CHAPTER XV.

THE RISE AND FALL OF COLUMBIA COUNTY.

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SOME PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD—BUSINESS DONE REGULARLY AND IN ORDER—DEFEAT AND DISASTER AFTER ALL—THE NEW COUNTY FIGHT OF 1896—THE LEADERS OF COLUMBIA’S FIGHT FOR EXISTENCE.

For some years after the year 1890 certain citizens of what are commonly called the Thirteen Towns—being the thirteen Congressional townships in the southeastern part of Polk County—had agitated and promoted the project of the formation of a new county to be composed of the townships named. The grounds assigned for the change in the composition of the original Polk County were various. Some persons said the district was too far from the county seat (Crookston) and that the people could not attend court or transact other county business without trouble and difficulty. Others were prohibitionists, or zealous temperance advocates, and feared that the western part of the county would some day become so strongly “wet” that Polk County, as a whole, would allow liquor selling throughout its borders. There were of course other reasons which were not either strong or attractive. There was a large element in the western part of the county which favored a new county that would be “dry” and allow the old county to remain “wet.”

Those opposed to a new county favored keeping Polk undivided and undisturbed, in symmetrical shape, and strong and influential as a political division, which, they argued, would be better for the whole people. The area of the county with its 3,030 square miles, was larger than either the States of Rhode Island or Delaware, with their 1,248 and 2,376 square miles, respectively, and that Polk and its big sister county, Otter Tail, might, if not dismembered or mutilated, become powerful factors in State legislation and controlling influences in northwestern Minnesota’s business and commercial affairs. They denied that there was any necessity for a new county to be taken by a sort of Caesarian operation from the body of the mother organization. They also charged that the advocates of the new scheme only desired that the towns or villages in which they were interested should become county seats, or that they should become county officers.

Late in 1900 the partisans of a new county in the Thirteen Towns took decided action. December 13 a petition was filed with the Secretary of State, praying for the creation of the proposed new division, which was to cover the area of the Thirteen Towns and called Nelson County (in honor of Ex-Governor and then Senator Knute Nelson), with its county seat at the village of Fosston, five legal voters were also named to constitute the first board of county commissioners. The next day, December 14, another and similar petition, describing the same territory precisely, was presented and filed with the Secretary of State. In this petition it was proposed to call the new county Columbia, with McIntosh as the county seat and five other and different legal voters to constitute the board of county commissioners. More than a year later, or July 22, 1902, a third petition was presented and filed asking for a new county with identically the same territory as named in the petitions for Nelson and Columbia. It was proposed to call this county Star, and its county seat was to be at Erskine.

These several petitions were duly considered by