

# **CHAPTER III**

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## **FOLLOWING THE MONEY TRAIL**

The Scriptures teach that the love of money is the root of all evil. When you "follow the money trail," it helps to understand many questions regarding man's behavior. G. H. Walser came to S.W. Missouri in 1866. I do not know why he made this move, unless it involved money. Somewhere, and somehow, he got his hands on a lot of money in S.W. Missouri. His friends, of course, would assume that he got it honestly. Clark Braden charged otherwise. Braden wrote:

"While living in Carthage, Mo., he concocted a railroad bond fraud. By hiring villains to hold a pretended bond election in thinly settled towns, by perjury, forgery, and fraud, he loaded the towns with fraudulent bonds, sold them, and escaped the penitentiary by compounding his villainy. He next took part in a gigantic land steal, in which the United States Government was defrauded out of tens of thousands of acres of the best land in Southwest Missouri, at a few cents per acre, as worthless, because 'swamp lands.' He has swindled scores, in disposing of the land he stole from the government. A common piece of villainy was to show a purchaser, an excellent piece of land, giving as its number, that of a worthless piece. The purchaser soon found that he had paid the price of good land for worthless land, and without remedy, for Walser was careful that there be no witnesses . . ." (Taken from the Fulfillment of a Dream, pages 4 - 5.)

### **Swamp Land**

I do not have any documentation regarding a railroad bond fraud, but documentation about swamp land is available.

On September 28, 1850, Congress approved:

"An Act to enable the State of Arkansas, and other states to reclaim the swamp lands within their limits, it is so provided that all the swamp and overflowed lands made unfit thereby for cultivation within the State of

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**Liberal, Missouri**

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Missouri which remain unsold at the passage of said act, shall be granted to said State. And whereas in pursuance of instructions from the General Land Office of the United States the several tracts or parcels of land hereafter described have been selected as Swamp and Overflowed lands enuring to the said state under the Act aforesaid being situated in the District of Lands subject to sale at Springfield, Missouri . . ." These hand written words are then followed by the legal description of lands which were designated by the state as "swamp lands." The Act was then signed by President James Buchanan.

### **Defrauding the Government?**

There are no swamp lands in S.W. Missouri. Yet, thousands of acres were "declared," or "designated," as swamp land.

The generally accepted theory of how this happened, involves fraud. Enterprising land dealers were said to have placed a boat in the back of a wagon. Then they climbed in the boat and drove over large sections of rich farm land. Then they signed affidavits that they had been over the land in a boat. In this manner large sections of land were purchased from the government for pennies on the dollar.

I have no way of proving that G.H. Walser participated in the "boat scam," but court records indicate that he did buy a lot of land, and that a considerable number of these purchases were designated as "swamp land," also known as "patent land."

Barton Co. Court House records verify that Walser, or his wife, bought "swamp" or "patent" lands on:

November 9, 1866  
March 12, 1867  
July 16, 1867  
August 31, 1867  
November 21, 1867, Etc.

In fact, they bought sixty-three farms, or parcels of ground from March 19, 1866, to May 3, 1870. Not all of these were "swamp" lands. Some were acquired at sheriffs' sales, and others were merely on the market at what Walser thought was a good price.

**Philanthropist?**

Walsers friends saw him as a philanthropist. Perhaps at some point in his life he was. In the 1860s and 70s, however, he seems to have been characterized by greed. Many of the old silent movies featured a wicked landlord who would take away the family farm. Walsers would have been perfect for the part.

Purchasing farms at Sheriffs' sales caused him to evict a great many people. Take, for example, page 216 in the Circuit Court Records of Barton County. Twenty-six law suits are listed on this page, and Walsers filed fifteen of them. Here are the people listed on this single page. Walsers sued them all for eviction or collection of debt:

Robert and Charles Olive  
D. H. Bowers  
Abraham Nigh  
R. T. Cartmul  
F. E. Reynolds  
C.B. Couch, Hoyt, J.J. Humphreys, A.G. Wray, Lee Chiswill, J.H. Neal,  
and Charles VanPelt  
David A. Olds  
John Couch and Joseph A. Watkin  
Phillip Hamir  
Thomas G. Harvey  
Barton Co. and M.B. Earll  
F.D.W. Arnold  
J.M. Travis and D.A. Olds  
Chas. Newberk  
Edward G. Ward, James T. Ward, R.J. Tucker and wife

If this is philanthropy, it is a different kind than I am familiar with. We must remember, however, that Walsers was in a period of change and development. Later, he would be more generous. Billy Graham once observed: "If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life."