, between unimproved land which commonly sold in large parcels for between fifty cents and two dollars an acre, and improved land which sold for between five and twenty dollars an acre in large parcels is indicative of some of the costs involved in making a farm. To put it another way, most people would not have paid so much more for improved land if there had not been costs involved in the process which justified the difference in price.⁷

Besides the cost involved in clearing and fencing the land and building a house, cultivation also required farming implements, stock animals, seed, and provisions to live on before the first harvest. Lowe and Campbell have estimated the costs of equipment and livestock for slaveholding farmers

7. For a discussion of farm-making costs, see Clarence Danhof, "Farm Making Costs and the Safety Valve: 1855-1860", in Vernon Carstenson, ed., The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain, (Madison, Wis., 1963); and Paul W. Gates, The Farmers Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860 (New York, 1960).

on a per slave basis. Assuming that the costs would be about the same for any farmer, then the equipment and livestock necessary for a farm of 160 acres in 1850 would be approximately \$199. By 1860, the cost had risen to approximately \$392.⁸ These figures are probably a little high, because they are a reflection of what the wealthiest class of farmers considered "necessary." But even if these figures were reduced by a third or a half, these costs, when added to the cost of clearing and fencing, were greater than the cost of the land itself, if only unimproved land was acquired.

The point of this discussion is not to suggest that Texas was not a land of opportunity. It was. Relatively poor farmers did come to Texas throughout the antebellum period because of those opportunities, and members of this class succeeded often enough to keep the dream alive for others. The point is that the opportunity was like most other opportunities available in this and other countries. Those with ample resources could be reasonably assured of success, while many of the truly impoverished were not so fortunate. As the letter of Isaac Mansfield, quoted in the last chapter, and the census data, discussed in this chapter, indicate, many in this group did not find the landowners as accommodating as those that Bollaert had discovered. They

8. Lowe and Campbell, Planters and Plain Folk, 165-169.

often found themselves farming someone else's land. Table three presents the results of the search for these poor tenants in Fort Bend and Milam counties in 1850 as described in the preceding chapter.⁹

Most of the poor tenants who are the focus of this study left no written records, and consequently many of the most important details of their lives are unrecoverable. But we can be sure of their existence, and we can make at least a reasonable estimate of their numbers in various portions of the Brazos River valley during the 1850s. As table three indicates, there were only eleven of these individuals in Fort Bend County in 1850, and 178 in the area enumerated on the Milam County census. They comprised approximately 10 percent of all Fort Bend County farmers and approximately 40 percent of all Milam County farmers. Most of these farmers did not appear on the tax rolls, which is not surprising as

9. When this study was still in the conceptual stages, an attempt was made to determine how to categorize every individual on the census who called himself a farmer. One of the groups appearing on the 1850 Milam County census was not anticipated. These were individuals who lived with and had the same surname as a farmer who had no real property himself. There seemed to be two equally acceptable ways of dealing with these people. They could be treated as poor tenants, or they could be ignored, and their numbers deleted from both the numerator and the denominator used to calculate the number and percentage of poor tenants. The difference between the two calculations is simply one of magnitude and not of direction as there were only thirty-six of these individuals. They were excluded from the farming population because that seemed to be the more conservative approach in this instance, and because they probably worked the same land as their relatives rather than as tenants on their own.

TABLE 3

OWNERS AND TENANTS IN 1850: FORT BEND AND MILAM COUNTIES

	FORT BEND	MILAM
TOTAL FARMERS ON FREE POPULATION SCHEDULE	113	440
NUMBER OF LANDLESS FARMERS*	19	243
PERCENTAGE OF LANDLESS FARMERS	17%	55%
LANDLESS FARMERS RELATED TO OWNERS	8	60
NUMBER OF PROBABLE TENANT FARMERS	11	183
PERCENTAGE OF PROBABLE TENANT FARMERS	10%	42%
NUMBER OF WEALTHY TENANTS	0	5
NUMBER OF POOR TENANTS	11	178
PERCENTAGE OF POOR TENANTS	10%	40%
NUMBER OF POOR TENANTS LOCATED ON TAXROLL**	1	40 (24)
AVERAGE TAXABLE VALUE FOR POOR TENANTS	\$200	\$198 (\$331)

*The figures for Milam County do not include seven individuals who showed up on the 1850 tax roll as landowners though the census reported no real estate.

**In categories ten and eleven, the figures in parentheses for Milam County are the number and average for those who both appeared on the tax roll and owned some taxable property.

their poverty is one of the defining features of this class of farmers.

The process of identifying poor tenants and determining their proportion relative to other farmers in these counties indicates regional patterns in 1850 which may shed some light on the aspirations and expectations of these individuals.

Bode and Ginter's work suggests that regional patterns of tenancy are not unique to the Brazos River Valley, or to Texas. They presented evidence indicating that tenant farmers in antebellum Georgia "tended to move with patterns of settlement." They suggested that tenants were "seeking more productive lands in their own self-interest, while proprietors ... encouraged the entry of tenants into such [more recently settled] regions as an alternative and supplementary labor supply to slavery." In other words, in the older, more settled regions where the land was already cleared and used extensively for the production of cotton or other staples, landowners generally preferred to use slaves rather than tenants, and tenants, finding few economic opportunities in these regions, moved to areas that were not so well established. In these areas, owners often preferred tenants because the use of slaves would entail a considerable outlay of capital without hope of the immediate high returns that a cash crop would provide.¹⁰

In Texas, settlement lines were generally from east to west. Fort Bend County was settled first, and, in 1850, it was clearly a more established region than Milam County. Therefore, if the model Bode and Ginter proposed for Georgia is applied to these two counties, the tenancy rate in Milam

10. Bode and Ginter, Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia, 117.

should have been higher than the tenancy rate in Fort Bend County. Table three indicates that this was indeed the case. The difference between the incidence of tenant farming in Fort Bend County and Milam County is startling. The Milam County rate is four times higher than the tenancy rate in Fort Bend County. In 1850, there were just over sixteen times as many individuals on the poor tenants list in Milam County as there were in Fort Bend. Of course, these numbers are somewhat misleading since the census was taken before Bell, McLennan, and Falls counties were organized from Milam, and thus, the territory open was immense. However, if the comparison is restricted to those individuals who, as nearly as can be determined, lived within the boundaries of present-day Milam County, the absolute number of farmers declines to one hundred-sixty-four, the absolute number of tenants falls to seventy-three (almost seven times as many as in Fort Bend County), and the percentage remains virtually unchanged.¹¹

Bode and Ginter confined their investigation of tenancy to Georgia. Lacking evidence from other states, they made no

11. The final major changes to the boundaries of Milam County occurred in January of 1850, when Bell, McLennan, and Falls Counties were created. None of these counties were organized before the census was taken. Thus, the census returns for Milam County in 1850 include all of McLennan and Bell Counties, and the western portion of Falls County. For the purposes of this analysis, no attempt was made to isolate those living only in Milam County. For an examination of persistence, however, such a process was mandatory. When the attempt was made to isolate Milam County residents, it was discovered that the rate of tenancy seems to have been little affected by the exclusions of the residents of the other counties.

attempt to claim that their conclusions could automatically be applied to the South as a whole, although they did suggest that similar tenancy patterns might exist in other parts of the South, including Texas. Finally, they asserted that their conclusions were tentative in the sense that they would require confirmation (or denial) from other types of sources. Although the method used here differs from that suggested by Bode and Ginter, the pattern is so similar to their findings for Georgia in 1860 that it seems appropriate to consider their explanation for the regional distribution of tenancy in that older southern state.¹²

Bode and Ginter suggested that tenants were "seeking more productive land in their own self interest," but their explanation of regional tenancy patterns placed greater emphasis on the labor needs of the landlord. On more than one occasion, Bode and Ginter refer to tenancy as an "alternate labor supply." In fact, Bode and Ginter maintain that there is some evidence to suggest that, even in the areas of fresher and more productive land, "tenants were placed on the poorer and intermediate lands." Thus, in a sense, tenants seem to have been largely unsuccessful in

12. Bode and Ginter, Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia, 180-182. The approach used in Bode and Ginter's work was not rejected because it seemed unsound, but because, as the discussion in the text will show, the search for conventions on the agricultural schedules was generally unsuccessful.

their efforts to farm the better lands.¹³ It seems, then, that Bode and Ginter saw tenants as settling where they did on the basis of what must be termed negative incentives. They may have moved with patterns of settlement, but, instead of gaining the opportunity to farm the fresher, more productive land they sought, they were generally forced to farm the least productive lands. If this analysis were extended to apply to Milam and Fort Bend Counties, the picture would seem even more bleak. Although Fort Bend County had been settled almost thirty years earlier than Milam County, almost all the land that was farmed in the county was still considered fresh by any standard. In addition to that, the land in Fort Bend County was for the most part more productive than the land farmed in 1850 in Milam County. Using this model, then, tenants could be seen as being forced to settle in areas containing farm land that was only marginally fresher and decidedly less productive.

It could be, however, that there were more positive incentives involved. Perhaps the thing that really propelled the landless farmer westward was the opportunity represented by vacant land--either land that was owned by the state, or by absentee owners who might be persuaded to sell it at a reasonable price. In other words, tenants may have followed the lines of settlement westward into Milam County by 1850

13. Ibid, 117, 153, 182.

not for greater opportunities as tenants, but because they seemed more likely to be in position to purchase land in that more recently established area.

Over the next decade, Brazos River counties grew and prospered at such a rate that a story from another time and another place seems appropriate. In the preface to The Reshaping of Plantation Society, Michael Wayne relates a story which supposedly took place in the 1830s along the Mississippi in Louisiana. It seems that a prospector discovered a deposit of silver which was pure, deep, and untapped. He approached the local gentry about a joint venture which he felt sure would make all concerned rich. To his chagrin, they turned him down--not because they doubted the presence of silver but because they could not understand why any planter would exchange his cotton fields for a silver mine.¹⁴ It may be that Fort Bend planters would have reacted similarly in 1860, for by 1860, the combination of cotton and slaves, (plus sugar cane for a few of the really fortunate) had generated wealth which made Fort Bend one of the wealthiest counties in the state. None of the 1850 farmers had reported real estate worth \$100,000 or more. In fact, the combined real property of all those who called themselves farmers in 1850 had totaled less than \$550,000. The three wealthiest farmers in 1860 reported combined real property

14. Wayne, The Reshaping of Plantation Society, 1.

worth \$701,500. A county rich in cotton and slaves had gotten richer by far.

The changes in Milam County during the 1850s were perhaps less impressive, but equally important. The cotton kingdom had expanded to include its farmers. According to the census of 1860, cotton production had jumped from none in 1850 to 2,238 bales in 1860. With the beginnings of the cotton economy had come a tripling of the slave population (436 to 1,542) and a rise in real property values. The frontier had also been pushed further to the west, and Palo Pinto, organized in 1857, was enumerated for the first time. Table four presents median and mean reported real estate values for Fort Bend and Milam in 1850, and all three counties in 1860.

TABLE 4
MEAN AND MEDIAN REPORTED VALUE OF REAL PROPERTY: FORT
BEND, MILAM AND PALO PINTO COUNTIES

	1850		1860	
	MEAN	MEDIAN	MEAN	MEDIAN
FORT BEND	\$5,380	\$2,335	\$27,052	\$10,000
MILAM	\$1,939	\$900	\$3,353	\$1,180
PALO PINTO			\$1,183	\$800

As the counties grew and prospered, the number of landowning farmers increased, but the counties still contained poor tenants. Table five presents the tenancy

rates for the three counties in 1860. The table was prepared by the same process that was used in 1850, except, as mentioned earlier, the list of wealthy tenants was determined by counting those who reported personal property worth \$3,000 or more on the Census, rather than those who paid taxes on property worth \$1,000 or more.

In Fort Bend County, the number of poor tenants had risen from eleven to thirty-five, and the proportion of poor tenants among farmers had almost doubled, rising from ten to 19 percent. The situation in Milam County is more difficult to assess because the 1850 Milam County census actually included residents of Bell and McLennan County which were just being organized that year. It appears, however, that the number of poor tenants present in the county had remained approximately the same, while the proportion of poor tenants present had fallen sharply, from 40 to 17 percent. Palo Pinto County, which was enumerated for the first time in 1860 had the highest proportion of poor tenants as the sixty present constituted 48 percent of all those who were termed farmers.

Thus, in 1860, as in 1850, the county nearest the frontier had the highest tenancy rates. In fact, at 48 percent, the proportion of Palo Pinto County farmers who were poor tenants in 1860 was higher than the proportion of 40 percent present in Milam County in 1850. To this extent then, the pattern

TABLE 5
OWNERS AND TENANTS IN 1860: MILAM, FORT BEND, AND PALO PINTO COUNTIES

	FORT BEND	MILAM	PALO PINTO
TOTAL FARMERS ON FREE POPULATION SCHEDULE	187	467	124
NUMBER OF LANDLESS FARMERS	58	94	72
PERCENTAGE OF LANDLESS FARMERS	31%	20%	58%
LANDLESS FARMERS RELATED TO OWNERS	8	10	7
NUMBER OF PROBABLE TENANT FARMERS	50	84	65
PERCENTAGE OF PROBABLE TENANT FARMERS	27%	18%	52%
NUMBER OF WEALTHY TENANTS	15	6	5
NUMBER OF POOR TENANTS	35	78	60
PERCENTAGE OF POOR TENANTS	19%	17%	48%
NUMBER OF POOR TENANTS WITH PERSONAL PROPERTY	13	66	55
PERCENTAGE OF POOR TENANTS WITH PERSONAL PROPERTY	37%	85%	92%
MEAN VALUE OF PERSONAL PROPERTY OF POOR TENANTS*	\$869	\$476	\$771

*The averages calculated in line twelve are averages for only those tenants for whom some value for personal property was reported

suggested by Bode and Ginter for 1860 Georgia still fits the evidence, but tenancy rates for Milam and Fort Bend County did not fit the pattern. The Milam County tenancy rate had fallen to 19 percent as the county became more established, but the Fort Bend rate had risen significantly, which was neither expected nor predicted by the model. Certainly the Fort Bend rate should not have been higher than the rate for Milam County.

It should be remembered that, while tenancy rates are important, they cannot tell us where most tenants settled. Tenancy rates tell us what percentage of those who settled in a particular area were tenant farmers in a given year. For example, they tell us that in 1860, a larger percentage of farmers in Palo Pinto County were tenants than the percentage of those in Milam or Fort Bend County.

From this it might be concluded that the frontier was more attractive to tenants than to owners. Tenancy rates in themselves, however, do not tell us anything about the percentage of all Texas tenants who chose the option of the frontier. Drawing conclusions about tenant preferences based on tenancy rates alone would be much like deciding that Texas blacks preferred small towns to large cities in 1980 because Rocky Mound, Texas (population 123) was well over 50 percent black, while none of the metropolitan areas came even close to being half black. This is an extreme and possibly even an

absurd example, but the point is valid. If we wanted to study where Texas blacks chose to settle, we would have to look at the percentage of all Texas blacks who lived in metropolitan areas versus the percentage who lived in rural areas or in small towns. We could then make valid conclusions concerning the preferences of those blacks who chose to live in Texas.

Tenancy rates thus cannot answer the important questions about where most Brazos River valley tenants lived and worked and why they settled there. Tentative answers to these questions can be advanced, however, on the basis of two assumptions. The first is that these three counties are representative of the areas in which they are located: the black belt around the coast (Fort Bend), the areas which combined plantations and a greater number of yeoman farmers along the middle reaches of the river (Milam), and the frontier (Palo Pinto). These counties would have to be representative not only in terms of the percentage of tenant farmers each contained, but also in the total number of farmers present and, more generally, in population densities. The second assumption is that these three broad area classifications adequately encompass the range of possibilities present in the Brazos River valley. Using these assumptions, the three counties will be combined to form a Brazos River Valley "universe" in each of the tables

concerning patterns of settlement presented in this and following chapters. The conclusions drawn from these tables are admittedly among the most speculative of all those presented in this study.

Table six presents the distribution of tenants and owners among Milam and Fort Bend Counties in 1850 and Milam, Fort Bend, and Palo Pinto Counties in 1860. The percentages in this case are the proportion of the total number of tenants from all three counties who lived in each location. The table shows that more of the tenants in this "universe" lived in Milam County than in the frontier county of Palo Pinto.¹⁵

There are two feasible explanations for this circumstance. First, Milam County was, in many respects, still a frontier for farmers. Milam County contained a vast area of productive land, i.e., that portion of the county which lay in the blackland prairie region of the state and could not be adequately utilized until the advent of steel plows in the late 1850s. By the time of the 1860 Census, this area was just beginning to be farmed.

15. Again, because the numbers presented in the table for Milam County are those tenants and owners found in areas that contained only those individuals who were either located on the census and the Milam County tax roll, and their neighbors (on the census), they are probably a little lower than the actual number of tenants and owners who lived within the borders of the county. The census taker probably crossed in and out Milam County when enumerating those who lived in the created but yet unorganized counties of Bell and McLennan. Therefore, some of those excluded were probably Milam County residents. Still, the figures in the table represent the most accurate estimate possible under the circumstances.

TABLE 6
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE* OF OWNERS AND TENANTS SETTLING
IN EACH COUNTY IN 1850 AND 1860

	1850		1860	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
<u>FORT BEND</u>				
OWNERS	94	51%	129	23%
TENANTS	11	13%	35	20%
<u>MILAM**</u>				
OWNERS	91	49%	373	67%
TENANTS	73	87%	78	45%
<u>PALO PINTO</u>				
OWNERS			52	10%
TENANTS			60	35%
<u>TOTAL</u>				
OWNERS	185	100%	554	100%
TENANTS	84	100%	173	100%

*The percentages in the table have been rounded off so that the total will equal 100%.

**The figures for number of tenants and number of owners in Milam County are taken from the sections on the 1850 population schedule which seem most clearly to have been located in Milam County.

Second, the frontier of Texas was an area of conflict between settlers and Indians. The frontier was a place where a person might prosper--or die. Although the number of settlers killed by the Indians was declining every year, the possibility still existed. Indians had inhibited the growth of the area that would become Milam County in the 1830s, and they had inhibited the growth of Palo Pinto County during the 1850s. The frontier was probably the area where landless farmers had the best chance of obtaining land, but there were

very real risks involved that may well have kept most tenants in the interior.

If Palo Pinto County represented the area where tenants could most easily obtain land, Fort Bend County represented the area where tenants would have the most difficulty in obtaining land that could be profitably farmed. The prairies in that county were still considered worthless for farming, and the bottom land areas of the county were among the most valuable lands in the state. The difficulty in obtaining land in the county could explain the fact that fewer tenants lived in Fort Bend County than in either of the other two. There are other aspects of the situation in Fort Bend County, however, which must be explained. Although there were fewer tenants in Fort Bend County in 1860 than there were in the other two counties, the percentage of tenants living in Fort Bend County in 1860 was higher than the percentage who had lived there in 1850. Moreover, the tenancy rate in the county was higher, and, in absolute numbers, there were more than three times as many tenants present than there had been ten years earlier.

Why would tenant farming be on the increase in this older, plantation county near the coast? Tenants in Fort Bend County can be divided into two groups according to personal wealth, and the answer may lie in these two groups. Nearly two-thirds of the tenants present in Fort Bend County in 1860

reported no personal property of any value and were among the poorest tenants in the three counties. Since 1850, the distance from the coast, (or the eastern boundary at any point) to the frontier had nearly doubled. Perhaps this group simply lacked the resources necessary to make the trip. Even if they could make the trip, it seems likely that they would be losers in the race for land. The second group was the wealthiest group of poor tenants found in the three counties. Perhaps they felt they stood some chance of obtaining land in Fort Bend, the most productive of the three. It is also interesting to note in this regard that there were more wealthy tenants in Fort Bend than in the other two counties. If the line between the rich and poor tenants imposed by this study is ignored, then perhaps there would still have been two distinct groups of tenants in Fort Bend County in 1860--the who hoped to emulate their wealthy neighbors in a few years, and those who had been forced by circumstances to give up hope, at least temporarily.

Regardless of how the figures for Fort Bend County are explained, they seem to suggest that negative incentives were not primary in the relationship between tenant farmers and the land. Tenants were not being forced to farm poor land and, certainly the increase in both the absolute number of tenants and the tenancy rate in the county did not mean that, as Bode and Ginter suggested, planters were using tenants in

lieu of more expensive slave labor. All during the decade of the 1850s, the county's slave population grew faster than its free population. In short, Fort Bend County landowning farmers seemed to have had less need for an alternative labor supply in 1860 than they had in 1850.

To this point, the information presented about poor tenants has dealt exclusively with their economic condition and location within these three counties. Their economic condition was, after all, the one facet of their existence which set them apart from landowners. Other statistics were also collected about these farmers, but in most respects, they very much resembled their landowning neighbors. Both tenants and landowners generally came from southern states. Like their landowning counterparts, most tenant farmers also lived at the head of what appeared to be a nuclear family, although they were slightly less likely to be in that position than were landlords. As table seven indicates, however, they did differ significantly from landowners in one respect, and that was age. Tenant farmers across the two censuses and the three counties were remarkably similar in median and mean age. According to median and mean ages, they were also much younger than farmers who had acquired land.

In one sense then, tenant farming appears to have been a young man's occupation during the antebellum period. Table eight demonstrates, however, that this was not always the

TABLE 7
AGE AND TENANCY IN FORT BEND, MILAM, AND PALO PINTO
COUNTIES

	OWNERS		TENANTS	
	MEAN	MEDIAN	MEAN	MEDIAN
FORT BEND 1850	40.3	38	34.2	30
MILAM 1850	38	36	33.5	30.5
FORT BEND 1860	42.4	41	34.2	31.5
MILAM 1860	40	39	35	31
PALO PINTO 1860	41.8	39.5	35.1	32

TABLE 8
AGE AND TENANCY: TENANTS AS A PROPORTION OF VARIOUS
AGE GROUPS

	NUMBER OF FARMERS	NUMBER OF TENANTS	PERCENTAGE OF AGE GROUP
18-21 YEARS	46	30	65%
22-25 YEARS	119	66	55%
26-29 YEARS	157	66	42%
30-33 YEARS	176	58	33%
34-37 YEARS	147	37	25%
38-41 YEARS	145	39	27%
42-45 YEARS	122	35	29%
46-49 YEARS	59	18	23%
50-53 YEARS	59	19	24%
54-57 YEARS	61	10	16%
58-61 YEARS	39	6	15%
62 YEARS UP	49	7	14%

case. Most young men were tenant farmers. This seems logical in that young men had had less time to accumulate the resources necessary to purchase land, but tenant farming was a way of life for individuals of all ages. At least 14 percent of every age group appeared on the list of poor tenants, and more important, almost one out of every four men in the age groups between thirty and forty nine farmed someone else's land.

Although the 1850s had been prosperous years in both Milam and Fort Bend County, most of those who were listed as farmers on the 1850 Census were no longer present in these counties in 1860. Table nine presents the persistence statistics for Milam and Fort Bend Counties.¹⁶

Because the antebellum Milam County probate records were destroyed in an 1874 court house fire, the number for those who died in the county is an estimate based on the mortality

16. The figures for Milam County are derived because the 1850 census for Milam County actually enumerated residents in Bell and McLennan Counties. Therefore, the tax rolls for McLennan County in 1850 and Bell County in 1851 were consulted, and those who appeared on the Milam County 1850 Census and one of these tax rolls were noted. One hundred two of these individuals were located. With very few exceptions, these individuals were enumerated in groups on the census of 1850. For example, all but three of those who appeared on both the McLennan County tax roll and the Milam County Census were enumerated in households falling between house number 317 and house number 385 on the census. There were individuals in this range who were not on the tax roll, but none in this range who appeared on the Milam County tax roll. Therefore, all individuals in that range were deleted from consideration when the search for persistence was made. Four other groups of households were identified and deleted based on information contained in the Bell County tax rolls. Thus, the numbers and percentages presented in table 4 are based on an adjusted census.

rates reported in Fort Bend and Milam Counties, and the number who had died in Fort Bend County between 1850 and 1860. This method is at best designed to give only a rough estimate of mortality among farmers in the county, and therefore the lowest estimate obtained was used. If accurate figures were available, the Milam County persistence rate

TABLE 9
PERSISTENCE BETWEEN 1850 AND 1860 IN MILAM AND FORT BEND
COUNTIES

	FORT BEND	MILAM
TOTAL 1850 OWNERS	94	91*
PRESENT IN 1860	43	28
DIED IN THE COUNTY	27	[10]
PERCENTAGE WHO PERSISTED**	64%	35%*
TOTAL 1850 TENANTS	11	73
PRESENT IN 1860	2	19
DIED IN THE COUNTY	3	[9]
PERCENTAGE WHO PERSISTED**	25%	30%*

*The total number of tenants and owners in Milam County are based on the portions of the census remaining after the sections which seem to have enumerated residents of other counties are excluded. The persistence figure is calculated following an adjustment for those who probably died in the county based on mortality rates for 1850 and 1860 in the two counties and the number who died in Fort Bend County.

**The persistence percentage was determined by dividing the number who persisted by the total minus those who died in the county.

would probably be significantly higher, particularly for farm owners, but the figures would probably still be lower than those for Fort Bend County.

In his book Old South, New South, Gavin Wright argued that "slaveholding farmers and planters moved from place to place so often they seldom had time to sink roots. When slavery ended, like players in a game of musical chairs they seized whatever land they occupied at the time and held it tenaciously, reorienting an entire economy in the process."¹⁷ Slavery and slaveowning farmers are peripheral to this study. But just as the almost proverbial mobility of the planter class is critical to Wright's analysis of changes in the postbellum southern economy, so is the mobility of the tenant class to this analysis of antebellum tenantry. For Fort Bend and Milam counties at least, those at the top formed the most stable element of the economy. In Fort Bend County, most wealthy farmers remained in the county. In fact, during the ten years between the 1850 and 1860 Census, death carried off a larger part of the landowning group than did the lure of better lands.

During the antebellum period the farmers who seemed to be players in a game of musical chairs, rather than the slaveholders, were those at the bottom of the economic

17. Gavin Wright, Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War, (New York, 1986), vii.

ladder. In both counties, tenants were more likely to move than landowners. It would be impossible to determine why so many tenants moved when we do not know where they moved or what they gained by their moves, but it is possible to say something about those who stayed. The overwhelming majority (two of two in Fort Bend County, and fifteen of nineteen in Milam) of those who had been poor tenants and remained in these counties from 1850 to 1860 were landowners by 1860. To continue the analogy of the game, perhaps they stayed because they had won a chair, and maybe those who left did so because they had not. Again this suggests, although it does not prove, that the most important factor in determining where and when tenants moved was their desire for land.

In summary, there were tenants in antebellum Texas, and most were individuals who found themselves in that situation because their alternatives were limited or nonexistent. The fact that there were significantly fewer tenants in antebellum Texas than there were in early twentieth century Texas is historically important, but had they known, it would have provided little comfort to those who found themselves in that position a half century earlier. In fact, the evidence suggests that one of their major concerns was acquiring land so that they could join their more fortunate neighbors as landowners. The evidence is admittedly circumstantial, but persistence rates indicate that if they failed to acquire

land where they were, they moved on. Certainly the evidence suggesting that they searched for greater opportunities on frontiers is stronger than evidence suggesting that they were forced out of the more productive areas by planter preferences. While the emphasis here has been placed on the more positive motivations of the tenant rather than on actions of landowning farmers who might have employed tenant labor more extensively had they not been heavily committed to slavery, the regional patterns are much like those discovered by Bode and Ginter in Georgia.

Although Bode and Ginter presented a convincing case for a much higher rate of antebellum tenancy in Georgia than had previously been supposed, they were forced to concede that there were few contemporary literary references to the subject. Their search for such references was evidently fairly extensive. In fact, they claim to have "combed every antebellum and early postbellum issue of the Southern Cultivator and searched a large number of Georgia county histories in vain for any reference to any form of antebellum tenancy."¹⁸ Although the search for such discussions in Texas may have been less extensive, it was equally in vain. Some county and state legal records contain references to

18. Bode and Ginter, Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia, 183.

rented land, but the subject was never discussed as it was in the postbellum period.

Bode and Ginter offer no explanation for the absence of such discussions in Georgia, but there seems to be a very plausible reason for such an absence in Texas. To the luckless tenant, his status may have been all important, but those on or close to the bottom rung did not generally edit newspapers or write county histories. To those who were in a position to edit newspapers or write books, the tenant was simply not a very important element of society. The number of tenants may indeed have tripled in Fort Bend County by 1860, but how much did those thirty-five individuals contribute to the cotton economy in relation to the 4,136 blacks who were held as slaves? Even in Milam County where there were twice as many tenants in 1860 as there were in Fort Bend, there were more than fifteen times as many slaves as there were tenants. The only areas where tenants constituted a large segment of the population were frontier areas which were isolated, with little contact with the cotton kingdom of the interior. Tenancy was not an issue before the Civil War because it contributed little to the cotton economy which dominated the culture of the interior. With the end of the war and the end of slavery, however, the cotton culture came to depend on tenancy, and suddenly it became very important.

Chapter 4

TENANCY IN THE POSTBELLUM YEARS: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGY FOR USING THE 1870 CENSUS

In 1907, William Owens' great-grandmother, born Missouri Ann Cleaver, died. Although he had been too young to remember her or her death, Owens later looked back on the event as something more than the loss of a loved one. He saw it as the loss of his family's only link with a pre-Civil War past that represented a different way of life and, in many ways, a different world. As he put it, "Missouri Ann died, and it was clear that a great deal had gone out of our lives. It was not only the link with the past, a link with men and women who stood up to the enemy, who fought the Yankees as long as they had any fight left in them. It was a link with books, with poetry, with a life a long way from Pin Hook."¹

In the chapter of This Stubborn Soil which deals with the death of Missouri Ann, the Civil War stands out, separating two eras almost as palpably as a wall. The differences between the two eras are symbolized by the differences in two women, Missouri Ann and her daughter, Owens' grandmother, Alice Chennault. Owens wrote: "My grandmother could not read

1. William A. Owens, This Stubborn Soil (New York, 1966), 19.

or write. With her there was no talk of books or reading. Missouri Ann was different. She had gone to school before the war... Missouri Ann was now too nearly blind to read, but she could call up things learned before the war."² Owens and his family were not unusual in this regard. For generations, many southerners saw the war as the end of an era. A tragedy in itself, it was also the end of a way of life. With the fall of the Confederacy, moonlight and magnolias gave way first to military occupation followed by "black Republican" rule, and, for many southern families, grinding poverty and its myriad problems.

Other southerners--apostles of the New South for the most part--saw radical differences, but they also saw a continuity with the past that was just as important. In a sense, their rhetoric concerning continuity was surely intended to be self serving. As they constantly urged southerners to take a new direction, they sought to establish links that would confirm the legitimacy of the course they wanted the South to take. Henry W. Grady, for example, claimed that the New South was "simply the Old South under new conditions."³

Early historians were divided over the extent of the changes between the Old South and the New. Some early historians of the South emphasized continuity. In his 1921

2. Ibid, 18.

3. Henry Grady quoted in: C. Vann Woodward, Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History (Baton Rouge, 1986), 63.

book, The New South, for example, Holland Thompson claimed that the New South was "a logical development from the Old South." He wrote:

The Civil War changed the whole organization of Southern Society, it is true, but it did not modify its essential attributes, to quote the ablest of the carpetbaggers, Albion W. Tourgee. Reconstruction strengthened existing prejudices and created new bitterness, but the attempt failed to make of South Carolina another Massachusetts. The people resisted stubbornly, desperately, and in the end successfully, every attempt to impose upon them alien institutions ...The attempt to force the barrier between the races by legislation with the aid of bayonets failed.⁴

Others emphasized the discontinuities. In his 1921 book, The Sequel of Appomattox, for example, Walter L. Fleming entitled his penultimate chapter, "The Changing South." Fleming concluded that chapter by enumerating the following changes:

The new generation of whites was poor, bitter because of persecution, ill educated, overworked, without a bright future, and shadowed by the race problem. Though their new political leaders were shrewd, narrow, conservative, honest, and parsimonious, the constant fighting of fire with fire scorched all. In the bitter discipline of reconstruction, the pleasantest side of Southern life came to an end... Hospitality declined; the old Southern life had never been on a business basis, but the new Southern life now adjusted itself to a stricter economy; the old individuality was partially lost; but class distinctions were less obvious in a more homogeneous society. The material evils of reconstruction may be only temporary;...but the moral

4. Holland Thompson, The New South: A Chronicle of Social and Industrial Evolution (New Haven, 1921), 1-3.

and intellectual results of the revolution will be the more permanent.⁵

By the 1940s, however, most historians of the South considered continuity one of the basic themes in southern history. Robert S. Cotterill was perhaps one of the most dogmatic proponents of this view. In his 1948 presidential address to the Southern Historical Association, Cotterill, mimicking the Gloria Patri, proclaimed: "There is, in very fact, no Old South and no New. There is only the South. Fundamentally, as it was in the beginning it is now, and, if God please, it shall be evermore." Probably the most widely read statement of this view came from the pen of a journalist, Wilbur J. Cash. In his widely read masterpiece, The Mind of the South, Cash compared the South to a mighty tree "with many age rings, with its limbs and trunk bent and twisted by all the winds of the years, but with its tap root in the Old South." According to Cash, most of the leaders of the New South came from "the old ruling class, the progeny of the plantation."⁶

Then in 1951, with the ideas of continuity in the ascendancy in most areas of the discipline, C. Vann Woodward published Origins of the New South. It was, and is, one of the most influential books on southern history ever written.

5. Walter L. Fleming, The Sequel of Appomattox: A Chronicle of the Reunion of the States (New Haven, 1921), 280-281.

6. Robert S. Cotterill quoted in Woodward, Thinking Back, 63; Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York, 1954), 14, 179.

For Woodward, the central theme was not continuity but discontinuity. Those who assumed positions of leadership in the New South had "little but nominal connection to the old planter regime." They were "of middle-class, industrial, capitalistic outlook." Changes occurred not just at the top, but throughout society. For the farmer, the New South meant "subordination to the status of tenant or sharecropper and the degradation of poverty."⁷

As contemporary historians began to focus attention on sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the postbellum South, two elements in Woodward's analysis became important issues in the debate--the continuity or discontinuity in leadership, and, in a more general sense, the issue of continuity itself. The relationship of the postbellum ruling class to its antebellum counterpart may seem at first to be of little importance to an understanding of the institutions of sharecropping and tenant farming, but most historians and many economists have considered the nature of the postbellum ruling class an important factor in explaining the evolution and essential character of these institutions. William N. Parker, for example, noted: "It should not be forgotten that there is always an essential antagonism between an agrarian

7. For a discussion of the basic themes of Origins of the New South, see Woodward, Thinking Back, 63-66.

and an industrial interest, since each continually threatens the labor supply of the other."⁸

The more general issue of continuity is important because the commercial agricultural system of the Old South rested on a coercive labor system that was racially defined. If continuity is the central theme linking the Old South and the New, then the case for a coercive labor system in the New South is immeasurably strengthened. Additionally, if it can be demonstrated that the same individuals were able to maintain positions of social and political leadership, then the assumption that they were also able to maintain at least some degree of control over their laborers seems more logical. Pete Daniel's argument, for example, that "replacing paternalism with violence which led back to paternalism, utilizing customs from the past and the freedmen's illiteracy, relying on contracts and northern sympathy with the work ethic, and mouthing laws and threats, southern planters shaped a labor system that preserved the larva of slavery in the evolution of freedom," does not stand or fall on the issue of continuity of individuals, but it clearly assumes and is strengthened by such continuity.⁹

8. William N. Parker, "The South in the National Economy, 1865-1970," Southern Economic Journal 46(1980): 1019-48 (quotation 1042).

9. Pete Daniel, "The Metamorphosis of Slavery, 1865-1900," Journal of American History 66(1979): 88-99 (quotation 92).

The evidence accumulated which stresses continuity between the antebellum and postbellum ruling classes is impressive, but as yet no consensus on the general issue of continuity has emerged. Questions of continuity are among the issues that will be more fully explored in the chapters that follow. One phase of the debate over planter persistence, however, must be dealt with more fully at this time. Gavin Wright has argued that the issue of persistence is irrelevant to an understanding of the economic system of the New South. He has claimed that in an economic sense, they were a new class regardless of their makeup because the basis of their wealth had changed. According to Wright, planters before the war were "laborlords," while after the war they were landlords. Wright insisted that this change created an "economic revolution." Among other things, the changed basis for wealth led to "a reallocation of land from corn to cotton, new enthusiasm for railroads and local development, and the rise of new manufacturing and mining sectors...Before the war, they favored high-priced labor (because they owned it); after the war they pressed for cheap labor." The overall affect was that "in many ways the direction of economic change moved closer to the American mainstream."¹⁰

10. Wright, Old South, New South, first quote: 18; second quote 11-12. Wayne, a student of C. Vann Woodward, seems to offer support for Wright's contentions in his study of the Natchez District in Louisiana and Mississippi. He argued that while many of the planter families persisted, the plantation itself had been transformed, largely because

There can be little doubt that the changes in orientation outlined by Wright had an important impact on the postbellum South and the nature of its agricultural institutions. However, the author of this study rejects his contention that the issue of persistence is irrelevant.¹¹ The postbellum landlords may have constituted a new class, but if that class comprised predominantly antebellum slaveholders then they had received their training in an old school. While Wright is undoubtedly correct in his assertion that their wealth was now directly tied to the value of their lands, it must be remembered that the value of their lands depended on their ability to use those lands profitably. For southern planters, that generally meant growing cotton. That is what they knew best, and in an overwhelmingly rural state such as Texas, cotton probably provided a higher return on their investment than anything else they could have done with their land. The cultivation of cotton demanded a stable supply of labor, and in a county such as Fort Bend in 1865, that labor came predominantly from former slaves. Southern planters

of the changes relationship between the planter and his labor force. As he put it: "The social organization of the plantation had itself undergone a radical transformation. A cash nexus now intervened between planter and laborer... No wonder that critical observers complained of an encroaching bourgeois ethic... The road to the New South plantation ran through the market place." Wayne, The Reshaping of Plantation Society, 149.

11. For Wright's comments about the relevance of questions about continuity or discontinuity in leadership, see Gavin Wright, "The Strange Career of the New Southern Economic History," Reviews in American History 10 (1982): 164-180.

were convinced that without coercion blacks would never provide reliable labor. They had not only formulated the proslavery argument, they believed it. Any interpretation of postbellum agricultural developments which attempts to separate economic motivations from what was very nearly a unanimously held article of faith such as this one will require considerably more convincing evidence than has been offered to date.¹²

The men who commanded the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas, believing that the free market and democratic institutions were the only foundations for a just society, knew that the conversion of the former planter class was essential to the establishment of either.¹³ No one preached the two

12. Ronald L. F. Davis made a similar point in his study of the period from 1860 to 1890 in the Natchez district. He said, in part, Had planters believed that freedmen would labor faithfully on their own, they could have abandoned low wages and supervision in favor of high wages and self-directed family or squad working arrangements, especially in the early days when cotton prices were high. But from their perspective, blacks needed supervision regardless of any other incentives provided. The issue was one of social control and the labor discipline of a people who were believed to be inherently inferior or so inexperienced as to be incapable of self-direction... Because of this perspective, the old southern planter group came into conflict with those few northern lessees and bureau agents who were convinced that freedmen would work well if paid well.

Ronald L. F. Davis, Good and Faithful Labor From Slavery to Sharecropping in the Natchez District, 1860-1890 (Westport, Connecticut, 1982), 100-01.

13. The Assistant Commissioners of the Freedmen's Bureau routinely discussed their objectives in their annual reports to General Oliver O. Howard. These annual reports can be found in National Archives, Records of the Assistant Commissioner of the State of Texas, Record Group 105, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands. These records, hereafter referred to as BRFAL, have been microfilmed.

fundamentals of the faith more fervently than General Edgar M. Gregory. In a letter to Benjamin G. Harris, the foreman of a Panola County Grand Jury who had written complaining of the conduct of freedmen in his county, Gregory outlined what he believed to be the problem and its solution. It is this author's contention that he understood the relevance of planter persistence more clearly than Wright does. He said, in part,

If in your locality the laborer refuses to work it may be because, though slavery be dead, its collateral influences still exist and survive, and new inducements have not taken the place of the lash and the chain. It may be that the planter as well as the negro has not yet learned what free labor means. The former still hugs the idea that he has the power to fix the wages, restrain the personal liberty, and exercise authority over the latter...The governing classes are today what the past has made them, and they cannot cut loose at a single blow from their past traditions, beliefs, hatreds and hopes. After all the rough schooling of the war they have still a lesson and a hard one to learn. It is to be just to the black man...Treat your laborers with liberality and on a basis of justice...Trammel them not with any attempt at serfdom under a new form, and permit them to run without a load the race of life. Then your locality will settle down into a normal state of peace. The gulf between the two races will be bridged over by a vital sympathy, and your labor unite with your capital and become productive force.¹⁴

The hostility which greeted the Bureau initially and the intensity with which its directives were resisted throughout its existence make it obvious that Gregory and his successors

14. E. M. Gregory to Benjamin G. Harris, Esquire and Foreman of the Grand Jury of Panola County, January 20, 1866, BRFAL.

made few converts in Texas. Conservatives who successfully elected James W. Throckmorton to the governorship in 1866 condemned the Freedmen's Bureau repeatedly through the newspapers, and the Bureau was specifically condemned in the Resolutions passed by the 1868 Democratic State Convention. When local agents of the Bureau prepared their final reports as their offices were closing in December of 1868, although there were exceptions, most considered their efforts a failure. The most telling comments came from William Howard in Huntsville and Nesbit Jenkins in Wharton. Howard had observed in November that planters rarely fulfilled their obligations under the contracts they made with the freedmen. In December he informed headquarters that planters had decided to wait until the office had closed before dividing the crop. Jenkins observed simply that the closing of the Bureau had left blacks "to the cold pity of a hostile world." William H. Rock was the agent stationed in Fort Bend County. He considered it "absolutely necessary" that troops be stationed in Richmond once he had closed the office.¹⁵

15. For information on the Freedmen's Bureau and the state press, see Claude Elliott, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Texas," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 56(1952): 1-24. For the resolution condemning the Freedmen's Bureau, see Ernest William Winkler, Platform of Political Parties in Texas, University of Texas Bulletin No. 53 (Austin, 1916), 110. William Howard to the Assistant Commissioner of Texas, December 23, 1868; Nesbit Jenkins to the Assistant Commissioner of Texas, December 31, 1868; W. H. Rock to the Assistant Commissioner of Texas, December 28, 1868; Monthly Reports, BRFAL.

Clearly planters wanted to establish some form of coercive labor system. The evidence in this regard is simply overwhelming. The "black codes" enacted by the Eleventh State Legislature in 1866 were a blatant attempt to give planters greater control over their labor force, and Bureau agents from all over the state frequently complained of the way in which planters abused the apprenticeship law which was part of those codes.¹⁶ The issue then concerns their ability to do so. In other words, was the "invisible hand" of the

16. The codes passed by the Texas Legislature did not include any reference to race because by 1866, it was obvious that that language would provoke an immediate reaction from the North. The codes were very similar to those of other states and will not be specifically addressed in this work. Still, portions of the labor law which seem particularly obnoxious were:

"Sec. 9. ...Failing to obey reasonable orders, neglect of duty, leaving home without permission, impudence, swearing or indecent language to, or in the presence of the employer, his family or agent, or quarrelling and fighting with one another, shall be deemed disobedience...

Sec. 10. Laborers, in the various duties of the household, and in all the domestic duties of the family, shall, at all hours of the day or night, and on all days of the week, promptly answer all calls, and obey and execute all lawful orders and commands of the family in whose service they are employed, unless otherwise stipulated in the contract, and any failure or refusal by the laborer to obey as herein provided, except in case of sickness, shall be deemed disobedience... And it is the duty of this class of laborers to be especially civil and polite to their employer, his family and guests..."

These codes are contained in H. P. N. Gammel, comp., The Laws of Texas, 1822-1897 (Austin, 1897) Vol. 5. The above quote is located on pages 78-79. For complaints about the abuse of the apprenticeship laws, see, for example, DeWitt C. Brown to the Assistant Commissioner, November 30, 1867; Hiram Clark to the Assistant Commissioner, July 5, 1867; Charles E. Culver to the Assistant Commissioner, September 1, 1867; John Dix to the Assistant Commissioner, July 2, 1867; Albert Evans to the Assistant Commissioner, January 18, 1867; Abner K. Foster to the Assistant Commissioner, July 1, 1868; and W. H. Heistand to the Assistant Commissioner, January 24, 1867; Reports of Operations, BRFal.

free market stronger than the very visible economic power of the planter class? Unfortunately, this will be difficult to ascertain because the evidence is limited. However, an attempt will be made to deal with the issue.

Most of the theoretical issues and practical problems involved in the use of the antebellum censuses also apply to the use of the 1870 census, but changes in the number of individuals involved made certain procedural changes necessary. Before explaining these changes, however, one other procedural issue with potentially important theoretical implications must be examined. Data collected on blacks and whites in the postbellum era were kept and evaluated separately. Although this reflected my belief that caste was an important element in the reorganization of Texas agriculture after the Civil War, it was also essential in any attempt to discern differences in the treatment of black and white landless farmers.

This study proceeds from the assumption that blacks and whites were and are inherently equal and that differences in treatment which apply to virtually all blacks or virtually all whites are examples of discrimination on the basis of preconceived ideas rather than on the basis of rational economic self-interest. The preceding statement should not be taken to mean that generations of slavery had had no impact on black Americans. Instead, it means simply that the

impact of slavery could not have affected all blacks to the same extent or in the same way. The range of conditions under which blacks who were held in bondage lived and worked and the variations in their personalities were too wide. Thus, slavery could not have created a single mindset which demanded a rigid separation in the treatment accorded them.

The census, with its systematic attempts to provide information on every individual in the country, proved the most important source for comparative data on the status of blacks and whites. The 1870 Census contains the same basic information as that contained in the 1860 Census, and the same process was used to determine the number of possible poor tenants present in each county. There was, however, one exception. Although the census figure for personal property was used to determine those who were tenants but not poor ones, the \$3,000 figure used to separate the groups in 1860 was lowered to \$1,500 for 1870. The end of slavery, and the drastic fall in the evaluations of all types of property in the state, led to a drastic fall in the values listed for both personal and real property by 1870. Still, \$1,500 seemed to be the most appropriate figure to use for distinguishing between tenants who were affluent and those who were not. Most of those who had reported relatively large amounts of personal property in 1860 owned slaves. In 1870, very few items of personal property could be converted

into capital with which to purchase land as easily as slaves could have been in the period before the Civil War.

Therefore, a figure that was actually comparatively higher seemed appropriate.

The postbellum years pose a tremendous problem for the researcher, even in a study of limited geographical areas such as this one. The end of slavery meant that for the first time all the members of society were included on the same population schedule. All were--theoretically at least--included as free agents in the agricultural system. This factor, coupled with the increase in the population of the state, drastically increased the number of individuals who were listed as farmers.¹⁷ The compiled lists of farmers for each county and census are presented in table ten.

Such large numbers make it impossible to do the kind of detailed analysis necessary. Therefore, for the postbellum years samples were taken in each county. For 1870, a list of farmers was compiled from the census in Milam and Fort Bend County. The lists were separated according to whether or not

17. The census taker responsible for the Fort Bend Census in 1870 enumerated a large number of individuals as "farming on shares", as well as the more traditional designation of farmer. Obviously this distinction was important and will be dealt with later, but it did not affect the methodology discussed in this chapter. These individuals were considered farmers, and the distinction was ignored in the compiling of lists of "poor" tenants and owners. This was largely because the meaning of the term "farming on shares" is not exactly clear and because there were clearly others in the county who were probably poor tenants who were simply referred to as farmers.

TABLE 10
TOTAL NUMBER OF FARMERS APPEARING ON THE POPULATION
SCHEDULES: FORT BEND, MILAM, AND PALO PINTO COUNTIES,
1850-1880

	1850	1860	1870	1880
Fort Bend	113	187	1383	1171
Milam	440	467	1383	2843
Palo Pinto		124	N/A ¹⁸	649
Total	553	778	2766	4663

the individual owned real property. The nonproperty owners were then divided into the groups discussed above -- relatives of landowners, wealthy tenants, and poor tenants. That is, an attempt was made to create a list of probable poor tenants, just as in 1850 and 1860. Next, random samples of 100 owners of real property and 100 probable "poor" tenants were drawn in both counties.¹⁹ In keeping with the

18. As will be noted from this table, no census was taken in Palo Pinto in 1870. This is unfortunate, but it does help to illustrate the eastward retreat of the frontier which occurred during the Civil War and Reconstruction. This point will be dealt with later because it had important implications for those who farmed land they did not own.

19. In Milam County, the population schedule is numbered in succession from beginning to end, and it is difficult to determine where the various precincts begin and end. Furthermore, the order on the agricultural schedule is very different from the order on the population schedule. Therefore, both the Milam County samples were drawn from the entire lists of owners and possible "poor" tenants. In Fort Bend County, on the other hand, the census is renumbered in each precinct. Therefore, the sample was stratified in the sense that the proportion of owners and possible "poor" tenants from each precinct matched the

emphasis of this study, the only criteria used were the ownership of real property and the possibility that an individual was a poor tenant. In drawing up the various universes from which the samples were drawn, factors such as race were disregarded. More sophisticated procedures would have involved additional complications and would require substantially larger samples.

Once the samples were obtained, the age, race, and real and personal wealth of each individual was recorded. An attempt was made to locate these individuals on the agricultural schedule and on the 1870 tax roll for the county. For individuals located on the agricultural schedule, the values recorded in the following categories were collected: improved acres, unimproved acres, value of farm, value of farming implements, value of livestock, corn produced, cotton produced, and sugar produced. From the tax roll, the total taxable value and the number of real acres owned was recorded for each individual located.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the historical arguments over the extent of continuity and discontinuity in

proportion of the total number of owners and possible "poor" tenants residing in that precinct. This seemed to be the most effective way of compensating for regional variations which might be present within the county. A computer program was then written to generate the random numbers. The computer was instructed to discard any number already chosen for that sample and choose another. Thus, each farmer could only be chosen once. In other words, the sampling was done without replacement.

the southern states during the decade of the 1860s will probably never be completely resolved. Tenancy, however, constitutes an important facet of this question and, because the issue of tenancy became a matter of some public debate during the late 1860s, the sources available for studying it multiplied. A number of these sources have been examined and utilized. Still, the major emphasis will be on the information collected from the census. This is due in part to the importance of the issue of continuity. Although later censuses were designed to record information on farm tenure, the 1870 census, which was almost identical to the 1860 census, proved to be an adequate source of data. It was not perfect, but the information it yielded allows a direct comparison. It allows us to assess the impact of a disastrous decade on the poorest groups in southern society--landless whites and the freedmen who were almost all landless also.

CHAPTER 5

FARM TENANCY IN FORT BEND AND MILAM COUNTIES, 1860-1870

In 1853, William J. Kyle and Benjamin Franklin "Frank" Terry moved to Fort Bend County from Brazoria, purchasing the 2,500 acre Oakland plantation on Oyster Creek for \$62,500. They paid \$7,000 in cash and signed a series of notes for the balance which was to be paid by 1858. Already wealthy men by antebellum standards when they entered the county, by 1860 they had accumulated the kind of wealth that most of the upper ten percent only dreamed about. By the time of the census that year, they owned real and personal property worth more than \$250,000. At fifty and thirty-nine respectively, Kyle and Terry were still relatively young men.¹

Materially speaking, they had it all, and Frank Terry, realizing that much of their wealth was a result of their human property, was determined to see that they kept it. When the delegates who had been elected from around the state met in Austin on January 28, 1861 to formulate an ordinance of secession, Terry was present as a delegate from Fort Bend,

1. The account of Frank Terry and his family that follows is largely taken from Wharton, Fort Bend County, 153-173; the manuscript returns of the Census of 1860, population schedule; and The Handbook of Texas, s.v. Benjamin Franklin Terry.

Wharton, and Matagorda counties. Terry had favored secession and had done his part to help make it a reality at the convention, but he was determined to do more. According to Clarence Wharton, while returning home from the convention by stage coach, Terry, John A. Wharton, and Thomas Lubbock began to plan the formation of a regiment to fight for southern independence, if necessary.

By August 31, 1861, Terry had raised a regiment, taken it to Brownsville where they had secured a former Federal fort, traveled to Richmond, Virginia where he had received a commission and participated in the Battle of Bull Run, returned home, finished filling the regiment and was ready to leave for the war. Wharton described his leave-taking as follows,

On the last day in August Frank Terry, in a new and splendid uniform, wearing the sword his Uncle Ben Fort Smith had carried in the War of 1812 and at the Battle of San Jacinto, mounted on a superb horse, cantered over the plantation giving final orders here and there, visiting some of the negroes who were ill and unable to be out and see him off.

The season was at its zenith and a thousand acres of cotton were almost ripe for harvest. Fields of cane, high as horseback, all in splendid green, rustled in the soft sea breeze of early morning.

It was a holiday and a hundred slaves were gathered at their quarters to watch the master ride away...He talked to them, told them he was going away...He told them perhaps he would be at home Christmas.

He bade his wife and children good-bye...and as he remounted his horse an old negro mammy came running from the house with his little five-year-old son, Kyle in her arms...The warrior reached down and caught the little fellow in a last embrace...His son David, in his

eighteenth year, ...rode proudly with him and they went to war to protect the sacred institution of the South.²

On December 17, 1861, Terry's Rangers were on the Green River near Woodsonville, Kentucky. When they were fired on by enemy troops from a concealed position in the nearby woods, Colonel Terry ordered his men to charge. It was to be their first skirmish of the war, and Terry led the way, standing in the stirrups as he urged his men on. An advance guard hiding in the brush shot Terry as he passed. Terry was home at Christmas time, buried in the family plot at Oakland plantation.

William J. Kyle's activities during this period are not known. Since he was fifty in 1860, he was probably considered too old to fight, and thus stayed home to manage the massive sugar and cotton plantation that he and Terry had built. But fate was not kind to Kyle either. He died in February of 1864, still a relatively young man. Apparently he had never married, and nothing is known about the disposition of his estate. Clearly, however, the partnership had ended.³

Davis S. and Kyle Terry, the two sons mentioned in Wharton's account of Terry's last day alive at Oakland, both survived the war. Neither, however, possessed the skill and

2. Wharton, Fort Bend County, 170-171.

3. Information about Kyle's death was taken from the Summaries of the Probate Records of Fort Bend County prepared by the Texas Historical Records Project.

desire to build an operation similar to their father's. David sold his share in the estate and moved to California, where his Uncle David Terry had become a Judge on the State Supreme Court. Young Kyle grew to manhood with what Wharton termed a "propensity for hunting trouble." Apparently he gunned down a policeman in Houston in 1882 but escaped prosecution. In 1889 he shot another man in Wharton. This time he was jailed, and then released on a \$15,000 bond. The enmity of the family of the man he shot made it impossible for him to return to Fort Bend County, so he traveled to Galveston where, according to Wharton, "he was a pathetic figure. He had long ago squandered the small remnant of his father's estate which had come to him, and now he was getting threadbare and shabby." He was killed in 1890 by the brother of the man he had killed. Frank Terry had one other son, Benjamin F. Terry, Jr., who was ten in 1860. No information is available about his life, but he is not listed on the 1870 or 1880 Fort Bend census. Thus, less than a generation after Terry had entered the county, his family had scattered, and most of their lands had passed into other hands.⁴

The rise and fall of the Terry family was mirrored in other families throughout the South during the tumultuous decade of the 1860s. The only thing which makes the story of the Terry family very different is the fact that they were

4. Wharton, Fort Bend County, 210-213.

unusually wealthy before the war. Although there are no stories from Milam County that can match the Terry drama, there also men and families were scattered and impoverished. There is no question that such occurrences were common during the period. The question is: Was this typical? Did most wealthy families in these counties fall into such poverty after the war, or did they hold on to the land, the chief remaining indicator of agricultural wealth?⁵

These are, of course, a parts of the larger question of persistence in general. During the antebellum period, the landed element of the agricultural community was the most stable part. Among tenants in Fort Bend and Milam in 1850, few persisted for a decade, and those who did were, for the most part, those who had managed to acquire land. The others moved on, possibly because they had not obtained land and their prospects of doing so seemed better elsewhere. What differences are discernible between the changes occurring during the period from 1850 until 1860, and those from 1860 until 1870? A related issue concerns landowners. How did they fare during the tumultuous sixties? Did they persist to

5. There is one inaccurate and poorly researched monograph on a wealthy Milam County family which faced ruin because of the war, but it was so poorly done that it seemed futile to use it even as an example of county legends. That work was Benton R. White, The Forgotten Cattle King (College Station, 1986), 6-18. Due to the absence of Palo Pinto census returns for 1870, Palo Pinto will not be included in the discussion concerning persistence.

the same degree that they had during the 1850s? Perhaps more importantly, did they maintain their status as landholders?

As table eleven indicates, the persistence rate was lower for landowners in Fort Bend County during the 1860s (48 percent) than it had been during the previous decade when 64 percent of all landowners had persisted. The difference in rates is significant, but its causes are difficult to determine. There are a number of possible causes for this change. First, the record of those who died during the

TABLE 11
PERSISTENCE BETWEEN 1860 AND 1870 IN MILAM AND FORT
BEND COUNTIES

	FORT BEND	MILAM
TOTAL 1860 OWNERS	129	373
PRESENT IN 1870	45	147
DIED IN THE COUNTY	36	[21]
PERCENTAGE WHO PERSISTED*	48%	45%
TOTAL 1860 TENANTS	35	78
PRESENT IN 1870	5	15
DIED IN THE COUNTY	3	[1]
PERCENTAGE WHO PERSISTED*	16%	21%

*Due to an absence of probate records, persistence rates for Milam County are again based on conservative estimates of mortality.

decade was taken from the Probate Minutes, as it was for the previous decade. It is possible that there are gaps in this record. With chronic paper shortages, the stress of such an intense war effort, and the disintegration of Confederate governments in the spring of 1865, many counties have very poor records for the Civil War period. Although the government in Fort Bend County never ground completely to a halt as did some Texas county governments, it is possible that some estates which would otherwise have been taken through probate were never brought before the court. It is doubtful that this could account for the entire difference in the rates, but it was probably a factor. Another factor could have been the upheaval of Reconstruction which undoubtedly prompted some of the county's landed citizens to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Although the drop in persistence rates in Fort Bend County was significant, it should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the rate was still remarkably high. The method was different than that employed by Campbell in his study of Harrison County, but the results should yield figures which are roughly comparable. The rates obtained for Fort Bend County are very similar to those obtained for Harrison County.⁶

6. See Campbell, A Southern Community in Crisis, 379-389.

While persistence among landowning farmers was lower in Fort Bend County for the decade of the 1860s than for the previous decade, it was significantly higher in Milam County where only 35 percent of all landowners had persisted between 1850 and 1860. Again, the persistence figure for Milam County (45 percent) is an estimate because probate records are unavailable. Still, the change in persistence rates between the 1850s and 1860s is obvious.⁷ It would be impossible to say conclusively why Milam had a more stable population, but the most important factor was probably the fact that the county was further removed from its days as a frontier community.

Clearly then, although the Civil War was a traumatic event with a noticeable impact on persistence, particularly in Fort Bend County, landholding farmers in these counties were still relatively stable. As table twelve indicates, in each county, the wealthiest segment of the population constituted the most stable major segment.⁸ In Fort Bend County, where probate records are available, the persistence rate of those

7. In fact, the 147 individuals present in Milam County in 1870 represent thirty-nine percent of the total group of 1860 landowning farmers while the forty-five individuals present in Fort Bend County in 1870 represent only thirty-five percent of the total group of 1860 landowning farmers. The final persistence rate, of course, reflects the very conservative estimate of mortality in the county.

8. As the table indicates, the poorest segment of the landholding agricultural class was actually the most stable in Fort Bend County, with a persistence rate of 100%. With only two people involved, however, the class is so small that any result would just as likely be due to chance as to factors about which we might speculate.

farmers who survived the decade are presented in parentheses. For that county, almost six of every ten of the very wealthiest who survived the decade were still geographically persistent. For Milam County, the figures presented are actual persistence rates which do not attempt to account for those who may have died during the decade. It seems certain that the geographical persistence rate would be over 50 percent for the wealthiest group if probate records were available. In fact, the persistence rate among those who survived the decade may have been higher in Milam County than it was in Fort Bend County.

TABLE 12
PERSISTENCE AND TOTAL WEALTH: FORT BEND AND MILAM
COUNTIES, 1860-1870

<u>WEALTH IN 1860</u>	<u>PERSISTENT IN 1870</u>			
	FORT NUMBER	BEND PERCENT	MILAM NUMBER	PERCENT
\$50,000 OR MORE	13/38	34% (59%)		
\$15,000 - \$49,999	15/48	31% (41%)	18/42	43%
\$5,000 - \$14,999	9/27	33% (43%)	51/120	42%
\$1,000 - \$4,999	6/14	43% (55%)	55/149	37%
BELOW \$1,000	2/2	100%	23/62	37%
TOTAL	45/129	35% (48%)	147/373	39%

Geographic persistence is important. But how did these various groups fare economically during the decade? Table thirteen presents the average wealth in 1870 of those

individuals in each class who persisted, along with the average loss of wealth each individual in the various classes sustained expressed as a percentage of that individual's 1860 holdings.⁹ For those who had possessed great wealth, the losses were truly spectacular. In this sense, the tale of the impoverished planter was certainly a reality in 1870. Men such as L. H. Schley in Fort Bend County who reported total property of \$75,000 in 1860 and \$5,100 worth in 1870

TABLE 13
IMPACT OF THE CIVIL WAR ON WEALTHHOLDING BY PERSISTENT
LANDHOLDING FARMERS

WEALTH IN 1860	AVG. 1870	PERCENTAGE	AVG. 1870	PERCENTAGE
	WEALTH	LOSS	WEALTH	LOSS
	FORT BEND		MILAM	
\$50,000 - UP	\$9191	91%	XX	XX
\$15,000 - \$49,999	\$8713	72%	\$9394	63%
\$5,000 - \$14,999	\$5938	49%	\$3286	63%
\$1,000 - \$4,999	\$1230	68%	\$2251	35%
BELOW \$1,000	\$500*	0%	\$837	20%

*Of the two who persisted, one was a woman. The other had actually increased his total wealth from \$400 to \$500.

9. In Fort Bend County, there were a few women who had been classed as farmers in 1860. In every case where these women persisted, they were no longer called farmers. Most were listed with no occupation on the 1870 census and without property of any kind. It appears that many of these women had passed their property to their grown sons. These women were deleted from consideration in table three. Although their inclusion would have had a relatively small impact, they were clearly not as poor as their reported wealthholding would indicate.

were not really poor, but it would be understandable if they had felt that they were. But these losses are obviously only one part of the picture. As table thirteen also indicates, they were still generally wealthy men in terms of their position relative to others who had persisted.

The losses sustained by the very wealthy were dramatic, but perhaps the most surprising statistics are those presented in the bottom lines of the table. Generally speaking, hard times are more difficult for those who have fewer resources. They often lack the accumulated wealth necessary to weather a crisis. In this sense, those relatively poor landowners who had persisted did better than might have been predicted. In the poorer classes though, the figures are more difficult to interpret because the measures presented in the table do not give as accurate a picture of the situation as they do for the very wealthy. Take the very wealthy in Fort Bend, for example. Among those thirteen individuals, everyone recorded property in 1870 worth at least 50 percent less than that recorded in 1860. At the same time, only three of the thirteen reported less than \$5,000 worth of property in 1870. One of these, Randolph Foster was eighty years old in 1870. He probably reported no real estate and only \$150 in personal property because he had already passed the bulk of his property on to his children. One of the three who had reported less than \$5,000 worth of

property was apparently truly impoverished, reporting no property, personal or real, in 1870. The other had reported property worth \$2,000.

Among those who had reported less than \$1,000 worth of property in 1860, the variations were much wider.¹⁰ Of the twenty-three who had persisted in Milam County, sixteen reported property worth more than that reported in 1860. It would seem that they had not only survived, but actually prospered during the sixties. With total reported property ranging from a high of \$2,400 to a low of \$400, none of these sixteen had become wealthy, but they seem to have been better off than they were in 1860. The seven of these twenty-three who were not better off in 1870 suffered losses which ranged from 100 percent to just 29 percent. These numbers are hardly significant--they had so little to lose. A far more important statistic was the loss of land. Five of the seven owned no land in 1870 and an average of only \$166 in personal property. They had literally fallen into tenantry during the decade of the sixties.

While the landowning elements of the agricultural population in these two counties were relatively stable in that their persistence levels were near 50 percent, table eleven shows that those who had been landless farmers in 1860

10. Again there is information in the table which is not utilized in the text. The one case in Fort Bend County represents too small a sample to merit inclusion.

were even less likely to remain in the county through the decade than their 1850 counterparts had been. Persistence among poor tenants had dropped from 25 percent to 16 percent in Fort Bend County, and from 30 percent to 21 percent in Milam County. Again as during the 1850s, poor tenants were slightly less likely to remain in Fort Bend County than they were in Milam. By 1860, the overwhelming majority of poor tenants who had persisted had obtained real property. These figures, as well as those for the 1860 poor tenant who persisted until 1870, are presented in table fourteen. Although the percentages are somewhat lower, most of those who remained in the county were landowners by 1870. Again, this suggests that, for the most part, those who stayed did so because they had acquired land.

Those whites who had remained in the county through the decade were, of course, only a portion of the total 1870 white agricultural population. As table fifteen indicates, when farm tenancy figures are compiled for the two counties it becomes obvious that there was significantly more landlessness among white farmers in general than there had been ten years earlier. Among white farmers, tenancy rates had more than doubled in Milam County and risen by 63 percent in Fort Bend County. Again, as in 1850, there were more tenant farmers in Milam County than there were in Fort Bend.

TABLE 14
PERSISTENCE AND REAL PROPERTY: PERCENTAGE OF
PERSISTENT TENANTS WHO OBTAINED REAL PROPERTY,
1850-1870

	1850 - 1860		1860 - 1870	
	FORT BEND	MILAM	FORT BEND	MILAM
TOTAL TENANTS	11	73	35	78
NUMBER PERSISTENT	2	19	5	15
% OF TOTAL	18%	26%	14%	19%
LANDOWNERS BY NEXT CENSUS	2	15	3*	10
LANDOWNERS AS % OF THOSE WHO PERSISTED	100%	79%	60%	67%

* One of those who had been considered a possible poor tenant in Fort Bend County in 1860 reported \$3,000 worth of personal property in 1870. In reality, then, eighty percent of those who had stayed in Fort Bend County were no longer poor tenants by 1870.

TABLE 15
WHITE TENANTS IN 1870: FORT BEND AND MILAM COUNTIES

	FORT BEND	MILAM
WHITE FARMERS ON FREE POPULATION SCHEDULE	218	1133
NUMBER OF LANDLESS FARMERS	110	676
PERCENTAGE OF LANDLESS FARMERS	50%	60%
LANDLESS FARMERS RELATED TO OWNERS	13	78
NUMBER OF PROBABLE TENANT FARMERS	97	598
PERCENTAGE OF PROBABLE TENANT FARMERS	44%	53%
NUMBER OF WEALTHY TENANTS	4	7
NUMBER POOR TENANTS*	90	565
PERCENTAGE OF POOR TENANTS	42%	51%

*There were three individuals in Fort Bend and twenty-six in Milam County who were related to poor tenants and were thus dropped from both the numerator and denominator for these calculations.

During the antebellum period, tenancy rates generally followed the lines of settlement, moving from east to west. In 1850 and again in 1860, the highest rates were recorded in those areas which had been most recently settled. Did this trend continue into the postbellum period, or was it reversed? The attempt to answer this question is rendered more difficult by the lack of census returns for Palo Pinto County.¹¹

Palo Pinto had been a frontier county in 1860. During the Civil War, the Indians had rolled back the frontier, virtually reclaiming a stretch of territory that included Palo Pinto County. The Indians remained active in the area during Reconstruction as the United States Army divided its attention and limited resources between the frontier and eastern areas where blacks and unionists desperately needed protection. The population of the area fell drastically. In the 1867 Texas Almanac, the description of Palo Pinto County, one of the shortest published, read: "This county is principally devoted to stockraising, and is mostly prairie. The Palo Pinto River runs through the body of the county. Indians keep the inhabitants in continual alarm."¹²

11. It was initially assumed that those individuals residing in the county could be located on the rolls of an adjacent county. But, with the exception of about six individuals in Parker County, this was not possible.

12. The Texas Almanac for 1867, 146

In spite of the problems, the county was never completely abandoned by Anglo settlers. In fact, it remained organized to the extent that although no tax roll was prepared for 1869, that year was an exception. Some estimate of the county's population can be made by comparing the 1870 tax roll with those of 1860 and 1880. The figures presented in table sixteen are a powerful indication of the county's drastic population decline.

TABLE 16
PALO PINTO POPULATION, 1860 - 1880

	NUMBER ON TAX ROLL	NUMBER OF FREE POPULATION IN CENSUS	FREE POPULATION/ TAX ROLL
1860	368	1394	3.8
1870	180		
1880	1131	5885	5.2

The lower proportion of the total population appearing on the 1880 tax roll is probably best explained by the fact that as the county moved away from its frontier days, the number of families versus the number of single individuals increased. The total number of individuals on the tax roll in 1870 was a little less than half the number appearing on the 1860 roll. Under such unsettled conditions, the number of individuals present who were missed by the tax collector may have been larger than the number missed in other years.

But this was probably more than offset by the decline in the number of families present versus single individuals. A very liberal estimate of the population can be arrived at by multiplying the number of the tax roll by a factor of five. This would yield a population estimate of 900. A more realistic estimate would be 700.

In any case, there were undoubtedly very few farmers present. Stockraising in mid-nineteenth-century Texas was almost always an open range operation. It required very little investment of time or money in the land itself. Farming, on the other hand, was dependent upon a commitment of time and money to a fixed parcel of land. When Indians raided, they could steal some of the cattle roaming the area, but it would be difficult to destroy the entire operation. It would be much easier to destroy a farmer's prospects. This, coupled with the ready market for beef provided by the army, made the county almost exclusively a cattlemen's frontier once more. In a sense, the farmer's frontier had moved east during the Civil War and Reconstruction, making Milam County closer to that frontier than it had been in 1860.

While the settled area of the state was decreasing in size, the population of the state increased by 30 percent. Under ordinary conditions, this would mean increased pressure on the land which would result in higher demand and probably

higher tenancy rates. An examination of the information presented in table seventeen indicates that the 1860s, compared to the antebellum period at least, were far from ordinary. This table is, of course, similar to the table presented in chapter three, but the percentages presented in the rows of total tenants and total landowners in this case are the number of each class as a proportion of the total of these two classes. In other words, these percentages do not measure the proportion of poor tenants present relative to all white farmers, just to white landowners.

TABLE 17
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF OWNERS AND TENANTS
SETTLING IN EACH COUNTY, 1850-1870

	1850		1860		1870	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
FORT_BEND						
OWNERS	94	51%	129	23%	108	19%
TENANTS	11	13%	35	20%	90	14%
MILAM						
OWNERS	91	49%	373	67%	457	81%
TENANTS	73	87%	78	45%	565	86%
PALO_PINTO						
OWNERS			52	10%		
TENANTS			60	35%		
TOTAL						
OWNERS	185	69%	554	76%	565	46%
TENANTS	84	31%	173	24%	655	53%

One precautionary statement is in order here. The 1870 census is less accurate than any other census taken during

the period under consideration.¹³ Still, the information recorded in 1870 was exactly the same information that was recorded in 1860, and there is no indication that the problems with the 1870 census are of sufficient magnitude to explain the drastic changes in the relative number of poor tenants present in these two counties. The number of poor tenants more than tripled, while the number of landowners actually declined in Fort Bend County and rose by just nine percent over all.

There are probably a number of explanations for this startling increase in total tenants, and most of them begin with the Civil War. A major war effort will inevitably task the resources of a population, and the strain of the conflict from 1861-1865 probably left many people without land. Perhaps, since the war exacted a higher price in many of the older southern states than in Texas, many of the poor tenants were recent migrants. If Bode and Ginter's suggestion that tenancy rates tended to move with patterns of settlement is accurate, why would that phenomenon stop at the boundary of a state? The reasoning presented would seem to indicate that rates should be higher in Texas than elsewhere because the patterns of settlement certainly moved in that direction. Although that was not the case during the antebellum period,

13. For a discussion of some of the problems involved with the 1870 Census, see Campbell, Southern Community in Crisis, 298-300.

perhaps the loss of land, coupled with the widespread destruction in other areas, compelled the landless to head west. If these two counties are an accurate indication of a state-wide trend, then many of those who came to Texas after the war were impoverished farmers in search of what they had lost (or never had) in other states. But, once in the Lone Star state, they farmed other people's land, at least for a while.

Regardless of the cause, tenancy rates skyrocketed in Milam and Fort Bend counties. And, as table seventeen indicates, even though the number of poor tenants in Fort Bend County was more than double the number present in 1860, a smaller percentage of the total number of poor tenants in this "universe" were located there than in Milam County. In fact, the proportion present in Fort Bend County (14 percent) was almost the same as it had been in 1850 (13 percent).

It is clear then, that despite the increase in numbers and in the proportion of tenants relative to landowners within Fort Bend County, the area was generally no more attractive to white tenants in 1870 than it had been during the antebellum period. But there was one significant difference in the relative position of Fort Bend County in 1870. The number of white landowning farmers present had dropped slightly, and so had the proportion of the total group present in Fort Bend County. The drop in the number of white

landowning farmers is misleading in that there was a slightly higher proportion of individuals on the agricultural schedule who were not listed as farmers on the population schedule, but the total number of farms on the agricultural schedule had risen by only seventeen, from 161 to 178.

The decline in landowning farmers is probably a reflection of two aspects of life in Fort Bend County during this period. The first was the political situation in the county discussed earlier. Second, there were only limited areas of fertile land available to grow cotton or sugar cane. Farming in the county was still limited to the areas around the Brazos and San Bernard Rivers and the two creeks mentioned earlier. These areas were for the most part the property of large landowners, and there was little room for real growth in the number of landowning farmers present in the county unless large holdings were divided into much smaller farms and sold. By 1870 at least, that process had not occurred.

In summary, the number of white tenants in the three counties being examined had risen dramatically by 1870. On the surface, the pattern looks much like the pattern present in 1850, but there was one significant difference. In 1850, Milam County had been outside the cotton kingdom, and by 1860, although there were a few more tenants present, they formed a negligible portion of the total agricultural work force. In fact, they may still have been avoiding those

areas where cotton was being grown in 1860. The most important agricultural labor force in the cotton kingdom had been slaves. In 1870, the most important agricultural labor force in the cotton kingdom was composed of tenants.

The percentages of tenancy among black farmers in Fort Bend and Milam Counties in 1870 were high. This in itself is hardly surprising. Almost every account of blacks in the postbellum South has incorporated their initial poverty into the explanation of the development of sharecropping.

Historians and economists can and do debate the importance of that wealthlessness in the long run, but none can deny its reality. Although the account contained an element of hyperbole, Frederick Douglass effectively described that wealthlessness when he stated that the former slave "had nothing but the dusty road under his feet. He was free from the old quarter that once gave him shelter, but a slave to the rains of summer and the frosts of winter. He was turned loose, naked, hungry, and destitute to the open sky."¹⁴

Thus, to the extent that the figures presented in table eighteen support a picture of black poverty described both by contemporaries and historians, they are predictable. Perhaps the thing most surprising about the figures is their similarity. Despite vast differences in economic and

14. Quoted in George Tindall, America: A Narrative History (New York, 1984), 1:671.

political conditions between the two counties, tenancy rates among black farmers differed by just two-tenths of one percent. Clearly, blacks in both areas began their lives as freedmen with the same advantages and disadvantages, and five years is a relatively short period in which to measure economic progress. Still, the figures suggest that the difficulties in obtaining land were at least roughly similar in both counties.

TABLE 18
BLACK TENANTS IN 1870: FORT BEND AND MILAM
COUNTIES

	FORT BEND	MILAM
BLACK FARMERS ON FREE POPULATION SCHEDULE	1165	250
NUMBER LANDLESS FARMERS	1147	246
PERCENTAGE OF LANDLESS FARMERS	98%	98%
LANDLESS FARMERS RELATED TO OWNERS	0	0
NUMBER OF PROBABLE TENANT FARMERS	1147	246
PERCENTAGE OF PROBABLE TENANT FARMERS	98%	98%
NUMBER OF WEALTHY TENANTS	0	0
NUMBER OF POOR TENANTS*	1126	220
PERCENTAGE OF POOR TENANTS	98%	98%

* There were twenty-six blacks in Milam County and twenty-one blacks in Fort Bend who were related to and lived with other poor tenants. These individuals were deleted from both the denominator and the numerator when calculating tenancy rates.

Of course, these figures on tenancy tell very little about the status of black tenants in these counties. While the figures are nearly identical, it is still possible that blacks in one county were significantly better off than blacks in the other county. After all, tenants worked under a variety of arrangements and with land of varying fertility. Some aspects of their situation, however, can be determined.

It is clear, for example, that the vast majority of blacks in Fort Bend County were working for a share of the crop rather than for a cash wage. The most concrete evidence of this comes from the population schedule of the 1870 census. On that schedule, 1,037 (89 percent) of all black farmers were listed as "farming on shares." Other forms of evidence makes it clear that this situation was not new. In October of 1867, a Fort Bend citizen had written Governor Pease about the problems caused by the failure of the cotton crop that year. In his letter he stated that freedmen had "worked for a portion of the crop, in most cases for the past two seasons." This testimony is corroborated by the subassistant commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, William H. Rock, who consistently reported that almost all of the freedmen were working for a share of the crop which varied from one third

to one half, depending on who furnished food for the freedman during the season.¹⁵

The situation in Milam County is much less clear. As mentioned earlier, Milam County never had an agent from the Freedmen's Bureau actually stationed in the county, and thus there are no reports specifically outlining the situation there. Technically, Milam was included within the district of an agent in a contiguous county, generally Robertson, but agents seldom traveled out of the county in which they were headquartered. Still, reports exist from three contiguous counties, Falls, Robertson, and Brazos. In each of these counties, reports indicated that at least half of the freedmen in these locations were working for a share of the crop. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the same was true in Milam County.¹⁶

In the beginning at least, the form of compensation, either cash or a share of the crop, and the structure of the work force, either as labor gangs or as family units, were separate issues. For the overwhelming majority of

15. J. S. Sullivan to E. M. Pease, Papers of the Governors, Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas; William H. Rock to the Assistant Commissioner, February 2, 1867; June 1, 1867; February 1, 1868; March 1, 1868; Reports of Operations and Procedures, BRFAL.

16. Capt. Edward Miller to the Assistant Commissioner, May 31, 1867; N. W. Randlett to the Assistant Commissioner, April 15, 1868; A. P. Delano to the Assistant Commissioner, December 31, 1866; F. B. Sturgis to the Assistant Commissioner, August 3, 1867; Joshua L. Randall to the Assistant Commissioner, August 31, 1867; May 31, 1868; Reports of Operations and Procedures, BRFAL.

landowners, necessity dictated the form of compensation they offered. They had little or no cash to offer; therefore, any offer they made had to come from the proceeds of the crop. As Gerald Jaynes has persuasively argued, the end of slavery left both planters and the South poorer in terms of collateral with which to borrow. Then, two bad crop years in succession further weakened the planter's position. Although many of the agents of the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas felt that blacks would be better off working for a fixed cash wage rather than the more uncertain prospect of a share of the crop, most acknowledged that planters offered a share of the crop because they had no cash.¹⁷

Initially, some planters tried to get around the problem by offering minimal support during the year and a final cash settlement based on a fixed monthly or annual wage after the crops had been sold. During the lean crop years immediately after the war, however, planters faced the possibility that wages would take the proceeds of most or all of the cotton crop. One solution was to ignore prior wage agreements, and apparently a number of planters adopted this tactic. The Freedmen's Bureau attempted to halt this practice by seizing the crop. On August 20, 1866, General J. B. Kiddoo issued

17. A. H. Mayer to the Assistant Commissioner, May 1, 1867; June 2, 1867; Albert A. Metzner to the Assistant Commissioner, October 31, 1867; M. H. Goddin to the Assistant Commissioner, August 31, 1867; September 30, 1867; William H. Rock to the Assistant Commissioner, July 15, 1868; Reports of Operations and Procedures, BRFAL.

circular twenty which read in part: "In all cases unpaid wages will be regarded as an equitable lien on the crop or other products of the labor of the freedmen, and will be the first claim paid. In such cases the whole crop will be regarded as liable for wages unpaid... and may be attached and held for the same, in whomsoever's hands it may have fallen..."(emphasis in original).¹⁸

In areas where the rather short arm of the Bureau did not reach, some planters undoubtedly successfully cheated the freedmen of their wages when times were hard. But this was not really a satisfactory long term solution for the planter because eventually no freedmen would agree to work his fields. Freedmen also were apparently very quick to realize that it was easier to get a share of the crop than to try to collect money from the planter after the crop was sold. So although the laborer was in effect assuming a part of the risk when he contracted to work for a share of the crop, the risk was probably no greater than the risk that his deferred wages would never be paid if the crop failed. Besides this, a share of the risk also meant a larger payment if there was a bumper crop and a good market price. These were rarities in the late nineteenth century South, but farmers seem to be more often optimists than pessimists.

18. A copy of this circular can be found in the collection of circulars preserved in the Archives of the Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

At some point, share wages became sharecropping. Many details of the transition remain unclear. The evidence seems to indicate, however, that market forces played an important role in the transition. Though freedmen were generally illiterate and possessed few assets, they had one thing planters wanted very badly--their labor. In those areas of the state where slaves had provided the labor to grow cotton or sugar, agents of the Freedmen's Bureau wrote of fields that were lying fallow because planters could not hire enough help. At one point, the Freedmen's Bureau used its network to locate areas where freedmen were underemployed in other states and helped with the costs of transporting those who were willing to relocate to Texas. But the attempt was shortlived as President Johnson halted the project due to the widespread reports of violence toward freedmen in Texas. Even without the aid of the Bureau, the population of the state continued to increase as black and white immigrants from more devastated areas of the South poured in. Still, during those critical, early years after the war, the demand for black laborers was brisk.¹⁹

19. John H. Archer to the Assistant Commissioner, February 5, 1867; Hiram Clark to the Assistant Commissioner, January 2, 1868; Capt. Edward Collins to the Assistant Commissioner April 1, 1867; William Garretson to the Assistant Commissioner, May 31, 1867; W. H. Heistand to the Assistant Commissioner, March 1, 1867; Arthur B. Homer to the Assistant Commissioner, March 2, 1868, Reports of Operations and Procedures, BRFAL; U.S. Army, Records of the Department of Civil Affairs, Fifth Military District, The Department of Texas, Register of Letters Received, Volume 1 Pages 428, 463, 464, 469, 470, 472, 474, 481, 482,

One openly stated objective of the Freedmen's Bureau was to see to it that freedmen were allowed to contract with whomever they chose. Once contracts had been signed, the agents worked to see that both sides honored their agreements. The over-all effectiveness of the Freedmen's Bureau remains controversial, but most historians agree that the agency's influence was diminished by the lack of troop support, the hostility of white Southerners, the brief span of their operations, and the immensity of subassistant commissioner's districts.²⁰ Still, bureau agents did provide an information network which probably helped to equalize wages and shares, and they prevented some of the most blatant forms of intimidation and violence. Their presence in some areas probably restrained most planters in other areas simply because planters would not want to see their laborers move to areas where protection was less inadequate. In this sense then, bureau agents probably helped to allow market forces to operate.

486, 547, 548, 549, 550, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Microfilm copy.

20. Elliott, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Texas," 1-24; Barry A. Crouch, "The Freedmen's Bureau and the 30th Sub-District in Texas: Smith County and Its Environs During Reconstruction," Chronicles of Smith County, Texas 11(1972): 15-30; James M. Smallwood, "Charles E. Culver, a Reconstruction Agent in Texas: The Work of Local Freedmen's Bureau Agents and the Black Community," Civil War History 27(1981): 350-361; James M. Smallwood, "The Freedmen's Bureau Reconsidered: Local Agents and the Black Community," Texana 11(1973): 309-320; William L. Richter, The Army in Texas During Reconstruction (College Station, 1987).

Of course, market forces are not impersonal natural laws like the law of gravity. They are the result of complex interactions between individuals attempting to maximize profits or minimize losses. They do not operate in a vacuum. Every action taken by individuals in the market is a function of that individual's current perceptions and expectations. To say that market forces were involved in the transition from slavery to sharecropping for most blacks in the postbellum South is not to say that the system that emerged was created by the operation of a free market model as outlined in classical economics.

According to the most popular models of the free market, discrimination in hiring practices will prove too expensive unless every hirer is willing to discriminate against the same groups. Since societies rarely possess such unanimity in attitudes and practices, most economists are unwilling to include discrimination in the models they construct to explain historical developments. Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch have characterized the efforts of many economists writing on the postbellum South as attempts "to demonstrate that the standard theory of competitive market behavior could be applied to yet another historical situation." In their own work, they have rejected the standard free market model in favor of a model in which racism played an important role in the "flawed institutions" which developed in the South.

Did racism serve to limit the role of market forces in the labor arrangements that developed in Milam and Fort Bend Counties?²¹

In Fort Bend County, the evidence remaining is admittedly fragmentary, but it all indicates a significant role for racism. Two articles appearing on the same day, August 22, 1868, in the Fort Bend County paper, the Brazos Signal, both point to racial discrimination in the market place. The first was specifically related to tenant farming and read in part,

"We know of one gentleman [N.P. Ward of Austin County] imbued with a spirit of white tenantry policy on his lands, and is giving proof by his WORKS. He has some ten or twelve families located upon his land, having previously divided it off into tracts to suit them; built snug cottages, dug wells, made cisterns, and, when we last had the pleasure of seeing him, he informed us he was about erecting a school house... Go ye and do likewise." (Emphasis in original)²²

The quote points to two systems of tenantry neatly divided by race. The editor of the paper clearly felt that black tenants did not deserve, nor would they receive, the same compensation in the form of living arrangements that white tenants deserved.

21. Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, "Credit Merchandising in the Post-Emancipation South: Structure, Conduct, and Performance," in Gary M. Walton and James F. Shepherd, eds., Market Institutions and Economic Progress in the New South (New York, 1981), 57-58.

22. Richmond, The Brazos Signal, August 22, 1868.

While encouraging white landlords to replace them, the editor warned freedmen that they need not expect to work in town. "We are glad to see that the young men of Richmond are turning their time to some account by going hard at work," he wrote. "We have already heard of the mutterings of discontent on the part of lazy, lounging freedmen, who hang around the street corners, at the hiring of white laborers in the concrete brick yard. They will come to worse than muttering, if they do not go into the fields and go to work, like honest people."²³

The point was clear--black people belonged in the fields, if they belonged anywhere in the county at all. They certainly had no business looking for other occupations, but landlords were encouraged to replace them with whites if at all possible. Blacks were not only excluded from other occupations through discriminatory hiring practices, but through their own ignorance. Citizens of Fort Bend bitterly resented the attempts of the Freedmen's Bureau to remove the barrier of ignorance. When writing to request a teacher for a freedmen's school in Richmond, the bureau agent cautioned that the teacher would have to be male. "The people of Richmond are so aristocratic and well-bred that they can not

23. Ibid.

condescend and can not believe that anyone that is a lady will teach niggers," he wrote. (emphasis in original)²⁴

The attitudes exhibited in the 1868 newspaper and the 1867 quote from the records of the Freedmen's Bureau are at least partially responsible for the distinctions made on the 1870 population schedule in agricultural occupations. The division is not a perfect one, but the tendency to distinguish by race is clear. Table nineteen presents the breakdown by race of those on the census who were called farmers and those who were farming on shares.

TABLE 19
FARMERS AND THOSE FARMING ON SHARES: FORT BEND
1870 CENSUS POPULATION SCHEDULE

	WHITE	BLACK
FARMERS	205	128
FARMING ON SHARES	13	1037
PERCENT FARMING ON SHARES	6%	89%
MEDIAN WEALTH FOR THOSE FARMING ON SHARES	\$0	\$0
PERCENT OF THOSE FARMING ON SHARES WITH WEALTH	23%	19%
MEDIAN WEALTH FOR THOSE FARMING ON SHARES WITH PERSONAL PROPERTY	\$125	\$100
RANGE OF WEALTH FOR THOSE FARMING ON SHARES WITH PERSONAL PROPERTY	\$100 - \$150	\$100 - \$600
NUMBER OF THOSE FARMING ON SHARES WITH REAL PROPERTY	0	13

24. W. H. Rock to the Assistant Commissioner, January 12, 1867, Reports of Operations and Procedures, BRFAL.

Obviously, the fact that most blacks were listed as farming on shares while few whites merited that designation is not in itself conclusive proof that these distinctions had any connection with the race of the individuals. It could have been based on poverty--after all, most of the county's blacks were still very poor. In fact, the first six lines of the table do seem to indicate that there were few differences economically between whites and blacks farming on shares. The last two lines of the table would be very difficult to explain on the basis of economics, however. Some of the blacks who were listed as farming on shares were wealthier than most white tenants listed either as farmers or as farming on shares. Most of those blacks who owned real property and yet were listed as farming on shares owned lots in the county's towns. But none of the whites who were listed as farming on shares were listed as owning real estate of any kind.

The case for a racially discriminatory system of labor is weakened slightly by the thirteen whites also listed as farming on shares. How can they be explained? Perhaps these individuals were relatively new to the county, and, as strangers, had to share the mudsill with most of the county's black population. It is interesting to note in this regard that five (38 percent) of the thirteen were of foreign

birth--a remarkably high proportion in a county where only 10 percent of the total white population was of foreign birth.

If racial discrimination had created what could be termed in effect two agricultural systems in Fort Bend County, was the same also true of Milam County? Or did blacks and whites compete on a more equal basis in an area where there were so many more white tenants? As noted earlier, the population of Milam County had grown tremendously during the sixties. Many of those who had flocked to the county were landless in 1870. As table twenty indicates, the number of poor white tenants had increased nearly seven-fold. The growth both in the number of tenants and the total white population in the county present a much different picture than do the figures for Fort Bend County. The reasons for this may be quite complex, but the most important factors probably revolved around economic opportunities.

Perhaps racial animosity was also less intense in Milam County than it was in some other parts of the state. No issues of a Milam County newspaper for the late 1860s are available, and, of course, there are no reports from the Freedmen's Bureau. Additionally, the census taker in Milam County did not distinguish between those who may have farmed on shares and other types of farmers in the county. Thus, any conclusions must be even more tentative. Still, some of the factors in table twenty indicate that racial

discrimination may also have played a role in the Milam County agricultural labor market.

The most startling thing about the figures in table twenty is the disparity between the proportion of whites who were listed as farmers and the proportion of blacks who were similarly listed. There was no black professional class, and Milam County had very little industry. The vast majority of blacks in the county clearly worked in agriculture, yet the proportion of whites listed as farmers was nearly two and one-half times larger than the proportion of blacks listed as farmers. Regardless of their description in the census, probably 20 percent of all blacks, (about 595 individuals) worked in agriculture. Thus at least 55 to 60 percent of all blacks who worked in agriculture were not called farmers. Clearly very few whites who worked in agriculture were not called farmers. Although there are few discernible differences between the black and white tenants who were called farmers, there was an underclass, admittedly much smaller than the underclass in Fort Bend, which was almost exclusively the province of black agriculturalists.

In summary, the tumultuous decade of the 1860s had brought sweeping change, particularly for slaveholders and slaves. The extent of these changes is difficult to measure and will

TABLE 20
BLACK AND WHITE TENANTS IN MILAM AND FORT BEND
COUNTIES: 1870

	WHITES		BLACKS	
	MILAM	FORT BEND	MILAM	FORT BEND
1860 POPULATION	3,632	2,007	1,543	4,136
1870 POPULATION	6,005	1,604	2,977	5,510
PERCENTAGE INCREASE	65%	(-25%)	93%	33%
PERCENTAGE FARMERS	19%	14%	8%	21%
1860 TENANTS	78	35	XX	XX
1870 TENANTS	565	90	220	1,126
PERCENTAGE INCREASE	624%	157%	XX	XX
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL*	9%	6%	7%	20%
MEDIAN AGE	33.5	36.5	31	36
MEDIAN WEALTH	\$0	\$50	\$0	\$0
MEDIAN WEALTH**	\$225	\$300	\$285	\$125
ON AG. . SCHEDULE	23 (30%)	2 (17%)	5 (23%)	0
MEDIAN IMPROVED ACRES	16	112.5	20	X
MEDIAN VALUE FARM***	\$250	\$6,700	\$100	X
PERCENT ON TAX ROLLS	36%	0	45%	23%
MED. IAN TAXABLE WEALTH	\$101	X	\$40	\$60

* (% OF TOTAL) This is the percentage of the total white or black population who were poor tenants.

** (MED. WEALTH) This line is the median wealth for those of the sample tenants who reported some personal wealth. This included 50% of the whites and 32% of the blacks in Fort Bend County and 38% of the whites and 27% of the blacks in Milam County.

*** (MED. VALUE FARM) Both of the whites from the sample on the Fort Bend Agricultural Schedule had a value recorded for the farm they operated. In Milam County, only one of the five blacks and six of the sixteen whites from the sample had a value recorded.

always be controversial. Still, some things are clear beyond question in Fort Bend and Milam counties. First, although wealthy landowners had suffered tremendous losses, most of these individuals ended the decade where they began, i.e., as the wealthiest members of society. Both the basis and absolute size of their wealth had changed, but relative to other members of the society in which they lived, they had maintained their position at the top. Additionally, just as when they had entered the decade, the value of their land largely depended on their ability to command the labor necessary to produce cotton. In both counties, a major segment of that labor force consisted of former slaves.

For the freedpeople, clearly the decade of the 1860s had brought sweeping and positive changes, the most obvious of which was freedom itself. But it seems clear, also, that the efforts of both blacks and reformers like General Gregory to win the right of blacks to compete with whites on an equal basis had failed. This failure was most obvious in Fort Bend, the county with the largest black population. More traditional narrative sources pointed to a dual system of tenant farming, and so did the census returns. Virtually all blacks were listed as farming on shares while almost none of the whites were listed in that manner. In Milam County the evidence was not as clear, but still, most black agriculturalists were not called farmers, while almost all

whites were. In both counties, it is clear that these were more than simple distinctions of economic standing or ability.

Among white landless farmers, the decade had also brought changes. First, the number of individuals who found themselves in this position had risen dramatically. This was probably a result of both the enormous strain of a total war effort and the devastation caused by the war in other southern states. In other words, it seems that the war effort may have caused some Texans to lose their land, and also caused landless individuals from other states to migrate to Texas hoping to gain, or regain, landowning status.

Settlement patterns during the decade are more difficult to interpret because of the rolling back of the frontier. While tenancy rates were highest in Milam County which was farther west than Fort Bend, it was hardly a frontier county. It may not be clear, then, how closely the settlement pattern of 1870 resembled the pattern of the antebellum period, but one portion of the pattern was the same. Landless whites had avoided the black belt county of Fort Bend before the war, and they generally continued to avoid it during the 1860s. Perhaps this is still indicative of their desire to obtain land, which would be harder to do in Fort Bend County. It may also be indicative of their desire to avoid competing with blacks if at all possible.

Even though the impact on landless whites of emancipation and all the other changes of the 1860s can not be fully assessed, it is clear that they did not rush to the fertile lands in an effort to displace blacks. In fact, they may have continued to settle where they did because they sought the areas where landowning status could most easily be obtained. Even if this is true, there were changes in their status. For the first time, white tenants were discussed in newspapers and other traditional narrative sources. The reason for this is that for the first time their status mattered. When all cotton had to be raised by tenants, the conditions under which white tenants could be employed became important.

The change in status of white tenants is also indicated on the 1870 Milam agricultural schedule. On every census before 1880, a search for the kind of convention Bode and Ginter found in Georgia was conducted. The first clear and unmistakable convention was located on this 1870 schedule. Twenty-seven (27 percent) of the 100 sample Milam County tenants were located on the agricultural schedule. Twenty of the twenty-seven (74 percent) had no value recorded for the farm they operated. Instead, for eleven of the twenty (55 percent), the letter "R" was written in the value of farm column. For the remaining nine, the enumerators used quotation marks for that column.

Although the number of tenants appearing on the agricultural schedule remained much smaller than the number of owners, this was the largest proportion of tenants to appear on any agricultural schedule in a cotton producing economy prior to 1880. In Milam County in 1860, and Fort Bend County in 1850 and 1860, less than 10 percent of those who were termed poor tenants had appeared on the agricultural schedules. Again, this points to their changing status in terms of their importance to the cotton kingdom.

Most antebellum tenants in these three counties did not grow cotton. During the postbellum period, however, a significant portion of the tenants in Milam County did produce cotton. Of the five blacks who were enumerated on the agricultural schedule (23 percent of all black sample tenants), all grew cotton. Twenty-two white tenants appeared on the agricultural schedule (28 percent of total white sample tenants), and fifteen of these individuals (68 percent of those enumerated) reported cotton production. The numbers clearly indicate that white tenants were more integrated into the cotton kingdom than they had been in the antebellum period. Still, in 1870, they seem to have been less likely to grow cotton than black tenants were. If the decade of the 1860s marked a period of transition, that transition was far from complete. Additionally, if the postbellum period brought blacks and whites into competition for the same

valuable resource, in 1870 at least, they were not competing on equal terms.

CHAPTER 6

TENANCY DURING THE 1870S: A METHODOLOGY FOR USING THE 1880 CENSUS

The year 1876 marked the centennial of the Declaration of Independence for the United States. As a part of the activities leading up to that momentous occasion, there were numerous calls for a special census enumeration in 1875. The idea of a special census never got off the ground largely because the country was still rocked by the aftermath of the Civil War, and the Department of the Interior had not yet finished tabulating the 1870 returns. Still, the 1880 census would be the first census taken in the nation's second century, and was designed as a great "centennial contribution of facts."¹

Numerous changes in the process and in the information collected and disseminated were enacted. For the first time, the task of enumerating inhabitants was placed under the supervision of officials specifically employed for the task.² This change not only marked the beginning stages of the evolution of a professional census staff, but it also meant a

1. Ann Scott, Census, U.S.A.: Fact Finding for the American People (New York, 1968), 33.

2. Previous censuses had been taken by United States Marshals who were first and foremost law enforcement officials and secondarily census enumerators.

tremendous expansion in the number of individual enumerators in the field. Between 1870 and 1880, the population of the United States increased from a little under thirty-nine million to just over fifty million--an increase of just over 28 percent. The number of enumerators jumped from 6,530 to 31,382--an increase of more than 380 percent.³

This increase in enumerators was matched by a corresponding increase in the size of the task. The census was to begin on or about October 1, 1880 and was to be completed within one month. Moreover, the amount of information that enumerators were asked to collect had been dramatically increased. Altogether, enumerators collected information from individuals, businesses, churches and other institutions in more than 13,000 categories. After the information had been collected, the enormous task of compiling and publishing the results began. The volumes published from the 1880 census comprised 21,458 pages, an equally dramatic increase from the previous high of 3,473 pages published in 1870.⁴

Some of the changes on the census forms that enumerators were asked to complete have important implications for an examination of tenant farming. The most significant of these changes were made on the agricultural schedule. Most

3. A. Ross Eckler, The Bureau of the Census (New York, 1972), 24.

4. Eckler, The Bureau of the Census, 24,42; Dan Halcy, Census: 190 Years of Counting America (New York, 1980), 47.

important, enumerators were asked to specify the tenure of the farmer. They were to be divided into three categories: "Owner", "Rents for fixed money rental", and "Rents for share of products". Census enumerators were also asked to record the number of acres planted in each crop as well as the amount produced. The categories of tenure leave many questions unanswered, but, for the first time, the census formally recognized that not all farmers shared equally in the fruits of their labors. When the collected data from the 1880 census was published, the information on farm tenure was not divided by race. But that information can be obtained on the county level by combining the information from the agricultural schedule with that recorded on the population schedule.

On the population schedule, the most positive change was that, for the first time, enumerators were asked to indicate the relationship of each member of a household to the head of that household. Of course, this additional information does not help in determining relationships when kinship patterns crossed households, but, when enumerators followed their instructions, it is possible to distinguish those who were relatives from those who were simply boarders. Unfortunately, the enumerators were not always careful in this regard. In every county, enumerators occasionally either left the column blank, or developed their own systems

for delineating relationships. For example, in every county, there were cases where two or more nuclear families shared a house. In those cases, enumerators generally dealt with each nuclear family as if it were a separate household. In other words, several houses in every county had at least two heads, and two or more wives. Again, as with other discrepancies on the census, these minor problems frustrate researchers, but they do not detract from the usefulness of the information recorded.

Unfortunately, this positive change on the population schedule, from the perspective of this study, was more than offset by one major negative change. In 1880, census takers did not collect information concerning the value of real or personal property owned. The agricultural schedule was now clearly designed to include tenants, and more of these poor tenants appeared on that schedule than had appeared on previous agricultural schedules. For these individuals, the added information found on the agricultural schedule makes the missing data on the population schedule less important in that their relationship to the land they worked is recorded. Table twenty-one presents the basic information on farm tenure collected from the agricultural schedules.

The information presented on farm tenancy and what that information demonstrates about the agricultural economy of the Brazos River Valley will be discussed in the following

chapter. For this discussion of methodology, the most important figures presented in table twenty-one are the number and percentage of farmers on the agricultural schedules. As the table shows, there was a wide variation in the percentage of those called farmers on the population schedule who were also enumerated on the agricultural schedule, varying from a high of 87 percent in Palo Pinto to a low of 49 percent of all black farmers in Milam County. There were probably a number of reasons for omitting a farmer from the agricultural schedule. First, some who were named farmers may have had so little production in 1879 that they did not meet the qualifications for inclusion on the schedule. Second, some of these individuals were probably new to the county and had not yet secured farms or had no 1879 production to enumerate. Third, some of these individuals may have been sharecroppers whose plots were so small, and their share of the crop so low, that their production was aggregated in the production of the owner and they were omitted. Finally, of course, some of these omissions were probably mistakes made by the enumerator. He should have collected the information, but he did not. Although there is no feasible method for determining which individuals fell into which category, it seems likely that the absence of these farmers from the agricultural schedule was the result of some combination of these possibilities.

TABLE 21
 OWNERS AND TENANTS FROM THE 1880 AGRICULTURAL SCHEDULES: FORT BEND, MILAM, AND
 PALO PINTO COUNTIES

	FORT BEND WHITE	FORT BEND BLACK	MILAM WHITE	MILAM BLACK	PALO PINTO TOTAL
FARMERS ON POPULATION SCHEDULE	228	943	2449	394	649
FARMERS ON AGRICULTURAL SCHEDULE	154	784	1507	195	567
PERCENTAGE ON AGRICULTURAL SCHEDULE	68%	83%	62%	49%	87%
NUMBER OF FARMERS WHO WERE OWNERS	99	116	945	62	406
PERCENTAGE OF FARMERS WHO WERE OWNERS	66%	15%	63%	32%	73%
FARMERS RENTING FOR A SHARE OF THE CROP	31	520	421	98	128
PERCENTAGE RENTING FOR A SHARE OF THE CROP	20%	67%	28%	50%	23%
FARMERS RENTING FOR CASH	21	143	129	35	25
PERCENTAGE RENTING FOR CASH	14%	18%	9%	18%	4%
PERCENTAGE OF FARMERS WHO WERE TENANTS	34%	85%	37%	68%	27%

Again, as in 1870, samples of 100 owners and 100 tenants were drawn from each of the owner and tenant lists compiled for the three counties. In order to obtain these sample owners and tenants, the information about farm tenure had to be obtained on all those designated as farmers on the population schedules who appeared on the agricultural schedules. Table twenty-one is based, therefore, not on sample lists, but on all farmers in the three counties.⁵

Initially, the lack of information about those farmers who appeared on the population schedules but were absent from the agricultural schedules seemed to present no major problems. A number of those who did not appear on the agricultural schedule were related to individuals who did and could thus be dealt with in the same manner as they had been previously. In other words, they were assumed to be a part of the landholding class. In the case of those who were not related to owners and did not appear on the agricultural schedule, a sample of fifty such farmers was drawn from each county.⁶

5. Each of the enumerators in the three counties numbered the precinct divisions independently, so the samples were stratified just as with Fort Bend in 1870. In this case, however, there were times when that would have entailed taking less than ten owners or tenants from some of the precincts. In order to avoid this, the samples were expanded in the sense that a minimum of ten owners and tenants were drawn from each precinct. This meant that a number of the samples were slightly larger than 100.

6. Because the samples were smaller, no attempt was made to stratify these samples as was done with the owners and the tenants. Each of the samples of fifty were drawn from the entire lists of those called farmers but could not be located on the agricultural schedule.

The 1880 tax rolls were then searched for these sample farmers and the information there about land ownership was recorded. It was assumed that this would solve the problem of the missing farmers because this information could then be combined with the information from the census to create a table comparable to those created for the previous decades. During this process the tax rolls were also examined for information about the sample lists of 100 owners and 100 tenants from each of the three counties. Following an examination of the tax rolls, nothing seemed so simple anymore. Table twenty-two presents the information obtained from the tax rolls. Altogether, the names of 152 farmers who were not located on the agricultural schedule were drawn.⁷ Eighty (53 percent) of these individuals were located on the tax rolls. This in itself is significant because, if the samples are reliable, it indicates that more than half of those who were absent from the agricultural schedule were present in the county at the beginning of 1880. Additionally, it provides a large enough total sample to allow some confidence in its representativeness. On the whole, these samples would indicate that, with the exception of Palo Pinto County, the percentage of landowners among

7. In Palo Pinto County, after the relatives of farmers on the agricultural schedule were omitted, there were only fifty-two individuals remaining, the tax roll was examined for information on all of these individuals.

those absent from the agricultural schedule yet present on the tax roll was roughly the same as the percentages on the agricultural schedule for white farmers and significantly lower among black farmers.

The real problem with the information from the tax rolls is the extent to which it seems to contradict the information on tenure extracted from the agricultural schedules. This is particularly the case with the information from Palo Pinto County, where almost 30 percent of the sample owners from the agricultural schedule appear on the tax roll but are not taxed on any real property. When this information is coupled with the information from the tax roll concerning those who were absent from the agricultural schedule, it presents a picture far different from the one presented in table twenty-one.

The problems with the discrepancies between 1880 census statistics and the information contained on the tax rolls can never be completely resolved. However, there are some very plausible explanations for these discrepancies which do not depend on assuming that an inordinate number of errors were made by census enumerators. Those recorded as owners on the agricultural schedule but not taxed on real property may well have fallen into one of three categories. First, there is the possibility that they had purchased land between January 1, 1880 and the fall of 1880 when the census was taken. In

this case, they would obviously have been tenants the year before, or they would have had no production for the enumerators of the agricultural schedule to record. Second, they could have been immediate family members who, although they did not themselves hold title, nonetheless worked the land as an owner. If this were the case and their relationship could have been detected, then they would have been counted as owners for purposes of this study as a part of the process of compiling lists of poor tenants outlined in the first chapter. They were part of the landowning class of farmers, although they themselves owned no land.

Finally, it is possible that these individuals were in the process of purchasing the land and thus considered themselves owners although they had not yet obtained legal title to the land. During research on a previous project involving Hunt County, Texas, the author of this study encountered several instances where whites sold land to blacks on the basis of what would today be termed a contract for deed. That is, arrangements were worked out, blacks paid for the property, and then title was transferred to their names. This practice afforded better protection to the white property owner than to the black purchaser, because if the conditions of the agreement were not met exactly as stated, then the seller could take possession of the property without having to go through foreclosure procedures. Among Hunt County's small

black population (there were 1,078 blacks in 1870), there were six blacks who were attempting to purchase land on a contract for deed in 1870. Of these six, four were ultimately successful, while two failed, losing their tenuous hold on the land.⁸

The Hunt County project uncovered no evidence suggesting that whites ever purchased land on a contract for deed. In fact, the records were full of instances where whites purchased land on credit, with the owner taking most of the payment in the form of a note secured by the deed to the land. This was certainly the conventional practice across Texas before and after the Civil War. In fact, the Texas Almanac of 1867 stated that land could be purchased on credit in any county in the state.⁹ It is doubtful, therefore, that very many white farmers could be induced to buy land on a contract for deed. But some black farmers probably had no other options. It seems likely that at least some of those blacks who are referred to as owners on the agricultural schedule but were not taxed on land were in the process of purchasing land under an arrangement such as this.

There are probably a number of other plausible explanations for the variations existing between these two documents which record ownership of real property, but these

8. For an example of a contract for deed, see Hunt County Deed Records, J: 765.

9. The Texas Almanac for 1867, 273-274.

three seem logical and probably account for most of the discrepancies which exist in these three counties. Whether an owner had only recently acquired property, was the relative of a property owner, or was in the process of acquiring real property, the individuals involved considered themselves, and probably operated as though they were, the owners of the land they farmed. In each case, then the most appropriate category for placing these individuals would be in the category of owners.

The problems regarding farm tenants who appear on the tax rolls as the owners of real property are more difficult to resolve. Again, as with the owners, there are at least three plausible explanations which do not involve unpalatable assumptions about the incompetence of census enumerators. The first and most obvious is that some of these individuals may have elected to rent property even though they owned property of their own. There could be a number of conditions under which an individual would choose this course. In most cases, the reasons would probably have been economic. Some individuals probably owned land that was not suitable for farming. Some may have owned land that could have been farmed, but not as profitably as land they farmed as tenants. Others may have purchased land but were not yet in a position to make the improvements necessary to turn unimproved acreage into a farm.

Second, again as with owners, the status of some of these individuals could have changed between January 1, the date upon which taxes were based, and summer when the census was taken. In other words, a few of these individuals could have lost their land during that period. The third possibility, of course, is that there could have been an error on the tax roll. This possibility is remote at best, because very few people would allow themselves to be taxed for something they did not own.

With these tenants who were also landowners, the basic problem is to assess how important their dual status was, and where they should be classified in calculating tenancy figures that are comparable with the ones calculated for the antebellum period and for 1870. Should they be counted as landowners or as tenants? The decision for the text was to count them as tenants. This decision is less defensible than the decision concerning discrepancies among farm owners because these tenants, had they reported the ownership of real property, would have been counted as owners during the previous decades. Still, they were farming someone else's land, and with a total of just two exceptions for all three counties, these were relatively poor individuals. Again, for the purposes of the tables and discussion in the chapter that follows, the decision was to accept the tenure classification which appeared on the agricultural census. While this may

mean that landlessness is somewhat overstated, these landowning tenants were to a certain extent balanced by landless owners in every county but Palo Pinto.

A decision also had to be made concerning those who were absent both from the tax rolls and from the agricultural schedules of the census. These groups were considered to contain the same proportion of land owners as those absent from the agricultural schedule but present on the tax roll. This decision seemed to be the most reasonable course to take, but it probably overstates the proportion of property owners absent from the census. Clearly, tax collectors are more apt to exclude people who have little or no taxable property than they are those who have larger amounts of taxable property. For one thing, landowning farmers would be easier to locate and landownership itself easier to verify. Here again, the decision seems to be the most conservative and helps to offset any overestimates of tenancy occasioned by the decision to regard landowning tenants as if they were tenants without other options.

The tables presented and the conclusions drawn from them in the following chapter are based on the decisions discussed in this chapter. In each case, the decisions which were outlined here are defensible because they are based on logical assumptions about the nature of the agricultural societies present in these three counties. They are not,

however, unarguable. For this reason, tables which are based on alternate assumptions are presented in the appendix.

Chapter 7

FARM TENANCY IN FORT BEND, MILAM AND PALO PINTO COUNTIES, 1870-1880

In 1873 a petition was presented to the Texas Legislature which provoked a storm of protest in Milam County. The petition, signed by 103 Milam County citizens including some of the wealthiest men in the county, called for an act which would authorize the county court to issue \$50,000 worth of bonds for the purpose of bringing "industrious, laboring citizens" into the county. In keeping with the traditional American respect for free enterprise, the county court would contract with a company or person who would actually be responsible for inducing immigration. The interest on the bonds was to be paid for by a tax on land. The petition argued that the county had nothing to lose and much to gain by adopting such a course. If the person or company failed to fulfill the contract, the money would have to be refunded to the county. If the contract was successfully completed, within ten years Milam County would have "every acre of tillable land within her borders in cultivation, and every laudable interest in the county thereby enhanced."¹

1. Milam County Petition File, Petitions to the State Legislature, Archives Division, Texas State Library.

If the petitions forwarded to the legislature are any indication, most citizens of the county felt they had more to lose than they could possibly gain by the measure. Petitions carrying more than five hundred signatures from various parts of the county were mailed to John W. Carroll, the county's representative. The one petition asking for the act to authorize the issuance of county bonds had been type set and printed. It was longer and more carefully worded than the petitions which opposed the act. All of the petitions that opposed the act were hand written and simply announced their opposition to any act which would tax the county for the purpose of inducing immigration. The simplicity of their petitions should not be allowed to mask the fervor of their opposition. As one of the opponents of the bill wrote in a letter to Carroll, "Were such a Law to be enacted, it would almost produce war in this county. And those who favored such a Law would be hereafter extremely odious to the people of this county."²

Those who had favored the plan for boosting immigration failed in that the act they had called for was not passed. Still, they were probably pleased with developments in the county during the decade of the 1870s. They had asked that county officials be allowed to act "while the emigration

2. F. M. Adams to Hon. John W. Carroll, April 7, 1873, Milam County Petition File.

fever ... [was] at its highest" so that the county could profit from this larger trend. It would be difficult to measure something as nebulous as an "emigration fever," but people from all over the United States continued to move to Texas, as they had since the days of Austin's colony. Between 1870 and 1880, the population of the state nearly doubled, increasing from 818,579 to 1,591,749. Although this was not the largest percentage gain within a given decade, it was by far the largest absolute gain in population that the state had ever experienced. Milam County received more than its share of immigrants, growing at a faster rate than did the state as a whole. Between 1870 and 1880, the population of Milam County more than doubled, increasing from 8,984 to 18,659. Every acre of tillable land in the county was not in cultivation, but the number of improved acres in the county had more than tripled, increasing from 32,644 in 1870 to 109,750 in 1880.

The line of the frontier had once again moved westward through the 1870s, and the population of Palo Pinto County had risen dramatically. According to the 1880 Census, the population of the county had increased to 5,885. Although cattlemen continued to utilize the open range, a number of those who had entered the county in the 1870s were farmers. Moreover, the county had taken its first tentative steps toward the cotton kingdom. Although the cotton report

indicated that 1879 was only the third year that the county's farmers had grown cotton commercially, the crop that year was 885 bales. It was a small but significant beginning.

To the east in Fort Bend County, the 1870s had brought the beginnings of recovery. The cotton crop was larger in 1879 than it had been in 1869, and greater confidence in the future was evidenced by the rise in value of the county's farms. The population of the county had also increased slightly, growing from 9,380 to 10,586. Still, the cotton crop was less than half the size of the 1859 crop, and the white population of the county was smaller than it had been in 1860. Conservative whites were no doubt frustrated at their inability to wrest control of the county's political system from the hands of the generally white Republican officeholders who were supported by the votes of the county's large black majority.

Each of the three counties seemed more stable and, in general, more prosperous than they had been in 1870. In each, population and cotton production had increased. Although the Palo Pinto County economy was far less dependent on the crop than the economies of the other two counties, it was surely obvious to perceptive observers that cotton would soon become a major factor in the county's agricultural system. In 1880, it would probably have been impossible to

foresee the rapid advance of the boll weevil which would cut short the reign of King Cotton in the county.

The decade of the 1870s was the first full decade of the postbellum era. What happened to the farmers present in 1870? Were there any discernible differences in persistence rates between this first full postbellum decade and the decades that preceded it? These questions will be addressed before considering the situation in 1880.

Because the retreat of the frontier not only greatly reduced the population of Palo Pinto County but also left it unenumerated on the 1870 Census, that county must again be omitted from the calculations of persistence. For Milam and Fort Bend Counties though, the information on persistence in many ways seems to present yet another chapter in an old and familiar story. The counties grew, many in the two counties prospered, and most of the residents moved. But there are some changes in detail that seem enormously important. Table twenty-three presents the persistence rates of owners and tenants, divided by race.

The biggest difference in persistence rates between the decade of the 1860s and the decade of the 1870s was not among owners but among tenants. In both counties, the highest persistence rates were recorded by black tenants. Actual persistence was probably even higher than the table indicates because white enumerators generally seem to have been more

careless recording black names and ages than they were when enumerating whites. Moreover, in Fort Bend County where there were probate records to work with, there were no records of any estates for blacks from the sample. This is not surprising, particularly for the most numerous black group--tenants. Their estates were probably very small, and, in spite of the fact that Republicans controlled the county, it is doubtful that blacks would have sought the help of the law for so simple a matter. In any case, black tenants were

TABLE 23

PERSISTENCE^{*} RATES FOR FORT BEND AND MILAM COUNTIES,
1870-1880 BY TENURE AND RACE

	FORT BEND		MILAM	
	WHITE	BLACK	WHITE	BLACK
TOTAL 1870 OWNERS	85	15	99	1
PRESENT IN 1880	30	7	45	0
DIED IN THE COUNTY	5	0	[4]	
PERCENTAGE WHO PERSISTED ^{**}	38%	47%	50%	X
TOTAL 1870 TENANTS	12	88	78	22
PRESENT IN 1880	3	44	26	12
PERCENTAGE WHO PERSISTED	25%	50%	33%	54%

*All of the information on this table is based on the samples of 100 tenants and owners drawn from each county.

**Final persistence rate in Milam County is based on a conservative estimate of mortality rates.

clearly more likely to stay in the county than were their white counterparts.

For each of the previous decades, most of those tenants who stayed had managed to obtain land by the time of the next census. Was the same true for the decade of the 1870s? The attempt to answer this question was more difficult than for previous decades because of the absence of a record of real property ownership on the census.³ Therefore, the agricultural schedules were consulted to determine the landholding status of tenants who persisted to 1880. Table twenty-four presents the results. First, it reveals that not all of the 1870 farmers who persisted appeared on the agricultural schedules. For example, although twenty-nine white tenants persisted, only sixteen could be located on these schedules. Among the tenants who were no longer listed as farmers on the population schedules, the differences in

3. The county tax rolls are the most obvious source of information about real property holdings and so they were the first source consulted for information about these individuals. Unfortunately, a number of the tenants who had persisted, according to the census, could not be located on the tax rolls. This was particularly true for black tenants. Additionally, population increases, coupled with emancipation and the beginnings of property acquisition by blacks, resulted in much longer tax rolls. This made it much more difficult to identify individuals with relatively common surnames. This was a problem even in the antebellum years, but, prior to 1880, the information on the tax rolls could be compared with the property information on the census. In other words, if there were two Tom Browns in the county, it seemed generally safe to assume that the Tom Brown on the tax roll whose property values most closely matched those on the census was the man sought. The 1880 Census allowed no such corroboration for those not listed on the agricultural schedule. The attempt to use the tax roll was reluctantly abandoned.

occupation listed by blacks and by whites is telling. In Milam County, for example, seven of the tenants from the

TABLE 24
PERSISTENCE AND LANDOWNERSHIP: FORT BEND AND MILAM COUNTIES, 1870-1880

	TENANTS				LANDOWNERS			
	WHITES		BLACKS		WHITES		BLACKS	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Persistent	29	32%	56	51%	75	41%	7	44%
On Agriculture Schedule	16	55%	31	55%	55	73%	3	43%
Owners	10	63%	4	13%	51	93%	2	67%
Cash Tenants	0	0%	8	26%	1	2%	0	0%
Share Tenants	6	37%	19	61%	3	5%	1	33%

sample list had occupations other than farmer in 1880: three whites, who were listed as a store clerk, a dealer in general merchandise and a cattle raiser; and four blacks, who were listed as a day laborer, a laborer, and two farm laborers. Clearly, the three whites who had once been tenants had either improved or maintained their economic status while the four blacks had seen their position in society deteriorate.

The figures presented in table twenty-four reflect the same kind of differences in progress between whites and blacks over the ten year period. Sixty-three percent of the sample white tenants from 1870 had become landowners by 1880 while only thirteen percent of the sample black tenants had achieved that status. Among owners, 93 percent of the sample

white landowners from 1870 had maintained their position as compared to 67 percent of sample black owners.

Table twenty-five presents the information compiled on persistence and land ownership from all three decades. The changes in the methods for enumerating the census make comparisons much more difficult, but the evidence available seems to indicate three things. First, a smaller percentage of white tenants who persisted during the 1870s became landowning farmers than did comparable groups during the previous decades. The differences in the percentages of tenants who had obtained land in 1860-1870 (65 percent) and 1870-1880 (63 percent) are not large.⁴ Still, the percentage for the 1870s is slightly lower than for the 1860s, and significantly lower than the 81 percent of those who persisted during the 1850s and had become landowning farmers by 1860.

TABLE 25
PERSISTENCE AND LANDOWNERSHIP: PROPORTION OF TENANTS WHO
PERSISTED AND BECAME LANDOWNERS, 1850-1880

	1850-1860	1860-1870	1870-1880W	1870-1880B
PERCENT PERSISTENT	25%	18%	32%	51%
PERCENT LANDOWNERS	81%	65%	63%	13%

4. Thirteen of the twenty-nine who remained were not enumerated on the agricultural schedule, and it seems likely that fewer of the tenants who did not appear on that schedule would have been landowners than those who did appear.

Second, the percentage of white tenants who persisted during the 1870s was much higher than it had been during the 1860s and marginally higher than it had been during the 1850s. Of course, the 1860s had been an unusual decade, but the differences between the persistence and landowning rates in 1880 and the two decades preceding it may also signal a changing situation. It could be that a larger number of white tenants stayed and a smaller number of them had obtained land because land was becoming harder to get, and thus tenants had less positive incentive for leaving. It is unfortunate that the destruction of the 1890 Census makes it impossible to follow these changes through another decade.

Finally, black tenants who remained in the county for the decade of the 1870s were much less likely to have obtained land than their white counterparts. The differences here are of such magnitude that the lack of information on all tenants makes little difference. Moreover, it seems clear that those blacks who were not listed on the agricultural schedule were, in some cases at least, worse off than those who were listed. It has been suggested previously in this study that those white tenants who remained in a county for the entire decade may have done so because they obtained land. Although enough black tenants had obtained land that the number of black landowners was slowly growing, black tenants clearly did not

stay for that reason. Most black tenants stayed, and most did not obtain land.

Of course, those who had persisted comprised only a portion of the total farm population present in 1880. Table twenty-six presents information on all farmers in the Fort Bend, Milam, and Palo Pinto Counties in a format similar to that utilized for the previous decades. Again, as in earlier years, tenancy rates were lower in the black belt county of Fort Bend, than they were in other areas of the state. Palo Pinto County, again emerging from a condition very much like the frontier conditions of the 1850s, however, occupied a different position than it had in 1860. In 1860, at 48 percent, the Palo Pinto County tenancy rate had been highest

TABLE 26
RECONSTRUCTED TABLE FOR 1880 TO MATCH 1870 AND 1860

	FORT BEND		MILAM		PALO PINTO TOTAL
	WHITE	BLACK	WHITE	BLACK	
FARMERS ON POP- ULATION SCHEDULE	222	932	2368	390	632
NUMBER OF LANDLESS FARMERS	74	811	993	295	213
PERCENTAGE OF LANDLESS FARMERS	33%	87%	42%	76%	34%
LANDLESS FARMERS RELATED TO OWNERS	17	4	156	3	21
NUMBER OF TENANTS	57	807	837	292	192
PERCENTAGE OF TENANTS	26%	87%	35%	75%	30%

among these three counties. In 1880, at 30 percent, it was 5 percent lower than the rate in Milam County.

Table twenty-seven again treats the three counties as a "universe," and presents the distribution of white owners and tenants among these counties over the entire period under consideration. The totals for the three counties measure the proportion of tenants and owners present there. The figures listed under the column "TOTAL," present the proportion of each group relative to the other. In other words, the percentages are based solely on the number of owners and poor

TABLE 27
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF WHITE OWNERS AND TENANTS
SETTLING IN EACH COUNTY, 1850-1880

	1850		1860		1870		1880*		1880**	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
<u>FORT BEND</u>										
OWNERS	94	51%	129	23%	108	19%	148	7%	99	7%
TENANTS	11	13%	35	20%	90	14%	57	5%	52	7%
<u>MILAM</u>										
OWNERS	91	49%	373	67%	457	81%	1375	71%	945	65%
TENANTS	73	87%	78	45%	565	86%	837	77%	550	73%
<u>PALO PINTO</u>										
OWNERS			52	10%			419	22%	406	28%
TENANTS			60	35%			192	18%	153	20%
<u>TOTAL</u>										
OWNERS	185	69%	554	76%	565	46%	1942	64%	1450	66%
TENANTS	84	31%	173	24%	655	53%	1086	36%	755	34%

* Assumes those not present on tax roll owned property in the same proportion as those present.

**From the agricultural schedule.

tenants present rather than the percentage each groups comprised of all those labeled farmers. The table shows that most owners and tenants in this "universe" lived in Milam County, as they had in 1870.

Table twenty-eight presents the same information for blacks as table twenty-seven did for whites. There was only one black on the entire Palo Pinto agricultural schedule, and thus Palo Pinto was excluded from the calculation of distribution of black owners and tenants in 1880, as well as for 1870. Because the study of black farmers has been limited to Milam and Fort Bend, table twenty-eight also

TABLE 28
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BLACK OWNERS AND TENANTS SETTLING IN FORT BEND
AND MILAM COUNTIES, 1870-1880

	1870				1880* (1880**)			
	WHITES		BLACKS		WHITES		BLACKS	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
<u>FORT BEND</u>								
POP	1604	21%	5510	65%	1871	11%	7508	66%
FARMER	198	16%	1165	82%	228	9%	943	71%
OWNER	90	16%	18	82%	148 (99)	10% (9%)	121 (116)	56% (65%)
TENANT	108	16%	1126	84%	57 (52)	6% (7%)	807 (663)	73% (83%)
<u>MILAM</u>								
POP	6007	79%	2977	35%	14723	89%	3934	34%
FARMER	1022	84%	250	18%	2449	93%	394	29%
OWNER	457	84%	4	18%	1375 (945)	90% (90%)	95 (62)	44% (35%)
TENANT	565	84%	220	16%	837 (663)	94% (93%)	292 (133)	27% (17%)

presents the distribution of white farmers between these two counties.

Now that all the tables containing information on these tenant farmers in the Brazos River Valley in 1880 have been presented, what can they tell us about the situation in 1880 and how it compared with the situation during the antebellum period and in 1870?

The most striking thing about the 1880 estimates of white tenancy is that they are significantly lower than the estimates presented for 1870. In 1870, the lowest tenancy rate was 42 percent in Fort Bend County. In 1880, the highest tenancy rate was 35 percent in Milam County. There seem to be at least two obvious reasons for this. First, the rates seem to indicate that despite the Panic of 1873, the 1870s were, in some respects at least, a period of recovery after the disastrous decade of the 1860s. This is reflected not only in the tenancy estimates which are most important here, but also in the more general statistics published about these counties and about Texas. Farm values were up, and cotton production had increased. Confidence was returning.

Second, in many respects, land ownership was becoming more important. Gavin Wright's analogy of slaveholders responding like players in a game of musical chairs, who, when the war was over, seized the land they had and clung to it tenaciously, has been alluded to earlier. Clearly there are

problems with this analogy--at least in this area of Texas. The fact is, if persistence rates and continuing land ownership are any indication, landowners had a tendency to cling to their land during the antebellum period much more tenaciously than Wright would lead us to believe. But there is nonetheless an important element of truth here. After the war, land was the chief basis for wealth in the rural and agricultural portions of the South.

These two factors are probably the most important reasons for the lower tenancy rates in 1880 when compared to 1870. But, of course, there is another side of the picture. While the rates were lower when compared to 1870, they were higher than they had been during the antebellum period, particularly when compared to the 1860 rates. Land was more than the basis for agricultural wealth, it was also a finite resource--particularly land that could be farmed successfully. It is true that the amount of land that could be used to grow cotton expanded through technological improvements coupled with the advance of the frontier. But in 1880, the advances which would permit cotton farmers to utilize West Texas lands were still decades away, while the population of the state was dramatically increasing. The higher tenancy rates in the postbellum period are probably most directly related to a growing free population which put

increased emphasis upon obtaining a resource that expanded more slowly than the number who sought to acquire it.

The increasing difficulty in obtaining land may also have caused the slight, but seemingly significant, changes in patterns of persistence among white tenants as mentioned earlier. A slightly larger group of tenants stayed, (see tables twenty-four and twenty-five) with a smaller proportion of the group obtaining land. It might also help to explain the changes in settlement patterns among white tenants. Compare the tenancy rate given in table twenty-six for Palo Pinto County with those for the county in 1860. Even if the percentage of landowners in the county was exaggerated for some reason by enumerators, tenants clearly found Palo Pinto less attractive than they had before the war. This can also be seen in table twenty-seven. The percentage of the total group of owners in the county was roughly twice as high as it had been in 1860 while the percentage of the total group of white tenants had fallen by around a half.

Although there are no available figures for the antebellum period which would allow an accurate comparison, it is nonetheless clear that land prices were lower and land was easier to obtain then in Palo Pinto County than it was in Milam County. By the 1880s, the gap in prices had narrowed if it had not disappeared. According to the statistics published in 1882 by A. W. Spaight, the Texas Commissioner of

Insurance and Statistics, improved lands in Milam County sold for between four and fifteen dollars an acre. Improved lands in Palo Pinto County sold for between five and ten dollars an acre.⁵ Apparently, as land was the chief basis of agricultural wealth, owners were more cautious in disposing of it. If, as suggested in chapter three, the lure of easily obtained land had been the major attraction of the frontier for landless farmers, then the frontier had lost an important part of its attractiveness.

One part of the pattern of settlement had not changed at all though. White tenants still generally avoided Fort Bend County. Obviously, this pattern cannot be examined in isolation. As table twenty-seven indicates, the white population in general was not expanding. Still, white tenants seem to have been more likely to leave the county and less likely to move into it. The most likely estimates of tenancy rates and the number of tenants present indicate that the number of white landowners had increased, while the number of tenants present had fallen rather sharply.

Again, there seem to be two obvious reasons for this. First, if fertile cotton land were a finite resource generally, it was especially limited in Fort Bend County. All of the county's good land by 1880 definitions had been claimed before Texas became a state. And while the decade of

5. Spaight, Resources of Texas, 220-222; 245-247.

the sixties may have seemed an unmitigated disaster to the county's white residents, it did not bring a redistribution of the land or a dramatic decline in its productivity. The figures published by Spaight in 1882 concerning average prices for improved land are again instructive. While Milam and Palo Pinto lands were selling for from four to fifteen and from five to ten dollars an acre respectively, Fort Bend County improved lands were selling for from ten to twenty-five dollars an acre.⁶

A second reason white tenants avoided Fort Bend County may have been their reluctance to compete with the county's large black labor force. This would help to explain the information present--and missing--on the tax roll. Again as during the antebellum period, those white tenants who resided in Fort Bend County seem to have been either much better off or much poorer than tenants in the other two counties. The only sample white tenant located on the tax roll in Fort Bend County who owned less than \$200 worth of taxable property was taxed on just \$6 worth. Moreover, it seems likely that at least some of those not listed on the tax roll were not included because they were so poor.

During the antebellum period, it was suggested that those who stayed did so either because they had no choice, or because they seemed to have some chance of gaining land in

6. Spaight, Resources of Texas, 103-104.

the county. The same may well have been true in 1880, but it seems equally true that wealthier tenants who remained in the county would not have to compete with blacks, while truly impoverished white tenants would have no choice. The focus of this study is too narrow and the evidence too fragmentary to make a stronger statement on this subject. Still, it is an explanation which fits well with what we know of lower class whites' attitudes towards blacks during this period and with most of the evidence available in the tables.

While this explanation of white tenant behavior can not be verified, it is nonetheless clear that blacks and whites did not react in the same manner to what seems on the surface to have been the same situation; that is, farming someone else's land. As mentioned earlier, most white tenants left and those who stayed in the county obtained land, while most blacks stayed but most did not obtain land. Although there were white tenants in each of the three counties, white tenants generally avoided Fort Bend County, while black tenants remained there.

In fact, black tenants were for the most part immobile while white tenants were highly mobile. This is reflected not only in the tenancy rates, but also in the over-all population figures presented in table twenty-eight. The proportion of the combined white population of the two counties which resided in Milam County rose by ten percentage

points between 1870 and 1880 while the proportion of the total black population living there hardly changed at all. This is ironic in view of the fact that it appears to have been easier to become a landowner in Milam County--as evidenced by the fact that more blacks obtained land in Milam County than they did in Fort Bend County.

The resettlement of Palo Pinto County also seems to point up these differences between black and white tenants. During the 1870s the periphery of the cotton kingdom had reached Palo Pinto, and although white tenants did not flock to the area to the same degree that they had in the antebellum period, they did not avoid the area. No matter which set of figures are consulted from table twenty-six or table seven, there were at least twice as many white tenants in Palo Pinto County than there were in Fort Bend County. On the entire population schedule in Palo Pinto County, there was only one black farmer. His name was Henry Pollard, and he lived near a white family with the same surname, which suggests that he may have been a former slave who traveled to the county with the white family. In any case, he was not a tenant. He was an owner.

Again as in 1870, there were differences between tenants which seem to be more closely related to race than they do to economic or geographical factors. All the theoretical arguments and elaborate models notwithstanding, the market

place was dominated by individuals who sincerely believed that blacks were inferior and treated them as such. White Texans were for the most part blatantly racist, and an examination of any white Texas newspaper from the nineteenth century will confirm that fact. Take for example the Milam County newspaper, the Rockdale Messenger. A half dozen issues of the paper from the summer of 1889 survived and were microfilmed by the Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas. Those issues contain reports of three black men who were lynched in Texas, a "race riot" in Bastrop County, and an editorial which suggested that if all the blacks in the United States were shipped to Africa, the United States would be better off, but those blacks would probably "lapse into barbarism and eat themselves up."⁷

With racism so prevalent in the society, it seems at least possible that it reached a level of unanimity that would allow it to operate in the market place without penalizing racist employers. When the evidence of this racism is added to the obvious differences between black and white actions as tenants, the case for a system of tenancy with coercive elements applied on the basis of race is quite strong. For this author, the evidence, which confirmed previously held perceptions, was convincing.

7. Rockdale Messenger, June 27, July 4, July 11, July 18, 1889.

Of course, the situation was quite complex, and it is clear that individuals among both races were exceptional cases. Thus, the evidence can never really be completely conclusive. Moreover, in 1880, there were signs which indicated that the situation was beginning to change. In a sense, the gap between white and black tenants was narrowing in some areas--not because black tenants were becoming more like white tenants, but because some whites began, statistically speaking, to become more like black tenants.

A portion of the evidence for this statement has been dealt with earlier. A larger number of white tenants were both persistent and landless. Not only that, but the obvious differences in occupations which had been present on the Fort Bend population schedule in 1870 had disappeared. In the black belt, landlords had discovered that whites could be incorporated into the system initially designed for their former slaves. Many whites would be offended with the language, but a correspondent to the Fort Bend Four Counties summed up the situation very well when he wrote that although some planters and merchants in the county were at first unsure that whites could or would work as hard and well as blacks in that climate, they would be "gradually undeceived" because "when whites are having the chance, they are making as good show as any other 'nigger'".⁸

8. Richmond Four Counties, March 25, 1875.

CONCLUSIONS

The summer of 1889 was a busy time for Milam County farmers. In addition to their work in the fields, many of the farmers in the county were heavily involved in the Farmers' Alliance, and 1889 was an eventful year for that group as they battled the jute bagging trust. Although it was clear that the great state-wide cooperative effort, the Alliance Exchange, had failed, Milam County farmers still believed in the idea and were involved in at least the planning stage of a new local cooperative effort. One of the county's newspapers, the Rockdale Messenger, devoted almost a full page to Alliance activities every week.

Three brief paragraphs in the few issues of the Rockdale Messenger that have survived from that summer provide a brief glimpse at an attempt to form another farmer's organization. On June 27, 1889, the Messenger carried two small advertisements signed by "A Tenant" which urged tenants in Lee, Williamson, and Milam Counties to meet and elect delegations to attend a tenant's convention planned for Rockdale on July 16. The writer of the advertisements left no doubt as to the purpose of the new organization. The organizers planned to form groups to homestead land in West Texas. In one of the notices he wrote: "Brother tenants, we

can go west in colonies large enough to form neighborhoods ...Colonies should be ready to start by the first of November." In the other notice, he outlined what was to be the first step, saying: "Texas has five million acres of vacant land. Meet us at Rockdale and we will send a committee to explore the promised land."¹

Most local nineteenth century Texas newspaper editors dedicated themselves assiduously to the task of building up their town and their county, and the editor of the Messenger was no exception. As such, he could not have been very enthusiastic about the items he published for the tenant's group. After all, most of the articles and statements he published indicate that he probably thought Milam County was the promised land. In any case, while the paper contained numerous stories and reports about and by the Alliance, the only other mention of the tenants' group in the surviving issues of the paper was a brief report of the July 16 meeting, which was published by request.

The organizers of the meeting must have been disappointed in the lack of response to their pleas. When the day for the three-county convention arrived, the convention assembled in the mayor's office. The turnout was estimated at about

1. Rockdale Messenger, June 27, 1889. For information on the Farmers' Alliance and their battle with the jute bagging trust, see John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis, 1931), 140ff.

twenty. There seems to have been little, if any, response from farmers in other counties. There were only five names mentioned in the report, and four of these five men had been residents of Milam County at the time of the 1880 Census. If the group chose a name, it was not mentioned in the report, and apparently they did not name the committee they planned to send west. Nonetheless, they tried to keep the effort alive, electing J. T. Stovall and H. P. Moses as permanent chairman and secretary of the group respectively.²

It may be that there were other meetings of the group of which we have no record.³ Still, it seems doubtful that the group ever organized a homesteading expedition to West Texas. Although the public domain of the State of Texas would not be officially exhausted until the Texas Supreme Court ruled it closed in Howard v. Baker in 1898, it was virtually exhausted by 1889 when the Milam County tenants group made its seemingly halting efforts. In any case, if parts of the group made their way west, they did not take their secretary, Henry P. Moses, for he died in Milam County in July of 1895.

In fact, for some tenants, better opportunities seemed to lie to the southeast rather than to the west. During the 1890s, the prairie lands in Fort Bend County were slowly

2. Rockdale Messenger, July 18, 1889.

3The collection of the Messenger preserved and microfilmed by the staff of the Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas apparently contains all surviving issues of the paper. There is a gap in their collection from August of 1889 until September of 1898.

being converted into farms. During that decade, the white population of the county began to grow again, and many of those whites were tenants who undoubtedly hoped to obtain some of this fresh land. But the land did not belong to the state, and, with the possible exception of the land belonging to the railroads, few of those who owned it would be willing to give it away when they could rent it for cash or on shares.

In Fort Bend County, most tenants had previously been black, and at least one white tenant found himself unwilling to work on the same terms under which they had labored. Clarence R. Wharton, the able local historian whose history of Fort Bend County has been utilized extensively in this work, was a lawyer who had entered the county in 1897. Although he moved to Richmond that same year, he came originally to assist in the defense of George Priddy, a white tenant who had farmed some of Wharton's father's land several years before. Priddy was being tried for the murder of his landlord, William O. Ellis, whose plantation lay in the rich bottom lands between the Brazos River and Oyster Creek, just west of Richmond. In his history of the county, Wharton described the events leading up to the death of Ellis.

Will Ellis, manager of the Ellis plantation had a system which worked like this--

A tenant would sign a printed contract which contained many provisions in small type which gave the landlord power to dispossess him almost at will and at any time. Often this contract would be presented for

signature after the tenant had begun his crop and at a time when it would be almost impossible for him to move elsewhere. ...

Among the things a tenant could not do was to leave the premises for more than a week.

After his crop was 'laid by' in August Priddy took his family in his farm wagon and drove to the coast for a few days and when he returned found a sign on the door of his house that he had forfeited his crop and must leave at once. The same day the plantation foreman began gathering his ripe corn. Priddy protested but was told he must go. He went to the house and got his Winchester and drove away the outfit which was gathering his corn. When they went back to plantation headquarters Will Ellis, who had been accustomed to dealing with negroes (sic) and indigent whites, was roused to great wrath..."⁴

According to Wharton, Ellis grabbed his shotgun and had himself driven to the area where Priddy stood protecting the corn he had grown. Ellis jumped from the wagon, ran forward, raised his gun, and fired. At about the same time, Priddy fired at Ellis. Ellis did not know that the gun he had brought was filled with mustard seed which was relatively harmless at a distance, while Priddy's shot from the Winchester was lethal. Apparently feelings ran high in Fort Bend County, for Priddy's lawyers had the venue of the case transferred to Wharton County, where Priddy was tried and acquitted.

These two incidents from Milam and Fort Bend Counties suggest that tenant farming, although present during the antebellum period, had changed dramatically by the 1880s. Bode and Ginter used the 1860 census in an innovative way to

4. Wharton, Fort Bend County, 229-230.

build their case that there were substantial numbers of tenants scattered throughout Georgia in 1860, particularly in the western regions of the state. The evidence clearly indicates that antebellum Texas, like Georgia also had significant numbers of tenants. Having discovered that farm tenancy was more extensive than previously indicated, Bode and Ginter concluded that this discovery had important implications on the interpretation of postbellum agricultural developments. First, they argued that, although there were important and fundamental changes occurring after the Civil War, "postbellum tenancy was not merely an ad hoc invention suddenly and hastily devised in the South as a response to emancipation. It had deep and substantial roots in southern society." Second, they concluded that "although white tenancy rates rose sharply by the end of the century, ... preliminary analysis has suggested that the picture of a white antebellum yeomanry falling into a dependent tenantry during the critical years of Reconstruction is fundamentally misleading."⁵

In a very real sense, the evidence presented in this study demonstrates that in these three counties at least, it would be fundamentally misleading to focus on antebellum tenantry as having provided deep and substantial roots for the system

5. Bode and Ginter, Farm Tenancy and the Census in Antebellum Georgia, 184-185.

of tenancy which was taking root by the 1880s. When they had the resources, antebellum tenants moved across the state, largely avoiding settled, cotton-producing regions. Instead, they settled on the undeveloped lands in Milam County, and in Palo Pinto County, not to grow cotton, but to obtain land from the state or from absentee owners who would let them purchase the land on terms which they could afford. If they were successful, they stayed; if they were not, they moved away.

Obviously, they did not immediately abandon their quest at the close of the war in 1865. But the devastation and the dislocation caused by the war had greatly swelled their ranks, and the frontier was at least temporarily closed. When it reopened, the conditions under which land was bought and sold had altered. As Gavin Wright has pointed out, there were no longer wealthy laborlords in the South, only landlords, whose major investments were now in land. Tenants did not avoid the West, but it no longer attracted them in the way that it had before the war. Still, their aspirations seem to have been fundamentally the same.

When the tenants in Milam County discussed at the beginning of this chapter attempted to organize their exodus, their calls for the convention reflected these aspirations. It also called for using a method for obtaining their goal which had apparently been used successfully during the

antebellum period--moving west. But their approach was an indication of the increasing difficulty involved in this method. The frontier had moved a long way from Milam County, and would have required correspondingly greater coordination to reach. The response to their calls indicated that few tenants seem to have been willing to take the risks involved when the promise of success was undeniably slim.

The changes in the nature of their prospects had gradually produced a fundamental shift in their perspective. Acquiring land was becoming more and more a matter of obtaining the capital to purchase it and less and less a matter of finding it. As a 1915 study of tenancy in Texas put it, "in times past it has been possible for the tenant in the State of Texas to buy a farm, or transpose himself from the renter class to the landlord class, without much money... As long as land can be had cheaply there is little need to save for the purpose of becoming a land owner."⁶ Tenant farming then became a way of sustaining life and accumulating the capital required to move to a higher status, rather than simply a way of sustaining life until land could be found. Tenants were no longer moving west in the numbers they had earlier. In fact, persistence rates seem to indicate that a slightly larger proportion of the group was no longer as mobile as it

6. Division of Public Welfare, Department of Extension, Studies in Farm Tenancy in Texas (Austin, 1915), 36.

had been. Perhaps these tenants were staying in the same locations in an attempt to begin the kind of capital accumulation necessary to buy land.

For black tenant farmers during the postbellum period, tenant farming had never involved the kind of roving search for land it had for whites before and, for a brief period at least, after the war. They could never hope to purchase land unless they gained the capital, and, perhaps equally important, the good will of a white owner willing to sell it to them. Both of these things would require time. The latter would require a personal relationship that went far enough to overcome the racial barrier.

In Texas at least, one system of tenancy was new - constructed rather hastily after the war. That system involved the utilization of "free labor" on the cotton plantation. Evidence from a wide variety of sources indicates that this system, designed originally for the freedmen, was influenced by a number of factors, only one of which was the "invisible hand" of the free market. Market factors did not lead blacks to react so differently to landlessness than whites did in similar situations--racism and coercion did. When the editor of the Richmond newspaper spoke of two systems of tenantry, white and black, he may have lacked a thorough grounding in modern economic theory, but he saw and approved of what was happening around him.

In their conclusions about white tenancy in Georgia quoted earlier, Bode and Ginter ended by pointing to one of the changes which they claim occurred during the postbellum period. White tenants fell, they wrote, "into competitive relations with blacks for a scarce and valuable resource over which they had previously exercised a monopoly both as proprietors and as tenants. In this way their status was also altered, and the seeds of racial conflict were sown more thickly on the ground."⁷ In these three counties, the evidence indicates that after the war, white tenants avoided competing with black tenants as far as possible--at least until they were forced to alter their perspective and abandon their roving search for land.

This study ends before the transformation in white tenantry had been fully accomplished. In fact, in 1880 it had probably just begun. The story from Fort Bend County quoted at the beginning of this chapter provides a tantalizing glimpse at what might have happened in a more general sense if whites were indeed forced to compete in a system designed for the freedmen in the years after emancipation. Joseph Reid, Jr., one of the foremost proponents of the dominance of the free market in southern agriculture, has insisted that black poverty came not from

7. Ibid.

the system of sharecropping instituted after the war, but from the "rural enclosure of blacks in the late 1880s." As he put it, "racism and poverty came immediately and directly to blacks from the discontinuous manipulation of the law by the sheriff" and were not "dictated continuously by cotton, tenancy, and country stores."⁸

His arguments are well written and persuasive, but they are not convincing. The system that Wharton described in force on the Ellis plantation in 1897 contained all of the coercive elements that Freedmen's Bureau agents had observed and attempted to halt thirty years earlier. They gave the planter approximately the same powers that the legislature of 1866 had attempted to use the law to accord him, and there is no indication that planters ever completely lost those powers. Of course, not all planters were as unscrupulous as Ellis, but the fact that he managed to work his plantation under those terms indicates that others must have operated under a similar system. Perhaps the "rural enclosure movement" was more than anything else an attempt to create distinctions which would appease men like George Priddy who

8. Joseph D. Reid, Jr., "White Land, Black Labor, and Agricultural Stagnation," in Walton and Shepherd, Market Institutions and Economic Progress in the New South, 54-55. By the rural enclosure movement, Reid is apparently referring to the barriers which prevented blacks from obtaining employment outside of agriculture.

found themselves operating on the same level as black men who had never really known any other level.

The evidence presented in this study strongly suggests that the nature of farm tenancy during the antebellum period was fundamentally different than the system under which blacks labored in the postbellum period. During the antebellum period, a highly mobile group of poor white farmers seems to have moved from place to place in search of land they could obtain without having to spend years--or even decades--accumulating a sizeable amount of capital. During the immediate postbellum period, whites continued to operate as they had before. For blacks on the other hand, a different system seems to have arisen out of their struggle for autonomy and the pervasive belief of their former masters that they could not be trusted to work without close supervision. They surely wanted the same kind of autonomy that whites sought, but the system they labored under made that goal virtually unobtainable for the vast majority.

Increases in population, the end of Texas' vast public domain, and new attitudes among owners toward the land they held, gradually forced poor white farmers to alter their perspective also. By 1880, they were less mobile, and less successful at obtaining land. In a sense, many whites probably found themselves working under conditions which were so different that they could be said to form a new system of

farm tenantry. For many, it was remarkably similar to the one devised for blacks in the postbellum period. They may not have fallen into tenantry during this period, but they did fall into a different kind of tenantry because they fell into competition with blacks. What had been in effect two systems had become one.

APPENDIX

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES FROM DATA DRAWN FROM THE 1880 CENSUS AND THE TAX ROLLS

Obviously, as the discussion in the text indicates (Chapter 6, pp. 175-184), the problems with the discrepancies between 1880 census statistics and the information contained on the tax rolls can never be completely resolved. There are, however, a number of ways in which the data collected can be organized and interpreted. The tables which follow are based on those interpretations of the data which seem logically possible if not always plausible. They represent, in a sense, "best and worst case scenarios."

The lowest estimates of the number of landless farmers that can be obtained utilizing the tax rolls and the agricultural schedules are probably those presented in table twenty-nine. This table was created by combining the tax roll and the agricultural schedule in the following manner: all those termed owners on the agricultural schedule were considered owners; all tenants who paid tax on land were also considered owners; and all those listed as farmers on the population schedules but not listed on the agricultural schedule were counted owners in the same proportion as those among their number who were listed on the tax roll in 1880.

Again, for blacks these figures are little different than the ones presented in the text because so few blacks owned real property.

Probably the highest estimates of the proportion of landless farmers present can be obtained by combining the agricultural schedules and the tax rolls in the following manner: all those listed as owners on the agricultural schedule but not taxed on real property are counted as landless farmers; all tenants are counted as landless farmers; and only those farmers not listed on the agricultural schedules who show up on the tax rolls with real property are counted as owners. These methods are extreme and the estimates presented in table thirty reflect that fact. This is particularly true for Palo Pinto County where there were so many farmers listed as owners on the agricultural schedule who were not taxed on real property. They are also affected by the relatively low proportion of farmers not listed on the agricultural schedule who were located on the tax roll. (The proportion varied between 38 percent in Fort Bend County and 54 percent in Milam County.)

Using this range of figures, then, the proportion of tenants who settled in each county can be recalculated. Tables thirty-one and thirty-two are exactly like tables twenty-seven and twenty-eight in the text except for the two sets of figures given for 1880. The figures given for 1880

in tables thirty-one and thirty-two are based on the lowest and highest estimates of tenancy which are given in tables twenty-nine and thirty.

In terms of tenancy rates, the differing sets of figures given in this appendix, if considered accurate, would obviously lead to radically different conclusions about the changes that had taken place between 1870 and 1880--things had either gotten a whole lot better, or a whole lot worse. Additionally, Palo Pinto County was either much more attractive to tenants than owners, or much less. The calculations used in the body of the paper seemed more reasonable, and were therefore the basis for the conclusions drawn in this study.

Although the tables presented in this appendix offer widely varying estimates of the tenancy rates in these three counties, they do little to alter the basic patterns of settlement which were described in the text. Regardless of whether Palo Pinto County had the lowest white tenancy rate or the highest, landless white farmers were more likely to settle there than in Fort Bend County. And regardless of whether the tenancy rate among black farmers was 70 percent or 84 percent in Milam County, it was still lower than the tenancy rate in Fort Bend County. Finally, whether the published census statistics on tenancy in 1880 are completely

reliable or not, tenancy had become an important issue in Texas and the other southern states.

TABLE 29
 LANDLESS FARMERS IN FORT BEND, MILAM, AND PALO PINTO
 COUNTIES IN 1880: THE LOWEST ESTIMATE

	FORT BEND		MILAM		PALO PINTO TOTAL
	WHITE	BLACK	WHITE	BLACK	
FARMERS	225	932	2411	391	632
LANDLESS	59	783	915	278	211
% LANDLESS	26%	84%	38%	71%	33%
RELATIVES	17	4	156	3	21
TENANTS	42	779	759	275	190
% TENANTS	19%	83%	31%	70%	30%

TABLE 30
 LANDLESS FARMERS IN FORT BEND, MILAM, AND PALO PINTO
 COUNTIES IN 1880: THE HIGHEST ESTIMATE

	FORT BEND		MILAM		PALO PINTO TOTAL
	WHITE	BLACK	WHITE	BLACK	
FARMERS	225	935	2411	391	632
LANDLESS	88	848	1229	329	342
% LANDLESS	39%	91%	51%	84%	54%
RELATIVES	10	3	85	1	21
TENANTS	78	845	1144	328	321
% TENANTS	35%	90%	47%	84%	51%

TABLE 31
WHERE WHITE OWNERS AND TENANTS SETTLED: DISTRIBUTION
OF OWNERS AND TENANTS BETWEEN FORT BEND, MILAM, AND
PALO PINTO COUNTIES, 1850-1880

	1850		1860		1870		1880*		1880**	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
<u>FORT BEND</u>										
OWNERS	94	51%	129	23%	108	19%	166	8%	137	9%
TENANTS	11	13%	35	20%	90	14%	42	4%	78	5%
<u>MILAM</u>										
OWNERS	91	49%	373	67%	457	81%	1496	72%	1182	73%
TENANTS	73	87%	78	45%	565	86%	759	77%	1144	74%
<u>PALO PINTO</u>										
OWNERS	XX	XX	52	10%	XX	XX	421	20%	290	18%
TENANTS	XX	XX	60	35%	XX	XX	190	18%	321	21%
<u>TOTAL</u>										
OWNERS	185	69%	554	76%	565	46%	2083	68%	1609	51%
TENANTS	84	31%	173	24%	655	53%	991	32%	1543	49%

TABLE 32
BLACK SETTLEMENT PATTERNS: DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL POPULATION, OWNERS, AND
TENANTS BETWEEN FORT BEND AND MILAM COUNTIES,
1870-1880

	1870				NO.	1880* (1880**)			
	WHITES		BLACKS			WHITES		BLACKS	
	NO.	%	NO.	%		%	NO.	%	
<u>FORT BEND</u>									
POPULATION	1604	21%	5510	65%	1871	11%	7508	66%	
FARMER	198	16%	1165	82%	228	9%	943	71%	
OWNER	90	16%	18	82%	166 (137)	10% (10%)	149 (87)	57% (58%)	
TENANT	108	16%	1126	84%	42 (78)	4% (9%)	779 (845)	74% (72%)	
<u>MILAM</u>									
POPULATION	6007	79%	2977	35%	14723	89%	3934	34%	
FARMER	1022	84%	250	18%	2449	93%	394	29%	
OWNER	457	84%	4	18%	1496 (1182)	90% (90%)	113 (62)	43% (42%)	
TENANT	565	84%	220	16%	1144 (759)	96% (91%)	275 (328)	26% (28%)	

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