Chapter III

THE ORGANIZATION OF POLK COUNTY, COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AND COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICTS

The actual organization of Polk County began with the appointment of three county commissioners by the governor of Minnesota on July 13, 1872, some fourteen years after the establishment of the county by the legislature. The three commissioners appointed to initiate county organization procedure were William Ross, Jacob Myers and E. A. Monison (the last named however apparently did not serve as commissioner). The first meeting of the two commissioners, William Ross and Jacob Myers, was held on October 21, 1872, with E. M. Walsh of Crookston acting as clerk. The commissioners decided to divide the county into three commissioner districts and set the regular election date in November as the time for the election of a full slate of county officers. After certifying the election of county officers to take office on January 1, 1873, the two commissioners met for a third meeting on December 8, 1872, and among other items of business appointed Richard Reis as County Superintendent of Schools.

At the first general election in the county on November 5, 1872, the three county commissioners elected were E. C. Davis, James Jenks and Lars Gordon. At the first meeting of the commissioners on January 7, 1873, E. C. Davis was elected as chairman.

The county remained in three commissioner districts until August 25, 1880, at which time the commissioners redistricted the county and divided it into five commissioner districts and established the boundary lines of the districts.

Prior to the time the state legislature declared the county legally organized (March 3, 1873), the legislature had re-established the county boundary lines on the south and east sides of the county. The southern boundary was established on what is now the southern boundaries of Norman and Mahnomen counties with the fragment south of that line to the Buffalo River attached to Clay County and the portion east of the present county line attached to Beltrami County, the southwestern portion of that county was later cut off to form our neighboring county, Clearwater.

The boundaries of the five original five commissioner districts are of historical interest for they include not only the present land area of Polk County but also the land areas of Red Lake, Pennington, Norman and Mahnomen counties.

Boundaries of the Five Commissioner Districts Established in 1880

FIRST DISTRICT—The boundary lines of the First Commissioners District shall be as follows: Commencing on the eastern
boundary line of Polk County on the town line between the Townships 144 and 145; thence running south 12 miles following said boundary line to the southeast corner of Polk County; thence running west to the Red River of the North, the southwestern corner of said county; thence running north along said Red River to the western point of the town line between Townships 145 and 146; thence running east on said town line to the range line between Ranges 46 and 47; thence running south following the said range line to the town line between Townships 144 and 145; thence running east following said township line to the eastern boundary line of Polk County, to the place of its beginning.

SECOND DISTRICT — The boundary lines of the Second Commissioners District shall be as follows: Commencing at the northeast corner of Township 152, Range 48; thence running south following the said range line between Ranges 47 and 48, eighteen miles to southeast corner of Township 149, Range 48; thence running east six miles following the town line between Townships 148 and 149 to the northeast corner of Township 148, Range 47; thence running south eighteen miles following the range line between Range 46 and Range 47 to the southeast corner of Township 146, Range 47; thence running west on the town line between Township 145 and Township 146 following the said town line to the Red River of the North; thence running north following the said river to the town line between Township 150 and Township 151; thence running east to the northeast corner of Township 150, Range 49; thence running north six miles on the range line between Range 48 and Range 49 to the northwest corner of Township 151, Range 48; thence running east six miles following the town line between Township 151 and Township 152 to the place of the beginning.

THIRD DISTRICT — The Third Commissioner District shall be composed of Townships 149, 150, 151 and 152, Range 47, and Townships 149, 150, 151 and 152, Range 46.

FOURTH DISTRICT — The boundaries of the Fourth Commissioners District shall be as follows: Commencing on the eastern boundary line of Polk County at the township line between Township 151 and Township 152; thence running south on the said boundary line to the south township line between Townships 144 and 145; thence running west following the said township line to the southwest corner of Township 145, Range 46; thence running north on the range line between 46 and 47, and following said line to the northwest corner of Township 148, Range 46; thence running east six miles on the town line between 148 and 149 to the northwest corner of Township 148, Range 45; thence running north on the range line and following said range line to the northwest corner of Township 152, Range 45; thence running east on the township line to the eastern boundary line of Polk County to the place of the beginning.

FIFTH DISTRICT (1880) — The boundary line of the Fifth
Commissioners District shall be as follows: Commencing at the northeast corner of Polk County and running south on the eastern boundary line of said Polk County and following said line to the town line between Township 151 and Township 152, Range 45; thence running north following the range line between Range 45 and Range 46 to the northwest corner of Township 152, Range 45; thence running west following the town line between Townships 152 and 153 to the southwest corner of Township 153, Range 47; thence running south six miles following the range line between Range 47 and Range 48 to the southeast corner of Township 152, Range 48; thence running west six miles and following the town line between Township 151 and Township 152 to the northeastern corner of Township 151, Range 49; thence running south six miles to the southeast corner of Township 152, Range 49; thence running west on the town line between Township 150 and Township 151, and following said line to the Red River of the North; thence running north following said Red River of the North to the northwestern corner of Polk County; thence running east following the northern boundary line of said county to the northeastern corner of Polk County to the place of beginning.

The County Board adjourned until September 29, 1880. J. Christianson, Clerk of the Board; E. C. Davis, Chairman of the County Board.

In common terms of geographical location, the five commissioner districts as outlined by the commissioners in 1880 are: District 1—all of the present Norman and Mahnomen counties; townships in the south central section of the present county. District 2 comprised pretty largely the southwestern part of the county including the Fisher and Climax areas. District 3—tw tiers of townships north and south in the central part of the county included Crookston. District 4—the east and northeast parts of the county. District 5 comprised what is now Red Lake and Pennington counties and townships west to the Red River of the North and south including East Grand Forks to the northern boundary of the second district.

The commissioner districts had to be redefined after the Norman County partition in 1881-82 and the Red Lake County partition in 1896-97. The general geographical district areas remaining in the county retained the commissioner district numbers with minor changes of townships to equalize the districts.

**Townships Included in the Present Five Commissioner Districts**

**DISTRICT 1**—Tilden, Grove Park, Badger, Godfrey, Woodside, Knute, King, Garfield, Garden and Winger.

**DISTRICT 2**—Bygland, Fisher, Lowell, Tynsid, Roome, Andover, Vineland, Hammond, Russia, Hubbard, Scandia and Reis.

**DISTRICT 3**—Parnell, Crookston, Gentilly, Fairfax, Kerstonville, Onstad and Liberty.
DISTRICT 4—Johnson, Chester, Gully, Lessor, Hill River, Eden, Brandsvold, Queen, Sletten, Rosebud and Columbia.


Polk County Officers 1960. (1st Row Left to Right): P. A. Anderson, Judge of Probate; Walter Acker, Register of Deeds; V. E. Watts, County Treasurer; Winnifred Laurent, Court Commissioner; Dr. H. E. Nelson, Coroner; F. H. Stadsvold, County Attorney. (2nd Row): Henry Gredvig, Supervisor Assessments; Adolph Stenseth, Superintendent of Schools; Martin Vanseth, Auditor; R. H. Espe, Clerk of Court; Carl Knutson, Sheriff. (Top Row): Emil Bagley, Welfare Director; Lilja Snyder, County Nurse; H. M. McFarlin, Veteran’s Service Officer.

1874 Huntsville Township organized in county; Crookston, Vineland, Fisher and Red Lake Falls townships organized two years later.

1874 Grasshopper plagues hit western and southwestern Minnesota.

1873 Jan. 9th Teriffic blizzard hits southwestern Minnesota.

1875 Newly laid rails from Crookston to Euclid taken up to make railroad to Fishers Landing.

1876 Pierre Botineau settled in Polk County near Red Lake Falls.
### County Commissioners of Polk County — 1872-1960

1872— Three commissioners appointed by the governor as organizing committee for county elections. 
Appointees: William Ross, Jacob Myers, W. A. Monison, and E. M. Walsh, Clerk.

1872— November election for the three districts.
Elected: E. C. Davis, James Jahns and Lars Gordon.

1879— 1st, W. D. Bailey; 2nd, A. Thoraldson; 3rd, Anthony Skreie.

1882— 1st, E. C. Davis; 2nd, John Frederick; 3rd, Isiah Gervais.

1884— Five Commissioner Districts.

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<tr>
<th>District 1</th>
<th>District 2</th>
<th>District 3</th>
<th>District 4</th>
<th>District 5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knute Nelson 1884</td>
<td>E. A. Bradish 1884</td>
<td>M. R. Brown 1884</td>
<td>Carl Kratzschmar 1884</td>
<td>Timothy Sullivan 1884</td>
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<td>John Oppegaard 1893</td>
<td>Anton Lindem 1893</td>
<td>M. E. Kirsch 1893</td>
<td>C. P. Deniers 1895-1897</td>
<td>A. C. Rhinehart 1895-1897</td>
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<td>Chas McCarty 1899-1905</td>
<td>G. W. Eastman 1900-1905</td>
<td>Rene Fortier 1899-1905</td>
<td>Henry Norland 1897-1899</td>
<td>Hugh Thompson 1897-1899-1901</td>
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Additions and Corrections to list of County Commissioners and other County Officers.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

1873 W. C. Nash appointed to succeed James Jahnks resigned
1876-87 W. D. Bailey, Peter A. Paulson, E. C. Davis
1878-80 E. C. Davis, Anthony Skeie, H. Thoraldson
1880 E. C. Davis, H. Thoraldson, Alex Running
1881-83 E. C. Davis, H. Thoraldson, Ole Estenson

1883 First change in commissioner districts, increasing the number from three to five. The first commissioners for the new districts were:

1st Knute Nelson
2nd E. A. Bradish
3rd M. R. Brown
4th Isiah Gervais
5th A. A. Higdem

Other additions

District 1 Oris Moen 1956 to-date
District 4 Carl Bakken, acting May '46 to Jan. 1, '47
District 5 Louis Geise 1947 to-date

COURT COMMISSIONER

Winnifred Laurent 1955 to-date

1897—Record flood in Red River Valley