WILLIAM SCULLY

AND THE SCULLY ESTATES OF LOGAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS

BY

PAUL J. BEAVER

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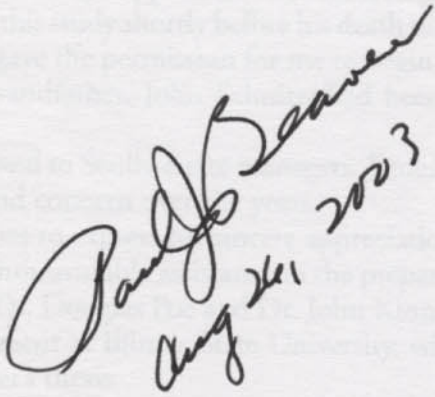

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Preface

William Scully was at one time the owner of perhaps more farmland in the United States than any other single individual, yet his life was often shrouded in mystery and clouded by half truths. Controversy swirled around him both in this country and abroad. In this work, an attempt has been made to reveal this pioneer landlord in a more accurate light.

This study covers aspects of Scully's life from his youth in Ireland to his death in 1906. Included are accounts of his American land purchases, his return to Ireland and the tenant problems he encountered there, and his work in land drainage and the establishment of this unique rental system.

The years following William Scully's death are also covered. The passage and division of the estate to his sons, Thomas and Frederick, and the role of his wife in managing the Scully affairs are noted.

The role that Peter and Michael, sons of Thomas Scully have played to this date in the operations of the Illinois holding are also noted.

I would also like to express my most sincere appreciation for the help given to me by Mrs. Violet Scully and to her two sons, Michael and Peter, for allowing me to make this study and to so fully review the vast source of Scully family and estate records. I will always appreciate the fact that Thomas Scully first allowed me to undertake this study shortly before his death in 1961. Mr. Stewart told me that Mr. Scully gave the permission for me to begin the study when he learned that my great-grandfather, John Schultz, had been an early (1870's) Scully tenant.

A great debt is also owed to Scully estate managers, James Stewart and James Walden, for their help and concern over the years.

The author also wishes to express his sincere appreciation to the following professors who were of immeasurable assistance in the preparation of this study. To Dr. Arlan Helgeson, Dr. Douglas Poe and Dr. John Kinneman, members of the social science department at Illinois State University, where this work was first submitted as a master's thesis.

A great debt of gratitude is also owed to the Scully tenants and their families who were so kind and generous in helping me complete this study. Special thanks to Delmar Zumwalt and Mrs. Dale Awick for their help.

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Chapter I

The Scully Background in Ireland

The history of the Scully family (O'Scoulades in Gaelic) as Irish landowners dates back some 500 years in the history of that country.[1] The family owned great estates in Ballenconey and Shronehill in Tipperary County[2] and rented to large numbers of Irish tenant farmers. As late as 1875, the Scully family still held leases on 14,520 acres in Ireland.[3] While this tenant system appeared to be the chief source of wealth for the Scullys, many of the family engaged in professions. Dennis Scully was a lawyer who was described as a politician and prominent leader in the cause for Catholic Emancipation.

Dennis Scully had the distinction of being the first Catholic student admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, in over 200 years during the early 1800's. At Cambridge he studied law. His work in the cause of Catholic Emancipation consisted of publishing several pamphlets on the subject. Later his work on the penal laws of the time was reported to be the accepted authority. He also received credit for helping formulate public opinion which led to the Emancipation Act of 1829.[5] Dennis Scully died in 1830, leaving his estates in poor financial condition.[6]

William Scully, who was the fifth son in Dennis Scully's family,[7] was born in Tipperary County, Ireland on November 23, 1821. Being a younger son, he saw the majority of the family's Irish lands go to his oldest brother, Thomas, after the death of his father. His own inheritance was proportionately smaller. He was only nine years old in 1830 when his father dies and it may be assumed that his inheritance was handled by his mother or an older brother until he came of age.

The Scully estate was disposed of after the custom of the period then, in that the oldest son received the majority of the inheritance while the younger sons were expected to be educated to follow a profession. William Scully decided to seek his education in the same profession as his father and after so doing was admitted to the bar in Dublin.[8]

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Paul Beaver is a native of Lincoln and Logan County. He was born on a farm west of Lincoln which was settled by his great grandfather in the spring of 1853, only a few months before the town of Lincoln was founded and named for Lawyer Abraham Lincoln. This heritage sparked his interest in History, in general, and in Abraham Lincoln and Logan County, in particular.

Beaver attended Middletown Community High School and followed that with two years at Lincoln College where he received his Associate in Arts Degree.

He received his bachelor's and master's degree from Illinois State University in the fields of History and English. Beaver completed his master's degree in 1964. The research for his master's thesis explored the history of the vast Scully landholdings of Illinois and the Midwest. Beaver has done additional study at Illinois State in the Doctorate of Arts program.

He taught History and English for seven years at Elkhart Junior High School before joining the faculty at Lincoln College. He held this post until his retirement in 2001. He also served as curator of the Lincoln Museum of Lincoln College for many years while at the College.

Beaver is a member of the Abraham Lincoln Association, and was one of the founders of the Logan County Abraham Lincoln Heritage Foundation. He was selected on four occasions by the Illinois State Department of Tourism to be "Lincoln Scholar in Residence" to travel with the Lincoln Heritage Trail Travel Writer's group touring "Lincoln Country" in Illinois, Kentucky and Indiana.

Professor Beaver has spoken about "Abraham Lincoln in Logan County" to Lincoln groups and Civil War round tables in Chicago, New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., The Lincoln Shrine at Redlands University in California as well as other cities around the country.

In 2003, Beaver is serving as Vice President of the Lincoln Sesquicentennial committee as well as co-chairman of the History/Book committee. The previous fall he was co-producer of the historical video "From Surveyor to President, Abraham Lincoln in Logan County."

Beaver was in charge of publishing a 1983 History of Logan County as well as being the co-editor on the recent "Pictorial History of Logan County."