The absence of dense forests filled with deer and other game, and furnishing fuel and material for habitations, was one reason why the Red Indians avoided the Valley region. There was little other kind of country here save the big prairies, which were almost untraversable save by horseback, and these aborigines had no horses, and indeed never saw one; since horses were not original to Minnesota, nor, indeed, indigenous to the United States, but had to be introduced from Europe. The aborigines of the Red River Valley, with their flint arrow heads and lance heads, and traveling altogether on foot, had a difficult job to kill buffalo and deer. Their best and common mode of securing these animals was to creep upon them as they grazed in the high grass of a lowland, near a lake or river, and, suddenly bounding forth, stampede the herd and chase its members into the water, where they often came up with them and speared them to death. Farther westward the tribes were accustomed to chase the buffalos over high precipices.

The Cree were the First Red Indians.

The identified Indians who first visited, and probably lived at intervals, in the section of the Red River Valley now embraced within Polk County were the Cree. There were others before them, of course, but we do not know who they were or what to call them. The Cree were in this region, especially about Pembina, Lake Winnipeg, and the lower Valley, when the first white men came. The Jesuit Fathers mention them, in their "Relations" for the year 1640, as "dwelling on the rivers of the northern sea, meaning Hudson's Bay] where the Nipissings go to trade with them." Lacombe, in his "Dictionary of the Cree Language," says that, according to their traditions, the Cree—in, say about 1750—"inhabited for a time the region about the Red River, intermingled with the Chippewas and Maskegons," but were attracted to the plains by the buffalo. The Maskegons were practically themselves Cree, being an offshoot of the tribe. They were often called the Swamp Cree, because Maskeg (or Muskog) means a swamp.

Many authorities regard the Cree as Chippewas. Their language is virtually a Chippewa dialect; their manners and customs are much alike; they too were a forest people, and finally they had a tradition that they were descendants of a band that in the long ago seceded from the Chippewas in northern Minnesota and went to dwell on Lake Cree. The Smithsonian Institution "Handbook" (1907) says: "The Cree are closely related, linguistically and otherwise, to the Chippewa. Prof. Hayden regarded them as an offshoot of the latter and believed the Maskegans another division of the same group." Many bands of the Cree were nomads and were generally unsettled, their movements being governed largely by their food supply. In their wanderings they mingled with the Assiniboines, who were offshoots of the Sioux, and intermarried with them and the old Chippewas from whom they had sprung.

Father Belecourt, the good priest of Pembina, who lived so long with them on the Assiniboine, Saskatchewan, and Red Rivers, says the Cree, in 1850, called themselves Ke-nish-ti-nak, meaning held by the winds. They lived long at Lake Winnipeg, whereon, when the winds blew hard, making the waves run high, they were checked by the winds and could not travel in their little frail canoes. Radisson, who, in 1659, either saw them or heard of them, says the Cree canoes were so small that they could not carry more than two persons. The name of the tribe was written by the French as Kristin-aux; then it became Christenaux, Kilistinos, Kenistonos, etc., but the chief French form was Christi-naux, which was pronounced Crees-te-nose; and the French finally contracted the word to Cree, as they contracted Naudowessioux to Sioux.

Now, when the white traders of the Hudson's Bay Company came to the Lake Winnipeg region they found the Cree. The poor savages were overjoyed to meet men who could furnish them steel implements in exchange for (to them) such simple and easily-pro-