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Americans love the soil because they love liberty—but they must beware of speculators

California's Strange Land Rush

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ONE OF THE strangest land rushes in California history is now under way. For several weeks people have been crowding the local land office hoping to acquire 5-acre tracts out in the desert. The thing presents a phenomenon that has officials scratching their heads.

The miniature land rush started when the government announced that it would lease 5-acre tracts at the annual rate of \$1.00 an acre, provided the lessee would build a cabin costing not less than \$300. The lessee would have the right to buy the property at from \$1.25 to \$5.00 an acre at the end of a 5-year period.

What makes the odd stampede unusual is that people are snapping up arid desert land sight-unseen, much of it unsurveyed and totally without water except at depths of 300 feet or more—and labor for drilling wells runs about \$3.00 a foot.

"Everybody seems to have gone land-crazy," says Paul B. Witner, registrar of the office. And he should know, as during just a two week period more than 3,000 persons have flocked into his office to claim land that has been there all the time.

So great has been the demand that 256 available five-acre plots were grabbed up the first day the rush started.

Not long ago, a group of Army offi-

cers stationed at an airfield just outside of 29 Palms decided they wanted something exclusive in the way of an Officers' Club. They inquired around and found there were a couple of sections of unclaimed land five miles from town. And about a dozen of them leased adjoining five-acre plots. They planned to purchase an abandoned barracks and move it to the "club site."

Then came the rub. No water.

It developed that where the club was to be was the driest of dry spots. The nearest well was more than three miles away . . . so the club never matured.

Perhaps this demonstration typifies the American's keenness for a bargain as well as his inherent passion for land. The first important land rush started with the colonization of America and continued until about 50 years ago. Until then, life on the land was, to say the least, rugged. There were few comforts and many hardships. Life on the farm was particularly rough on women. The first electric lights, the first use of steam heat, gas for cooking, modern plumbing and all the other advantages made possible by science went to the cities.

The movement cannot be explained merely by saying that Americans love the soil. It is far more than that. Above all else Americans love liberty

and freedom. They do not want to be regimented; they do not want to take orders from anyone. Notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, the average American does not like the discipline that is required by many of the organizations through which he now does his economic bargaining.

The problem will be to use the end-products of science in making hitherto worthless country productive and desirable. Much progress in this direction is already being made by the government. Power development, water storage, and erosion control will reclaim literally millions of acres. Air conditioning, landing fields, a network of good highways, together with scientific utilization of the soil, will do much to provide future homes on the land for overtaxed city dwellers.

There is one development, however, that should be checked at the earliest possible moment. Speculators are already turning to the land as a source of easy and big profits, while surveys indicate that the majority of servicemen and women look forward to the time when they can use their veter-

ans' credit facilities for the purchase of the very land now being grabbed by the speculators.

Officials of the U. S. Land Office state that most of the area of this free land—there are some 8 million acres of it in Southern California counties—has a definite health value for certain convalescent cases, but that service men and women should go easy. Most of this region is unsurveyed, and many persons are getting nothing but rock piles.

The best description of conditions is contained in a bulletin the land office hands each applicant. It reads in part:

"The experience of this office for the past 25 years has been that the cost of developing water and reclaiming the land is so great that the average person attempting it is doomed to failure and bitter disappointment."

But still the rush goes on. Officers of the department refuse to answer the telephone—they are too busy taking \$5.00 bills to give a lease on property the lessors will not be able to find until it is surveyed several years from now.



The Harvard Touch

On the eve of their initial football game with Harvard, the athletic director of a well-known Eastern college, hoping to cement future relationships between the schools, telegraphed the Harvard captain as follows: "Best wishes and may the best team win."

The reply by return wire read: "Thank you and may the better team win."

Contributed by AUTUMN OSBORNE