Chapter II

THE SHRINKING LAND
AREA OF POLK COUNTY — 1858-1958

Polk County in 1858 had the unique distinction of having two water-sheds draining in opposite directions. The Mississippi River, which formed the southeast boundary of the county from Lake Itasca to Cass Lake, emptied its water ultimately in the Gulf of Mexico, while the Red River of the North, which formed the western boundary of the county, emptied its water into Hudson Bay. After all of the changes in land area of the county had been made, the county today lies wholly in the Red River Valley.

In 1958 the land area of the county was less than one-half its original area. The land area of Polk County was established when Governor H. H. Sibley signed the bill creating the county on July 27, 1858. The land area for the county was set off from the territorial county of Pembina which included parts of northwestern Minnesota and northeastern North Dakota. The law set up the southern boundary of Pembina as the northern boundary of Polk County. When the present counties north of Polk were established, the name Pembina was erased from the county map of Minnesota.

The boundaries of the county, as originally established, commenced at the southwest corner of Pembina county, opposite the mouth of the Turtle River and running up the Red River to the mouth of the Buffalo River at Georgetown; thence easterly up the Buffalo River along the northern boundary of the then named Breckenridge County and then along the northern boundary of Becker County to the southeastern extremity of Lake Itasca; then north and east up the Mississippi to its intersection of the county’s eastern boundary line at the northeast extremity of Cass Lake; thence due north to the southern boundary of Pembina County, then due west to the point opposite the mouth of the Turtle River, the place of its beginning.

The first division of the county occurred in 1862, when a sizeable strip of land across the southern boundary was allotted to Clay County. The southern boundary of Polk and the northern boundary of Clay counties was established on a line between Townships 142 and 143.

The second division of Polk County occurred in 1866 when all of the land east, between the ranges 38 and 39, were set off to form a part of Beltrami County. (The land adjacent to the eastern boundary of the county was later separated from Beltrami County to form the present Clearwater County).

Some confusion occurred, regarding the northern boundary of Polk County, when Marshall County was established in 1879. The act establishing Marshall County had the dividing line between the two counties, between Townships 154 and 155N, while the original boundary, when Polk was set off from Pembina, was