Hill River and other early drainage projects has been recorded by a former county engineer, George A. Ralph, in the HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY OF POLK COUNTY, 1916, pp. 122-124. Drainage engineer Ralph also includes in his report the history of the early drainage legislation through the legislature, outlining procedures for the establishment of county and judicial ditches. According to the reports, the first great accomplishment of the Red River Valley Drainage Commission was to accept the proposal of James J. Hill that a drainage survey be made of the Red River Valley on the terms that The St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba (now the Great Northern) pay one-half the costs and the participating counties pay the other half. The six border counties beginning with Wilkin on the south and extending north to include Kittson all took part in this survey. Ralph further reports that many were amazed to find that the slope of the land to the northwest across the prairies ranged from one to four or more feet per mile.

It was not until the legislative session of 1893 that the Red River Drainage Commission was legalized and an appropriation of $100,000 was made for drainage work and the first drainage laws were passed. As a result of the enabling drainage acts passed by the legislature, Polk County today has an elaborate and effective system with outlets into the rivers of the county and the Marias (apparently an old channel of the Red Lake River extending from west of Fisher in a north and northwesterly direction to its junction with the Red River several miles north of East Grand Forks). The network of ditches in the county can be seen on the accompanying Drainage Map of Polk County. As a matter of historical record, the first of each of the three types of ditches will be listed. The County Ditch No. 1 is six miles in length, running south and cutting through the river ridge into the Red Lake River two miles west of Crookston. The first state ditch completed by the Red River Valley Drainage Commission was the Sand Hill River State Ditch extending from Beltrami along the Sand Hill and emptying into that stream nine miles west. Judicial Ditch No. 1, one of the largest ditches of the county, has an average width of 50 feet, an average depth of 10 feet, is twelve miles in length and drains the northwest part of the county. In the prairie section of the county the ditches generally are located on section lines with most of the drainage going from east to west. Where it has been necessary to cut through the river ridge with the north and south ditches running into the Red Lake River, severe erosion has taken place at the ditch outlets. Striking examples of the erosion are shown in the Red Lake County ditch four miles east of Crookston and in the outlet of County Ditch No. 1 two miles west of the same city.

Farmers are now cooperating with the two Soil Conservation districts of the county in the farm drainage program. Through the use of land levellers, mechanized ditching and soil carrying equipment, spot losses in field crops are being eliminated and drainage waters are controlled by the best soil conservation practices.