Stone Lake into Lake Traverse, and thence north on the Red River. The distance by this route from St. Paul to Pembina was said to be 448 miles, and the time taken by carts was 30 to 40 days. The stage route over which the early settlers in Polk County arrived was laid out in 1859, following an intermediate course along the border of the hardwood belt by way of Sauk Rapids, Osakis, Alexandria, Pomme de Terre (near Ashby), and Breckenridge. It is estimated that during 1869, 2,500 river carts passed up and down the valley.

The first steamboat was called the Anson Northup and was launched on the Red River in 1859. Funds for its construction had been obtained in part by public subscriptions in St. Paul, the purpose being to secure the trade for that city of Fort Garry (Winnipeg) and the Red River Region. The period of most active navigation in the Red River Valley was during the years following 1871, when the Northern Pacific Railroad had reached Moorhead, the usual head of navigation, and while the river north of that point was not yet paralleled by railroads. During this period, there were four or five boats on the river which made from 35 to 65 round trips annually, depending largely on the stage of the water and the length of the season.

POLK COUNTY’S FIRST SETTLERS.

It was during this period that Polk County received its first settlers. The following is from an article by Judge Watts in the “History of the Red River Valley:”

“In 1871, there came from southeastern Minnesota some Norwegian families that settled along the Red River and near it, in what are now the towns of Hubbard, Vineland, Tynsid, and Bygland. Farther north, at, and near the place where the Red Lake River joins the Red, and along the Marais, at this time also came a considerable number of Scotch and Canadian people, who had been attracted by accounts of the lower part of the Valley in the Dominion of Canada, but finding the desirable lands there already taken or reserved, returned to this place, one of the garden spots of the Northwest, to make fine homes for themselves and their families. A line of boats had been established by Norman Kittson plying the waters of the river between Moorhead and Winnipeg, and upon them, most of these settlers reached their new homes. Among those who came thus, and made the deepest impression upon the future of the county, were Robert Coulter, John Coulter, and William Fleming.”

RED RIVER CARTS.

These Red River carts and steamboats—and especially the steamboats—were, undoubtedly, great factors in promoting immigration, and in developing agriculture in the Red River Valley. Owing to the earlier establishment of agriculture by the Selkirk settlers, more immigrants seemed to have come into Canada by this route, than stopped off in the Minnesota part of the Valley. The railroad was constructed from Glyndon to Snake River in 1872 and, in 1875, from Crookston to Fisher’s Landing. Interesting incidents are told of the early traffic on the railroad between Crookston and Glyndon. The people at Crookston built a platform on two pairs of railway trucks, and attached sails, and used them in making trips down to Glyndon, bringing back supplies.

Polk County was declared to be a legally organized county by an act of the Legislature approved March 3, 1873.

Within the space of ten years, and for the most part within five years, the development of settlement in Polk County dependent upon Red River carts, stage lines, and river navigation for intercourse with the outside world, came to an end, and a way was opened for the rapid settlement of the agricultural development of the country.

IMMIGRATION TO POLK COUNTY.

The population in 1876 was 937, of mixed nationalities, but largely Norwegians. In 1877 lands sold for $2.50 per acre. The immigration during this period was largely from Norway and Sweden, and about one-half the population were Scandinavians or of Scandinavian descent. In 1878, a large immigration of French Canadians and their descendants set in. In 1877 the railroad had been extended to St. Vincent.