Chapter VI

EARLY EXPLORERS AND EXPLORATIONS OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY

It is not the purpose of this Centennial History of Polk County to trace or describe the journeys and explorations of all of the early explorers visiting Minnesota and the Red River Valley, nor verify the claims of their respective governments for title to the lands of which the Red River Valley is a part. Much of that information is available to students in text books of American history, books published on the work and accomplishments of early explorers, journals and records in the Library of Congress and in the archives of many state and county historical societies. It will be the purpose of the treatise to list chronologically, explorers, explorations and changes of titles of ownership of importance to the Red River Valley and Polk County.

The date the first white man visited the Red River Valley probably never will be known. Many people would like to believe, the writer included, that Norsemen entered the valley by way of Hudson Bay and the Red River before Columbus discovered America. While the authenticity of the Runestone record has been discredited, yet the finding of old Norse type anchor stones in lakes of the area has never been explained. Following the explorations of Radisson and Groseilliers in eastern Minnesota, 1658-1660, France sent officers to the region and in 1671 claimed the whole area south to the Gulf of Mexico. England, previous to this time, granted the Hudson Bay Company all of the lands draining into Hudson Bay, which caused a conflict of interests between the two countries. The brief interlude in which Spain claimed title to the lands had no appreciable effect on the bitterness of feeling between the English and French fur traders in the area. The title to the lands west of the Mississippi was transferred back to France under Napoleon. Irritation between the two countries over boundary lines ended when the United States gained title to this area as a part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The boundary line between English and United States lands was not definitely established until 1823 by the scientists and surveyors of the Stephen Long Expedition.

The first authentic records of white men crossing the Red River Valley was in 1732. This record and subsequent explorations are quoted from Report No. 1126, House of Representatives, 71st Congress, 2nd Session, from the Committee on the Library:

"On the outskirts of this valley along its northeastern confines as early as the year 1732, the year in which George Washington was born, French traders and missionaries established Fort St. Charles on the shores of the Lake of the Woods. In 1763 LaVerendrye crossed this fertile valley near the location of the proposed monument (Old Crossing Treaty site) on a journey to the present location of Minot, North Dakota. In 1798, David Thompson, an English explorer, passed through the Red River Valley during the early winter and wrote about Christmas Eve festivities in camp among Indians."