

I. Introduction

The Civil War and the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution ended slavery, but it did not end the South's agricultural economy. Although greatly reduced in profitability, Southern plantations would rise again utilizing the labor of black and white sharecroppers and tenant farmers.

Paul Pfeiffer, a transplanted Midwesterner to northeastern Arkansas, owned extensive acreage in Clay County that he farmed with tenant farmers, but his agricultural operations were not the same as the new plantation of the post-Civil War South. In many ways, Paul Pfeiffer seemed to have been a land developer who set out to improve both the agricultural lands and the economic livelihoods of tenant farmers. The significance of Paul Pfeiffer's tenant farming operation in Clay County, Arkansas, cannot be appreciated until the reader understands how it contrasted with similar systems in the Mississippi River Delta region. Pfeiffer provided excellent living arrangements for his tenants. He did not operate a commissary where he required them to purchase needed items. He allowed his tenants to grow a large garden of fruits and vegetables for their family and five to 10 acres to grow hay and corn to feed their livestock. Pfeiffer provided quality houses for his tenant farmers. Each farmstead contained a set of outbuildings to shelter farm activities and livestock. Furthermore, Pfeiffer's tenant farmers prospered, and they often hired seasonal laborers or their own tenants to assist with planting, cultivating, and harvesting the crops.

During the first half of the twentieth century when Pfeiffer began farming in northeastern Arkansas, sharecropper and tenant farmers provided the labor for most of the cotton farms in the Delta region. Although many sharecropper and tenant farming systems existed in the Mississippi River Delta during the early twentieth century, all planters did not conform to the infamous stereotypes that became largely publicized. Pfeiffer's farming operation in Clay County became overshadowed by the national attention focused on the violence and mistreatment of poor sharecroppers elsewhere in the Delta. The plight of the croppers cannot be discounted; however, it is necessary to present a counter model that accentuated the positive relationship between landlord and tenant farmers.