EARLY HISTORY OF RURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION

III. Medieval Europe and Frontier America

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Medieval Europe

Following the decline of the Roman Empire, the world sank deeply into a mire of intellectual stagnation. A pall of darkness enveloped the minds of men, creating shadows so intense that most of the learning of the Greeks, Romans and others was forgotten. Knowledge of agriculture faded from the minds of perhaps all but the Moors of Spain. What remained of land classification returned largely to the primitive "proximity" concept. Under this concept, land frequently was classified according to the general nature of the soil, but more commonly, according to its proximity to the farmstead or village. Little or no consideration was given to capability of the land as we understand it today or even as it was recognized by the ancients of China, India, or Rome.

The dawning of the renaissance pushed back the shadows of the Dark Ages but did not bring about an immediate rebirth of interest in agriculture. Rather, it concerned itself with the extension of discovery and trade and with the building up of colonial dependence of nations. A search of the literature reveals an almost complete lack of improvements of any kind in agriculture in Western Europe from the time of the fall of Rome to a period several hundred years after the dawn of the Renaissance.

A possible exception to this may be found in the provinces of southern Spain. During the eight hundred years of the Moorish occupation of Spain (711-1500 A.D.) the southern provinces are said to have been very productive.