CHAPTER VII.

EARLY HISTORICAL DATA AFTER 1850.

FIRST NATIONAL CENSUS—FROM 1850 TO 1860—HUDSON’S BAY COMPANY RETURNS TO MINNESOTA—BUILDING OF FORT ABERCROMBIE—CREATION OF POLK COUNTY.

In Volume II of Cooper & Company’s History of the Red River Valley (Chicago, 1909), appears a chapter descriptive and narrative of Polk county. It may be characterized as the only historical sketch of the county ever published in imposing form. The article was written and revised by Hon. William Watts, of Crookston, and therefore may be regarded as authoritative. For Judge Watts is a long-time resident of the county and well versed in its history from its beginning as an organized county, and even long before. It is well that he consented to write the article, for otherwise much of the record of the county would be lost and not preserved in convenient and permanent form.

From the judge’s valuable article several notes of the county’s history have been extracted and used as data or notes for the present volume. Some of them have been quoted literally, but the majority have been used practically as texts or suggestions for comment. For example he speaks of the old Pembina trail, as “the route by which the Hudson’s Bay Company carried its furs and merchandise between the Northwest and St. Paul in the early days,” and he states that although the famous trail passed through Polk County the Bay Company had no trading post within its borders. The fact is that the Bay Company never used the trail “in early days,” and made but little use of it at any time. The trail was inaugurated in 1844 by Norman W. Kittson (then the chief factor of Chouteau & Company, of St. Louis) at Pembina, and it was used almost exclusively by him and his sub-agents up to about 1854, when he entered into partnership with Major W. H. Forbes, in St. Paul, in the general Indian trade supply business. The organization was called “the St. Paul Outfit.” The Hudson’s Bay Company first used the trail in 1858. In Harper’s Magazine for January, 1859, the late Dr. R. O. Sweeney, of St. Paul, wrote:

* * * The past season over 800 Red River carts, loaded with furs and skins, came into St. Paul from those far northwestern valleys. Even the Hudson’s Bay Company have at last availed themselves of the superior facilities of the heretofore ignored routes to our market, by sending last season over 60 packages of furs and pelts, taking in return cattle, mules, and implements of agriculture.

It would seem that 60 packages, or about 3,000 pounds, would not constitute but a very small portion of the cargoes of the carts, for three of the screeching but stout vehicles could easily transport 3,000 pounds.

FIRST NATIONAL CENSUS.

From 1850 to 1860 there was some development and occupation of the country within the present limits of Polk county. Indeed it seems from certain known circumstances that settlements were made in different parts of the country’s present area before 1850.

In 1858, when Polk County was created by the Minnesota Legislature, its declared boundaries included all of the now area of the county, and also the following described territory: All of Pennington, Red Lake, Mahnomen, Clearwater, and Norman Counties; the greater part off the north half of Clay County; twelve miles of the northern part and a strip three sections long from north to south by one section wide off the