

WHAT I SAW AT FRANCITAS, TEXAS

Being a Few Observations Made by Will M. Maupin During a Recent Pleasure Tour of Ten Days Through the Lone Star State

Once upon a time I asked an old German friend of mine, Jake Buckmeister:

"Jake, did you ever buy a gold brick?"

Looking me squarely in the eye Jake replied solemnly:

"Nein, Billy. But I told you vat I did vonce—I bought me vot I t'ought vos a golt brick."

I know quite as well as anybody that during the last decade a lot of people have "bought vot dey t'ought vos a golt brick." "Youmayslipittous wood plantations," "rubber plantations," "mahogany wood plantations," and all those pretty gilded propositions that look so almighty good on paper—and which give you that palpitating feeling around the epicardium every time you think of the good money you put in to them.

Now I am pretty much of a Nebraska booster myself, and although I have traveled quite a bit during the last ten or fifteen years I have seen few sections of country that seized upon my fancy quite so lightly as this good state of ours. Therefore, it has been my habit, every time anybody came to me with a land proposition elsewhere, to say, so to speak, "Nay, nay, Pauline!" In this wise I have escaped some of the snares that have caught friends of mine for varying sums, running from the initial payment of \$10 down up to the final payment under threat of suit. Most of the men who approached me were strangers, but some were known, either personally or by reputation. I haven't a doubt that every one of them firmly believed that his proposition was "O. K." and altogether the best ever. If they didn't believe it they couldn't sell their stuff. But, as before remarked, none of these propositions appealed to me.

However, there came to me one day a gentleman I had known for many years. I knew him to be as square as a die, above any petty trickery, and constitutionally unable to engage in any proposition that was not on the level. When he told me that he, too, had a Texas proposition I just smiled and listened. Then I bought a little tract on his say-so—"sight-unseen,"—and I now believe, candidly and honestly, that it was the best investment I ever made, amount considered.

A few weeks ago I was privileged to go down into Texas and take a peep at my land holdings, and to make some study of what is known as "The Texas Gulf Coast Country." It is my purpose here and now to tell my friends just what I think about one particular section of that country, and just what I think of the gentlemen who are pushing the project.

First and foremost let me observe that after taking a personal view of the land, of the people now there, and of the possibilities fronting it, I stretched my credit and bought some more of it. That, I believe, is about the best evidence I can offer of my confidence in the gentlemen who are pushing this particular project, of my faith in the future development of that particular section, and of my belief that the land in question is a good purchase now. For several years I have made a study of production, and I rather pride myself upon knowing as much as any man living about the resources of Nebraska, her climate, her soil, and her people. This experience leads me to believe that I am capable of fairly good judgment in matters of this kind.

On December 5 I made a trip to Texas, going as far as Brownsville, and closely observing all the country between Dennison and the city on the Rio Grande. I saw some magnificent farming land—and some that I wouldn't give a penny an acre for. That, however, is true of any other state. But I saw what seems to me to be millions of acres of land capable of bringing forth fruitful harvests under intelligent cultivation. Not one harvest a year, mind you, but several harvests, for the climate of the Gulf Coast country is such that farming and gardening may be pursued every month in the year. Texas is a wonderful state. She is today offering the opportunities that Nebraska and Kansas and Iowa offered a generation ago, and without the pioneer privations that the men who made those states had to undergo.

It is, however, of one particular section of Texas that I desire to speak at this time—that portion of it now being handled by Schwind & Maher of Lincoln, and known as the "Nebraska Colony" at Francitas. This tract of land lies in Jackson and Matagorda counties, bordering upon Palacios bay and lying between the branches of the arachua river. It is one of the most beautiful tracts of land I ever saw, viewed from the utilitarian standpoint. It is a very level tract, with just enough slope to afford good drainage; wholly free from mesquite or sage brush; with fine timber bordering the river's branches, and with soil that seems to me splendidly adapted to farming of all kinds suitable to such a climate. And such a climate! Situated near the Gulf of Mexico there is an invigorating breeze, laden with the salt tang of the ocean, always blowing gently through the summer, mitigating the heat and making it pleasant, especially at night. This same breeze blowing from the Gulf through the winter months prevents anything approaching the rigorous winters of the north. It appears to me that the least item of expense in the Francitas colony is that of fuel, for all that is needed

is for cooking purposes, and with native oil to be had for next to nothing, and with plenty of timber within easy reach, the fuel problem is practically solved.

I made something of a study of the rainfall while I was in that section. Not since the establishment of the government weather bureau in Texas has this particular section of that state suffered from drouth. True, the rainfall has varied, and at times the supply is not all that could be desired—but there is always enough to insure against total failure. But this great tract of land is in what is known as the "artesian belt," and at small expense any landholder may secure a never-failing and abundant supply of water. At Francitas is an artesian well flowing a splendid stream of water—enough to supply a small city. Similar wells are to be found all over the tract. The rainfall, or water supply, is solved in this section.

One year ago the "Francitas Tract" was a great cattle range. One year ago there was no Francitas. Today several hundred former Nebraskans are making homes upon this tract, and Francitas is a prosperous little town of perhaps 400 inhabitants, with a fine depot, a public park, three good hotels, several general stores, drug store, hardware store, and a splendid weekly newspaper. It has no magnificent homes, for the citizens are all pioneers making homes in a new country. But these homes are all handsome, all new, all well kept and Francitas is a little town that will delight the eye.

I would not undertake to make comparisons between the "Francitas Tract" and other tracts of Texas land now being offered to northern investors. There may be better, but I doubt it. That there are many poorer I am convinced by investigation. But I would commend the "Francitas Tract" to any of my friends who are thinking of seeking a new home in the Gulf Coast Country of Texas. I have investigated it. I have known its promoters for nearly twenty years, and I know that neither of them would, for any amount of gain, misrepresent or seek to take advantage of a patron. As a newspaperman of almost thirty years' experience I have traveled with many a landseeker's excursion. Schwind & Maher manage their excursions differently. I have seen promoters get a car load of land seekers in tow, lock them in the car and allow no one to converse with them until the land was viewed and every possible sale made. Schwind & Maher never do this. Any land agent who so desires may undertake to lure away their possible patrons. Anybody's literature is allowed on a Schwind & Maher excursion. Indeed, these gentlemen gladly take their prospective purchasers over and through many another tract that is being exploited by others, being perfectly willing to have the merits of their proposition judged in comparison with the merits of other propositions. There is exhibited in this a confidence in their proposition that must, perforce, carry immense weight with the careful and thoughtful prospector.

The soil of the "Francitas Tract" is a sandy loam, unusually fertile and not in need of any other fertilizer than intelligent cultivation and crop rotation. It will grow practically anything—corn, oats, alfalfa, cotton. It is an ideal fruit and garden truck country. It will grow figs, oranges and pecans. It is the natural habitat of the sweet potato, and as for tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, cauliflower and kindred vegetables it can have no superior. It produces all kinds of garden truck at a time of year when the northern markets are crying for them, and when only the Gulf Coast Country and Florida can produce them. I have eaten the finest of tomatoes in February grown in the Gulf Coast Country. And the climate is such that something may be kept growing on the land all the time, every month in the year.

But do not make the mistake of thinking that because the land is fertile and the climate mild, that one may prosper here merely by purchasing a piece of land and cultivating it in a desultory sort of way. To prosper here requires just as hard work, and just as much of it, as it requires in Nebraska. The greatest advantage that this Gulf Coast Country has over Nebraska, as I see it, is that the man who is seeking land may acquire it here more cheaply than in Nebraska, and he need not have so much of it in order to make a living and lay aside something for old age. The men and women who go to Francitas must expect to endure many of the hardships that were endured by the pioneers of Nebraska. Not nearly so many nor so severe as the Nebraska pioneers endured, for there are no rigorous winters, no danger of drouth, no lack of railroad and market facilities, and no lack of neighbors. Indeed, in Francitas any Nebraskan may well feel at home, for here are hundreds of former Nebraskans, all remembering the old home state with love and pride, and always ready to extend a hearty welcome to the industrious, honest Nebraskan who is seeking a home in this New South.

In the country of which I speak one must study soil conditions, just as one must study soil conditions in Nebraska if one would secure the best results. Not everything will grow anywhere, nor anything grow everywhere. That is as true of Texas as it is of any other state or territory.

I want to pay a tribute to the people of Texas, taking the state as a whole. They enforce laws down there better than in any other state I know, not even excepting my own beloved state of Nebraska. And they have a splendid code of laws. Both Texas and Nebraska have laws prohibiting the drinking of intoxicants upon any railroad train. The difference is that the law is enforced in Texas. Both states have laws prohibiting the carrying of concealed weapons. It is enforced in Texas. It is a misdemeanor to play cards upon the train in Texas, even for fun. There is no "negro problem" in Texas, although the negro population is immense. In Jackson county, wherein lies the major portion of the "Francitas Tract" there is a "White Man's Union." It is frankly organized for political purposes—to provide a "white man's government." By this I do not mean that it would be possible for the negroes to elect a county officer without such a "union," for the negroes are in the minority in Jackson county. But before the organization of this "union" the negro was an important factor, in that he was always selling his vote to the last and highest bidder. In this way he was corrupted, and along with him the white man. He became more shiftless than ever, depending upon the sale of his vote once a year to keep him from going hungry for twelve months. Finally the white men met, regardless of partisan affiliation, and organized the "White Man's Union." Any man who desires to become a candidate for county office may file it. Then the white men have a primary all their own, and the successful candidates are placed upon the regular primary ballot, seldom more than one for any one office. Election day is as quiet as a Sunday in a Nebraska village. The county officers are sometimes republicans, sometimes democrats. Their party affiliation cut no figure. But they are white men, elected without expending a dollar for campaign expenses other than the filing fees and a few notices in the newspapers. As a result the negro, cut off from his "graft" has gone to work. He is happier, he is more prosperous, and even he is well satisfied with the plan. This plan has done more for the negroes of Jackson county, and several other counties where similar plans are in operation, than any other one thing during the last ten years.

I am not advising anyone to leave Nebraska. I believe its possibilities and opportunities are equal to those of any similar area of country anywhere on earth. But if I have any friends in Nebraska who are thinking of leaving this good state and seeking a new home in Texas, I certainly commend this "Francitas Tract" to their careful attention. I am not a "practical farmer," but I have made a study of soil conditions and climate, and I claim to know something of productivity. If I were considering moving from Nebraska and locating in a newer country, I certainly would make my home in the Gulf Coast Country of Texas, and I as certainly would make it as near to the thriving little town of Francitas as possible. Francitas and the surrounding country have a splendid future before them. Those who build homes there, stick to it and work intelligently and industriously, will prosper. That they will endure some hardships is almost a certainty—for success in any good line of endeavor is only won through sacrifice and hardships. But the rewards are bound to be ample in time. Those who buy land in the "Francitas Tract" for investment purposes need have no fear of the outcome. It will be worth more and more with the advancing years. The near opening of the Panama canal is sure to greatly benefit that section. The rapidly growing demand for tillable land, together with its constantly growing scarcity, of a surety means a steady advance in land values. So, then, I say: If you are determined to leave Nebraska and cast your fortunes elsewhere, by all means investigate the proposition offered by Schwind & Maher.

And now a closing word about these gentlemen who are selling land in the "Francitas Tract." As I said before, an intimate acquaintance of nearly two decades assures me that they are absolutely "on the square." That they are enthusiastic over their proposition is only natural. But they have results to show that warrant all the claims they make. They have located hundreds of people, and after visiting among them and making careful inquiry, I candidly assert that I have yet to find one of their customers who is not well satisfied. They have founded and builded a town that is rapidly becoming known throughout Texas for its enterprise, its stability, and the high character of its citizens. They have fulfilled every promise they made—and more. If you invest with them the results depend upon your own energy and industry, for you will have everything at hand which kindly nature has vouchsafed for the comfort and well being of mankind. You will have the companionship of real neighbors, not near-dwellers. You will have the refining influences of the church, the educational benefits of good schools, the benefits of good railroad facilities, a splendid climate, a fertile soil, and an opportunity to build for yourself a home in a country that is bound to be in good time the storehouse of the world.