CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST WHITE MEN IN POLK COUNTY.

THE NORSEMEN WHO MADE THE KENSINGTON RUNE STONE WERE FIRST—THE EARLY WHITE EXPLORERS—OTHER FIRST VISITORS TO MINNESOTA—THE LA VERENDRYES DISCOVER THE RED RIVER VALLEY—FIRST PRINTED DESCRIPTION OF THE REGION BY A CHIPPEWA HALF BREED—RED LAKE NAMED "FROM THE COLOUR OF THE SAND"—NOT MANY OTHER EARLY EXPLORERS.

It is always interesting to every citizen to learn (so as to believe) the facts connected with the early history of his country. Among the items composing these facts one of those of rarest interest is the identity of the first Caucasians or white men to visit his district or locality. Sometimes this may be ascertained with accuracy; but generally, especially in Minnesota, the information is impossible to secure beyond and without a reasonable doubt. The present writer is unable to assert positively, and to furnish proof of the assertion, who were the first white men to visit the district of country now comprised within the boundaries of Polk County. He can only furnish certain information on the subject, all that is readily accessible, and let every intelligent reader pass upon the question and decide it for himself.

WERE NORSEMEN HERE IN A. D. 1362?

It is fairly probable that the first white men that visited and traveled over the soil of Polk County were 32 Norsemen, who came some time in A. D. 1362. If they were here at that time, they probably came from the very early Norse Colony of "Vinland" which is said to have been on the northeastern Atlantic coast in what is now the State of Maine, or either of the Provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, or Newfoundland.

The evidence that these men were here, or at least somewhere in this portion of the Red River Valley, is a stone with an inscription to this effect. This stone has come to be known as the Kensington Rune Stone, because it was found near the village of Kensington, a station on the Soo Railroad, in the southwestern portion of Douglas County, and because the inscription on it is in the ancient Runic dialect. The stone was found on the farm of Olaf Ohman, three miles northeast of Kensington, November 8, 1898, by himself and his two young sons. Nils Olaf Flaaten, owner of an adjoining farm, was present immediately after the finding. All the parties are Swedes, and though plain people, in modest circumstances, are honest, upright, and highly esteemed citizens. None of them have any other than a primary education.

The stone was thoroughly discussed and examined by several Scandinavian and other archaeologists and scientists, and carried back and forth for two or three years, going in 1911 to Rouen, France. It is now in the custody of Mr. Hjalmer Rued Holand of Madison, Wisconsin, who obtained it in 1907 from Mr. Ohman, the finder. Mr. Holand has spent much time and money and made extensive research in his investigation of this tablet and is thoroughly enthusiastic in his belief that it is genuine. This opinion is firmly held by a large majority of the experts that have examined it. Those who doubt its authenticity do so on seemingly insufficient grounds. The strongest argument in its favor is the stone itself, which is of the variety that geologists call graywacke, which is...