By November 23, 1891, when he reached his seventieth birthday, William Scully could see that the vision of his great landed estates was reaching fulfillment. He had three young sons, who were absorbing his philosophy of long-range goals for the land, and a wife, then in her late forties, who was fully committed to his views. He had other plans for his youngest daughter. With a little more time, he could bring to culmination the disciplined goal of his adult lifework. He was given almost fifteen more years than the traditional three score and ten. He used these to provide the capstone for his dynastic empire of land.

But even a strong-willed multi-millionaire would not have everything his own way in his twilight years. As far as his estates were concerned, yes, he could lay out the policy under which they would be operated, with expectation of a high degree of compliance. But he could and did have strong-minded children, whose contrariness provided him discomfort and embarrassment. Even harder to fathom for landlord Scully were the views of “fickle” Americans who were “envious” of his foresight and good fortune. Earlier they had encouraged him to make his initial investments in American land. Now they were responsible for throwing roadblocks in his path to ultimate success, and he and his agents worked to minimize these obstacles. Personal tragedy also haunted William Scully in what should have been his happy golden years.

The 1890s in American history have been called the “Gay Nineties” by sentimentalists. Others have seen the period in a color sense as the “Golden Nineties,” “The Mauve Decade,” or the final years of the “Brown Decades,”
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a part of the American Victorian era. One historian called it an "Age of Excess," and another defined the period as "The Restless Decade," separating the Old America, which was gradually disappearing with the passing of the frontier and with the new rise to world power for the United States. Strong indications of that decade brought an assurance that industry would soon triumph over agriculture in economic and political power.

There is no sign that William Scully saw or was willing to recognize the existence of these momentous changes in American life. However, his brief recorded memoranda of that time show that he was bitterly resisting the transformation of British institutions. He endeavored to cling as long as possible to his Irish estates under the older patterns of landlord dominance. His ties to traditional law and legal authority caused him to reject the new in favor of the old and trusted ways. Yet, there were many changes that William Scully endorsed. For instance, the early trips to Illinois had been by stage or horseback or lake steamer—railroads were a big improvement. Transportation of virtually every kind had brought greater comfort and speed since his first trip to America forty-one years earlier. Techniques for a more scientific agriculture had shown much improvement, and farmers better understood the new ways and were beginning to reap the benefits. Institutional arrangements for transferring large sums of money across international borders had much improved, and Scully was making use of them.

By the 1890s, with his western lands coming under lease, William Scully's tenants numbered more than a thousand. Requirements set down in the lease, which have been "laughed to scorn by frontier farmers," were now easier to enforce, since the tenants' alternatives in the way of other land that they might rent were rapidly disappearing. In a Kansas lease of 1893, the tenant agreed to

cultivate and manage said land in a good and husbandlike manner, that he will pull out clean out and destroy all burrs, thistles and other weeds on said land by the first of September in each year. That he will take care of, cultivate, protect and maintain all hedgerows, fences, fruit and other trees that now are, or may hereafter be planted on said land. That he will trim all hedges on said land by the first of January in each and every year during this lease and burn the brush. That he will at his or their own expense, keep open, cleanse, plow, scrape and dig out all ditches and drains that now are, or may hereafter be made on said land, by the first day of October in each and every year during this lease; and in case of failure to keep open, cleanse, plow, scrape and dig out said ditches, trim said hedge-rows, and pull out and destroy the burrs, thistles and other weeds, respectively, as aforesaid, the said Tenant agrees to pay said Landlord Seventy-five cents per rod for the
ditches, twenty-five cents per rod for the hedges, and two dollars per acre for land in burrs and weeds, as damages for such failure in addition to the rent hereby reserved, such damages to be recoverable by the said Landlord in the same manner as rent in arrears. That said Tenant will not permit or suffer cattle or other animals, to feed upon the stalks standing on said land, said stalks being reserved to the Landlord; and that he will deliver up said premises to the said Landlord in good order and condition as they now are, at the end or other sooner determination of the period for which the same are let, reasonable wear and tear only excepted.²

Such a requirement was typical of all Scully leases of that time. Cash rent was also usual, but sometimes share rent was collected. For example, a Logan County tract of 144 acres had been unrented in 1889, so it was leased for "grain rent"—one-third of the small grain and two-fifths of the corn—in 1890 to attract a tenant. Whereas cash rent in 1888 had been $470.00, plus $56.86 paid in taxes, the share rent in 1890 was merely $404.26. But the next two years it rose to $810.92 and $853.10. Much more supervision was needed in handling share-rent contracts, and Scully preferred the cash-rent pattern. By 1900 most land in Logan County was rented at rates ranging from $5.50 to $6.25 per acre plus taxes. At the higher rate the 144-acre farm in 1900 would have produced $890 plus taxes.³

Income from Kansas and Nebraska land was far less per acre than from Scully lands in Illinois at that time. Scully's explanation for the difference, which did not take into account the nature of the crops and the more intensive Illinois agriculture, was that "settlement of Illinois is older, the farming more scientific and the railroad facilities better."⁴ The high rent on Marion County land in the 1890s was $1.50 to $2.00 per acre plus taxes, whereas rent on Nuckolls County land did not average a dollar an acre until 1898 and 1899 when 6 1/2 percent of the total was returned to tenants in abatements and almost 13 percent more was lost by the landlord because of the tenant's inability to pay. Rentals in Butler County were about the same as in Marion County, while land in Marshall and Gage counties brought slightly higher rates.

The dry years of the 1890s, coupled with a farm depression and the Panic of 1893, brought dire prospects of rentals, especially in the western lands. The agent in Beatrice wrote Koehnle and Trapp early in 1893 that one tenant had skipped out for Oklahoma Saturday night and left his improvements for me to get his rent out of—I will probably get 400 out of $665—If I can get an honest man on the place instead of a [rascal] I will feel that the loss will not be so much. If the change in adminis-
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tration has any thing to do with the present depression I am not in favor of any more changes. However I think a good crop year makes the collection of rents easier than any other condition.⁵

Collections that year were down. In September the agent expected a 95 percent collection rate in Marshall County, while tenants in Nuckolls County returned 75 percent of their rent, and those in Gage County returned only 65 percent. Two months later the Beatrice agent reported:

Collections are going to be much worse than I anticipated in Gage co. Nearly every man that comes in wants me to carry him over. Where they were expecting 15 and 20 bu. corn they are getting 8 & 10 and at the low price of 23 cents. What little they have to sell if any does not amt. to anything. A good many will have to buy corn to feed their stock through.

What in Hell am I to do?

Some of the tenants are proposing to flee the country in the spring and all I can possibly get will be the improvements on their leases. If it were an ordinary year I could sell the improvements for as much as the years rent but you cant sell anything here now for money. I have never seen anything like such a time since I have been doing business for Mr. Scully.

Well, I will do the best I can and take anything and every thing I can get, except the women and children, and household goods. I may get better results than I anticipate, but it looks blue now.⁶

The drouth of the mid nineties in Nuckolls County resulted in seventy-five Scully tenants running out of "seed or grain to feed their teams to raise a crop with." Efforts to alleviate poverty conditions in Nuckolls County resulted in some landlords providing fifty bushels of corn to their tenants for each team they farmed with. The agent calculated that Scully's outlay, if he agreed to such a proposal, would be two thousand bushels at a cost of fifty cents per bushel. The Nebraska agent closed his letter to the chief agent in Lincoln with this plea: "Now the question for you to decide is whether to chance this much money, or let more or less of the land lie Idle. As time is pressing please telegraph your decission [sic]."⁷

By the 1890s Scully agents were usually expected to work full time for the landlord and not to engage in any other business. Lincoln, Illinois, continued to be the headquarters of the American estates, and Frederick C. W. Koehnle and Frederick Trapp were the landlord's chief employees. Other agents had limited authority and dealt with the landlord through the Lincoln office. For example, the only written instructions for F. William Fox, Scully's agent in Marion were:
I authorize F. W. Fox, of Marion, Marion county, Kansas to receive all my rents, and to make and enforce all collections for me in Marion and Dickinson counties, and to sue for the same whenever he himself shall think it advisable to do so; and to take other proceedings for the recovery of same as he may be advised to do so by Fr. C. W. Koehnle, of Lincoln, Illinois, or other of my duly-appointed agents in the United States.

By the 1890s a set of “Rules on Scully Farms” had been worked out as a guide for the kinds of tenants sought by William Scully. In a paternal fashion, copies of this list were distributed to tenants. They said:

Tenants must be temperate.
They must pay their debts.
They must not quarrel with their neighbors.
They must build their own houses and barns and plant their own orchards.
They must make money for themselves over and above the money with which they pay their rents.
Their stock must be well fed.
Their machinery must show good care.
They must so deport themselves that the community will respect the Scully colony and the name of Scully.

In the meantime, in the depression year of 1894, Scully’s agents began to purchase land in Bates County, Missouri, which is located on the Kansas border, two counties south of Kansas City. In the face of a hostile league of landowners who agreed to withhold sales to Scully, initial purchases that first year amounted to thirty thousand acres, which were paid for with cash. Rumors persisted that Scully was making his purchases in specific sections radiating out from Butler, the county seat, and that he was not buying land in between. A conspiracy theory was advanced that the newly acquired “land is to be stripped of buildings and colonized with Italian labor of the cheaper and more degraded sort,” so as to make the locality undesirable for adjoining landowners who would then sell cheaply to Scully.

Purchases continued through 1895 and 1896 at an average price of $27 to $35 per acre until Scully had 41,844 acres in Bates County. Some of the land sellers became tenants on land that they had formerly owned. Other new tenants were primarily Bates County farmers, thus laying to rest the hearsay reports of strange, foreign farmers who would be imported to lease the land. Butler became the site of a new Scully agency, and rents were set at a per acre rate from $1.50 to $2.50. Scully’s new estate gave him about one-thirteenth of the farmland in the county, for which he paid about one-
tenth of the taxes, a fact that led the Scully agent to inquire of the landlord what the tenants should do on the vote for a new county courthouse. Scully responded by saying, "Vote for it," and the issue passed.¹¹

The outlay for the Missouri part of the Scully estates was roughly one and one-quarter million dollars, which was equivalent to the total expended for earlier Scully acquisitions in America.¹² By the end of 1896 William Scully was the owner of American territory equal to nine and three-quarters townships, or more than 351 square miles. His total was 224,738 acres of farm and pasture land in the four midwestern states of Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. Only minor changes in total acreage came in subsequent years. His expenditure for this land, purchased over a period of forty-seven years, was somewhat under three million dollars, perhaps only a little higher than two and one-half million dollars. Scully land in Illinois was found in seven counties, with most of it located in Logan, Grundy, Sangamon, and Livingston and very small acreages in Mason, Tazewell, and Will.¹³ The Kansas counties were Butler, Dickinson, Marion, and Marshall, with the major concentration in Marion. Two-thirds of Scully’s

Map showing counties in which Scully owned land in 1900. His largest holdings were in Marion County, Kansas—55,666 acres; Bates County, Missouri—41,884; Nuckolls County, Nebraska—40,830; Logan County, Illinois—34,728; and Gage County, Nebraska—23,157. Courtesy of Western Historical Quarterly.
Nebraska land was in Nuckolls County, with the remainder in Gage. Bates County, Missouri, became the fourteenth county in Scully's landed estate in America.

On September 20, 1895, William Scully appeared before the clerk of the United States District Court, Southern District of New York, to initiate his naturalization as an American citizen. Newspaper commentary in later years generally interpreted this move either as a response to Populist party hostility and the legislation against aliens that they were able to pass or as the landlord's reaction to events or happenings that came later than the date of filing his declaration of intention. Most of the Populist activity came after the passage of the antialien laws. Certainly, the legislation of the late 1880s and the early 1890s had some influence on Scully, but two developments, very close in time, probably confirmed his resolution to take that step toward American citizenship. The first was the death of his son William, at the age of eighteen, probably in June, 1895, in the South of France. The death of this son, the eldest of Angela's children, hit the landlord hard, as he had great expectations for the young man. Because "Willie" wouldn't be around to take over and because William was less sure that Thomas and Frederick would have mature judgment as landlords, he may have felt pushed to renounce his British citizenship in order to protect his property. A mention five years later that grief for Willie still prevailed in the home of William Scully tells only a little about this loss. Even though a Supreme Court decision supported alien ownership of land, a second development that may have influenced William Scully to seek American citizenship was the passage of a Missouri law, in 1895. This hasty action came at the very time when he was acquiring land in Bates County, and it prohibited the acquisition of land in Missouri by nonresident aliens.

Scully wrote to his agents in Lincoln that he had made a declaration of intention to become an American citizen in 1853, and they found it on file in the Logan County courthouse. Since more than forty years had elapsed, Scully received legal advice that it was better to start over to provide continuity for the five-year waiting period required for naturalization. This move and the subsequent establishment of the William Scully residence in the United States ended for all time the possibility that William Scully would be elevated to the British peerage, which was supposedly one of the fondest of Mrs. Scully's hopes. It also served another purpose in contributing to greater cordiality in American newspapers and in greatly reducing criticism of Scully landlordism. No other action taken by Scully in the nineteenth century found such widespread public support. That he was serious about gaining his American citizenship can be seen from two small bits of evidence. Scully was on the voter's list in his London district in 1890, but not thereafter. Before his five-year waiting period for citizenship had
been completed, he asked those few agents who were not American citizens to take out their naturalization papers.¹⁸

News reports about William Scully's intention to become an American citizen were speculative and inexact on a number of points. For example, a statement was made that Scully had sold all his English and Irish property that was not encumbered. Also, the location of the American residence for the landlord was as yet undetermined, but after staying a while in Lincoln, Illinois, it was expected that he would settle either in New York or Boston.¹⁹

In reality, Scully owned no land in England; his residence in London had always been in a rented house. The only land that Scully had ever sold in Ireland was Ballycohey. None of the Irish estates were sold at this time, and throughout the remainder of his life he resisted giving up any of his holdings in Ireland. Washington, D.C., seems to have been picked for a family residence because of the lack of citizen obligations in the District of Columbia and in order to avoid summons or taxes that might be imposed on a citizen of a state. It was there that Scully rented the old home of Gen. John A. Logan in Calumet Place on the outskirts of the city.²⁰

A large staff of servants was employed to care for the Scully family in Washington. Carriages were purchased, footmen and coachmen were secured, and the family accepted some social invitations and "gave some entertainments." This entrance into society was "on a scale of elegance, but nothing to excite unusual attention." Most active socially were Mrs. Scully, who was described as "a handsome, matronly woman, [who] was well liked," and Ita, "a beautiful young girl of pleasant manners and inclined to athletics, [who] became popular in a quiet way." Reportedly, in 1901 she frequently assisted Mrs. Thomas F. Walsh with her entertaining. Neither Thomas nor Frederick cared much for society activities in Washington, and no mention was made of William Scully's participation other than a general statement, when he was eighty years of age, that he met all business and social obligations with the "energy and interest of a man in the prime of life."²¹ While residing in the nation's capital, both Thomas and Frederick Scully took a course of study in the legal offices of William Scully's Washington attorneys, Jackson H. Ralston and Frederick L. Siddons. Their training was in "contracts, leases, deeds and the court processes involving these particular branches." But other activities were of interest to the young men in the family.

For instance, in 1900 Thomas secured a steam engineer's license to operate his steam automobile, a Locomobile. Thomas and Frederick knew that their mother greatly enjoyed picnics, so they asked her to go with them in the car to a picnic. She would have nothing to do with the car, but a picnic was fine, and she would go in her coach. So the boys headed out in the Locomobile to the picnic site, and after going a ways, the car stalled. Soon
their mother passed them in her coach and haughtily refused to stop and pick them up. The boys finally got the car started again, and soon they passed their mother in a cloud of dust. She was furious at their discourtesy.²²

About two years after William Scully received his citizenship papers on October 17, 1900, the Calumet Place house was given up. Another house on Scott Circle, at 1401 Sixteenth Street, N.W., known as the Gurley House, was purchased in 1902 at a cost of $90,000. Additional expenses on the house and the cost of furnishings brought the total to $101,596.24. This "poorly architected" house was rented to Gen. Russell A. Alger for a period of four years beginning January 1, 1903. Alger, a United States senator from Michigan, was a brevetted brigadier general from the Civil War, a former governor of Michigan, and secretary of war for two years under McKinley. In late 1902 the Scullys returned to their Holland Park residence in London, with plans to move back to Washington at the expiration of Alger's lease.²³

William Scully's Irish estates in the late nineteenth century gave him net profits on his cattle and sheep alone of £1,769 per year from 1890 through 1900.²⁴ The Irish Land Acts of 1870 and 1881, sponsored by the Gladstone administration, greatly restricted the Irish landlord's freedom and provided a feeling that sizable agricultural properties would be seized by the government to satisfy demands of the land league. One report in 1887 speculated that Scully had kept his Irish estates "in trust or set apart for three daughters by his first wife."²⁵ But such was not to be.

In 1899, because of premonitions of governmental confiscation and in order to avoid death taxes, Scully sought to plan for the future of his Irish lands by giving his Tipperary estates to Thomas, his oldest living son, who had just reached his twenty-first birthday. This land had come to William Scully "for his lifetime only and was then to go on to his heirs male." He gave his wife all of the cattle, horses, and implements from the Tipperary lands, as well as all of his Kilkenny property.²⁶ Elaborate instructions to the new owners were written by William Scully because "the present land laws operating in Ireland . . . are confiscating the landlord's interest." Scully pointed out that his "Kilkenny Estate . . . chiefly fit for grazing . . . [but not suited] for wintering stock" could be divided into six or eight parts and then be leased or sold. Instructions were given about the steps to be employed—first, to reduce the number of cattle; then to advertise the land; and finally, the procedures for taking payment. He cautioned that his Forgestown farm, which was about halfway between the Kilkenny lands and Ballinaclough, should be kept as a cattle resting place until the Kilkenny estate was disposed of. Then farming could be curtailed on his other lands, with Ballinaclough as his final holding ground.²⁷

But Scully would never permit the sale of his Irish land. On one occa-
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sion, Thomas went to considerable effort to contact the Irish Land Commission and to reach a price for the Kilkenny estates. All his hard work brought an absolute refusal from his father—he would not sell. That land had come from his beloved brother.

William Scully must have felt that all of his children were irresponsible and immature. Thomas, because of his strong interests in disposing of the old family estate in Ireland and because of his temper, worried William most of all. Directions were given to his wife, as he turned over his vast estate to her, to use care in giving complete authority over the estate to her children. There were written instructions, which suggested that Thomas should receive a substantial reduction of a share in the estate, but final discretion was given to his wife.28

About the same time that Scully filed his declaration of intention to become an American citizen, general farming conditions began to improve. So the newspaper comments about the large-scale landlord began to moderate. The editor of the Marion (Kansas) Record reported that the landlord “erroneously known as ‘Lord’ Scully, has been in Marion the past week. Mr. Scully has never claimed any English title. He is a plain Irishman, now seventy-odd years of age, and, though he probably owns more American land than any other man, he is as unassuming in manner as the humblest citizen. He has recently become a citizen, so the laws against alien land ownership no longer affect him.”29 However, on the same day, the Lincoln (Nebraska) Courier was critical of Scully’s lack of philanthropy in the Lincoln area, and a little later the Superior (Nebraska) Journal attacked the Scully administrative procedure in Marion County, but not in nearby Nuckolls County lands.30 But generally, reports about Scully in his last decade suggest that he had mellowed, and more positive aspects of his huge estate were discussed. It was discovered that neither Scully nor his agents pushed his tenants for rent during poor crop years. From Marion County in 1901 came the report that Scully was “very lenient with his tenants.”31 Also, when Illinois farmers suffered an unusually bad year in 1903, Scully agents wrote the landlord and suggested that abatements be given for half of the rent. Scully said for them to forgive all of it.32 Similarly, it was discovered that neither the “burdensome requirements” nor the one-year lease posed a handicap to serious farmer-tenants. Scully’s insistence that “his agents keep abreast of the progress of agricultural practices and to urge the tenants to do the same” was heralded as progressive agriculture.33 In anticipation of the alfalfa requirement on the Scully leases in Nuckolls County, the agent in Nelson ordered books on alfalfa, written by the secretary of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, for each of his tenants. The landlord paid for the books.34 Constantly, Scully urged his agents to deal honestly with tenants and to expect honest effort from them.

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The new and more generous attitude toward Scully in the press prompted him to grant an interview to a young reporter of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in 1901, which produced the only direct William Scully interview in an American newspaper. When the reporter visited Scully's office in Lincoln, he was told that "Mr. Scully was there, but was very busy and did not see newspaper men." The reporter asked the agent to announce him "and learn from Mr. Scully himself if it were impossible to see him." The landlord responded through his agent by asking for a list of written questions for which the news reporter wanted an answer. These questions opened the door, and Scully granted the interview for the next morning.35

The interview began with Scully saying: "Young man, I salute you as a friend. Your written questions have convinced me you are interested in me in no unfriendly way, and I shall be glad to be at your service. You have put some of these questions in a blunt fashion, but they are business-like and give no offense." Thus, the most complete newspaper story of Scully's life was obtained and published. According to a later story, one of the conditions under which Scully granted the interview was that he could see "the story before it was printed," an indication that he could not fully trust newsmen, however friendly they might seem.36

Throughout his career, William Scully handled all of his personal and business correspondence without a private secretary. The staff in each of the Scully agencies located near the main concentrations of land did grow. Generally there were two or more agents at each office, one of whom was older and more experienced in order to maintain continuity and knowledge of the Scully way of doing things. By 1904, on Scully's last trip to America, sixteen men posed with him in a picture. They probably constituted his entire agency staff in America. Four—Frederick C. W. Koehnle, Frederick Trapp, Jeff Sims, and Fred Koehnle—were from Logan County. Three were from Bates County: a Mr. Arnold, a Mr. Crowe, and Jesse Smith, who had been sent by Scully to the University of Missouri for specialized training. Captain Henry Fox was the Grundy County agent. All other locations were represented by two agents each—Henry Fox and W. W. Hawley in Nuckolls County; a Dr. L. P. Rogers and Ed Fisher in Gage County; John Powers and Billy Evans in Marion County; and John Cole and an unknown person in Butler County.

In 1905 Frederick C. W. Koehnle, as Scully's chief agent, was living in pretentious fashion in a big house in Lincoln. His salary was $6,000 per year, a figure that remained remarkably consistent during his long career. Trapp's salary, which had been $3,000 in 1899, was also $6,000. Other agents were in the $1,500 to $2,500 range. Even Thomas and Frederick Scully were on the payroll, although their duties consisted primarily of visiting the estates at various times to become acquainted with the land and
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the agents and to learn how to examine the books. Koehnle and Trapp visited the outlying agencies in the years when Scully did not come to America. During those same years, according to lists of travel expenses in their office, either Koehnle or Trapp, or both of them, would travel to England to give a personal report to the landlord. On one of his business trips to visit Scully, Koehnle was invited to bring his family, and they were treated to a Grand Tour of the Continent.

During the last seven years of his life, William Scully's account in the First National Bank of Chicago showed the following deposits:

- Sept. 5, 1899–April 2, 1900: $275,000.00
- August 9, 1900–February 25, 1901: 262,853.32
- March 1, 1901–May 13, 1902: 195,500.00
- September 4, 1902–March 28, 1903: 263,097.46
- 1904: 283,676.52
- 1905: 267,000.00
- 1906: 326,937.00

These figures are probably an indication of his net income per year from his American estates, not of his Irish income or of his income from any bonds and other securities.

When John Scully died in 1885, leaving his widow and two very small children, he left a fairly sizable estate for a man approaching the age of thirty-six. William Scully helped Louise C. Scully by providing administrative services for the land that John had left. William enjoyed John's children, but he took no steps to be responsible for them. At the age of forty-seven, Louise C. Scully died on May 29, 1899, and William began to see that her children, who were teen-agers at the time, would need some guidance, even though Louise's family were helping out. To no avail, Frederick Trapp from 1886 on had urged William Scully to help John's children, reasoning that he could readily afford to do so. Finally, in Scully's old age, the Catholic priest in Lincoln talked to him about his responsibilities to John's children. Thus, William Scully, an Anglican for more than thirty years, responded by giving John Chase Scully and Louise Scully a considerable stake in the Scully estate.

John was given the poorest land in Kansas—the 9,058 acres in Butler County. Louise was given a much smaller amount of land in Illinois and, in addition, income from John's land to the extent of $3,000 per year. John's gift was deeded on July 9, 1906, and was recorded in the Butler County Register of Deeds Office on January 7, 1907. Both John and Louise maintained close and cordial ties to William's family, and their association continued through their descendants.
The will contained no bequests for any of his children, even those by Angela, who were twenty-eight, twenty-six and twenty-four years of age when their father died. William Scully would let his wife take care of that.

In spite of the will, Scully deeded the land to his wife shortly before his death. News reports in August, 1906, stated that the registers and recorders of deeds in counties where Scully owned land had received one of "the most peculiar deeds ever placed on the books." William Scully "simply stated in substance that he deeded to his wife all the real estate in said county of which he might at the time be possessed." The comments on this action were that Scully was dropping some of his usual business care in this move.

Resentment against Scullyism eased with growing farm prosperity in the early twentieth century. Some observers were identifying the Scully tenant system as a new rung in the agricultural ladder, enabling a tenant to start farming on a Scully lease with very little capital. The tenant, because of low cash rent, could put money into improvements that he could eventually sell in order to make a substantial down payment on a farm of his own.

After visiting his lands in 1899 and 1901, William Scully did not return until 1904. Then he spent the months of May, June, and July in Illinois and the other states on what would be his final visit to his American holdings. As on earlier occasions, he was accompanied by Thomas and Frederick. Independently, they visited the western states that year, earlier than did their father. Many changes had taken place since William Scully had visited these newer states more than thirty years earlier. He was proud of the vast estate.
that he had built and organized over a period of fifty-four years, and he tried to communicate that feeling to his sons, who would be taking over soon. He believed that the honest and forthright dealings with his tenants had paid off. If it was paternalism in his relation to his tenants and employees, he believed it was in a benevolent form. In his declining years his estates projected the fruition of a long-time dream. Had he given his sons a proper appreciation of the land so that it would remain in the family? That question must have risen in his mind many times as he built a series of safeguards into the bestowal of land to his wife. No doubt there were specific oral instructions, which he would permit her to modify as time would pass.

During his final years, when London was again his primary residence, Scully traveled with his wife to southern France to take the sun. Some time was spent in country houses in England, but most of each year found him at 12 Holland Park. Plans were under way to return early in 1907 to the Gurley House in Washington, D.C., when William Scully died at his London home on October 17, 1906, just over a month before his eighty-fifth birthday. The cause of death was cardiac failure, aggravated by fever and intestinal catarrh. Although some news accounts said he would be brought back to Washington for burial, his body was placed in the Kensal Green Cemetery, located north of Holland Park. Later, a simple, large, uncut dull red stone was raised over his grave. On it was carved:

In Loving Memory
-of-
William Scully
Born 23rd November 1821.
Died 17th October 1906.
"Rest in the Lord"