CHAPTER IV.
FUR TRADERS THE FIRST WHITE RESIDENTS.

THE HUDSON’S BAY COMPANY—DUNCAN GRAHAM COMES TO EAST GRAND FORKS PRIOR TO 1800—DAVID THOMPSON FINDS JEAN BAPTISTE CADOTTE HERE IN 1798—THE NORTHWEST FUR COMPANY FORMED AND SENDS IN TRADERS—THE COLUMBIA AND AMERICAN FUR COMPANIES.

The first white men with fixed residences and steady occupations in the country to visit and occupy portions of what is now Polk County, were fur traders in the service of the Hudson’s Bay and the Northwest Fur Companies, both English corporations.

THE HUDSON’S BAY COMPANY.

In 1668 an American ship, the Nonsuch, Capt. Zachariah Gillan, a New Englander, sailed from London into Hudson’s Bay and landed at the mouth of the Nelson River. It was sent out by some London furriers to investigate the fur and pelt resources of Hudson’s Bay, which great inland sea had been discovered by Henry Hudson fifty years previously. A full ship-load of furs and peltries was easily secured, and on the return of the Nonsuch to London a great corporation was soon formed to make permanent occupation of the Hudson’s Bay region and make thorough exploitation of its resources available for traffic. The corporation called itself, “The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson’s Bay.” King Charles II, England’s “merry monarch” of the time, readily gave the company a charter which was dated May 2, 1670.

The first Governor of the Company was Prince Rupert, the dashing English cavalier, whose titles were Count Palatine of the Rhine and Duke of Bavaria and Cumberland. The region of country in which the company was to operate was styled Prince Rupert’s Land, which name is still in use. The generous King Charles gave the adventurers a vast expanse of country, which of course he did not really own, and which, according to the terms of the charter comprised,—

The whole trade of all those seas, streights, bays, rivers, lakes, creeks, and sounds, in whatsoever latitude they shall be, that be within the entrance of the streights commonly called Hudson’s streights—together with all the lands, countries, and territories upon the coasts and confines of the seas, streights, bays, lakes, rivers, creeks, and sounds aforesaid, which are not now actually possessed by any of our subjects or by the subjects of any other Christian Prince or state.

Of course, by the terms of the charter, the Red River region was included in the trade territory of the great corporation, since the water of the river whose name it still bears flows finally into Hudson’s Bay and may be said to lie “within the entrance of the streights commonly called Hudson’s Streights.” Into Lake Winnipeg run both the Red River and the Saskatchewan, the latter rivaling the Mississippi in some respects, springing from the very heart of the Rocky Mountains. The vast territory drained by these streams was all legitimately covered by the language of the company’s charter.

It must be borne in mind, however, that at the time the charter was given, the French owned Canada, including the country south of Hudson’s Bay; and this great empire they continued to own and control until it was taken away from them by the English after the French and Indian War and by the treaty