CEDAR COUNTY

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Part 1

CEDAR County is located in the northeast corner of the State. It is bounded on the north by the Missouri River, on the east by Dixon County, on the south by Wayne and Pierce and on the west by Pierce and Knox Counties. It contains nearly 730 square miles, or 467,000 acres.

The county was organized by act of the Territorial Legislature, February 12, 1857, and, by the same act, bounded as follows: "Commencing at a point in the middle of the main channel of the Missouri River, at which the line dividing Ranges 1 and 2 west intersects the same; thence south to the southeast corner of Township 28 north, Range 1 west; thence east to the southeast corner of Township 28 north, Range 3 east; thence north to the middle of the main channel of the Missouri River; thence up said channel to the place of beginning."

Subsequently, the boundaries were so changed by statute as to give to Pierce County the southeast corner township, as above defined.

SURFACE, SOIL AND PRODUCTS.

The surface of the county consists principally of gently rolling prairie. Valleys are numerous and some of them are of considerable extent. Those of Antelope and Beaver in the northern, of Bow Creek in the central, and of the north fork of the Logan Creek in the southern part,
are the principal valleys. In extent, the valleys comprise nearly half the surface, and, in some places, notably at the head of the main bow, are as level as a floor for miles. The uplands are composed principally of gently rolling prairie, but along the Missouri River, the hills are higher and more precipitous, but very seldom are they too much so to admit of cultivation.

The surface soil of the county is for the most part a clay loam or vegetable mold, varying from two to ten feet or more in depth, and as rich as the most exacting agriculturist could desire. The subsoil is well adapted to both excessively wet and excessively dry weather. In many places on the surface rest numerous bowlders of considerable size. There is an immense amount of chalk rock in the county, which makes excellent building stone, except for the foundations of buildings. The color of it varies from light blue, through the various shades of yellow to almost white. On account of its softness, it can be sawed or planed into any shape, and, on exposure, it does not generally disintegrate, but appears to grow harder with age. A farmhouse is built of it about one mile south of St. Helena; some houses have been built of it at the Santee Agency, Knox County, and some at Yankton, Dak. If it absorbs moisture and freeze, it will disintegrate to the depth it has been frozen. Good brick clay is also found in abundance.

There are considerable quantities of timber on the Missouri bottoms and along some of the creeks; elm, basswood, box-elder, ash, hickory, soft maple, black walnut, red cedar, willow and the coffee tree are to be found. Quite a number of forest trees have been planted, of the various kinds indigenous to the climate, and at the present time the catalpa tree is receiving considerable attention. The number of forest trees reported, in 1881, as under cultivation, was 323,100, and of fruit trees of all kinds, 1,415.

The same kinds of grasses grow here as in other counties in Northeastern Nebraska, blue joint being the principal variety, which yields luxuriant pasturage and abundance of hay. Tame grasses have received but little attention, as there is but little necessity for it. Clover does well, but some of the early settlers think the subsoil of Nebraska is generally too warm for timothy.

There is an abundance of water in Cedar County. The Missouri River bounds it on the north, and receives the water from East, Middle and West Bow Creeks, besides other smaller streams. Logan and Middle Creeks and several branches of the north fork of the Elkhorn drain the southern portion. Excellent springs abound, and good wells may be had by digging from ten to seventy-five feet.

THE INDIANS.

The Indians have at different times caused the people of Cedar County considerable trouble. In the year 1858, a party of Ponca Indians stole five oxen belonging to Platt Saunders and Martin Chapman. These Poncas were returning from a visit they had just made the Omahas
by permission of the agent on their reservation in Dakota, and stole the oxen for food. Notice
was given to the settlers in the county, and a party of forty-nine of them started in pursuit.
After having followed the trail a day or two, they discovered the Indians on the opposite side
of the creek, drying the flesh of the oxen which they had killed. The creek prevented an
attack, and the Indians, about thirty in number, including men, women and children, fled,
leaving behind all their provisions, and all escaped except one woman with her papoose.
With her as a prisoner, the settlers proceeded to the Ponca Agency, and reported the theft.
The Ponca chiefs, upon receiving the woman, whipped her with their lariats unmercifully,
and would doubtless have beaten her to death but for the interposition of the agent. They
then sent out a party of warriors to bring in the depredators, and, upon ascertaining the
amount of loss Saunders and Chapman had suffered, make it good.

In 1862, about fifty of the citizens of Cedar County joined Company I, of the Second
Nebraska Cavalry, raised for the purpose of defending the frontier settlements against
Indians. Of this number were John Andrews, Henry Clopping, Ernest and Augustus Ferber,
William Guite, Henry Morton, Henson Wiseman and Moses H. Deming, the latter being
First Lieutenant of the company.

In 1863, this regiment went to Dakota to join Gen. Sully's command, and during the absence
of Mr. Wiseman, a party of Yankton and Santee Sioux attacked his five children, who were
at home alone, and killed them all. Mrs. Wiseman was that day in Yankton, and thus escaped
the fate of her children. Three were killed outright, a boy aged seventeen, who had evidently
done noble battle in defense of his sister and younger brothers; another boy, aged thirteen,
and one eight years old. The youngest of the family, a little five-year-old boy, lived three
days; the girl, aged fifteen, lived five days, but never spoke after the return of her friends.
Her person bore evidence of the most brutal outrage, a cartridge had been exploded in her
mouth and an arrow pierced the lower part of her body, passing out above the hips.

These atrocious murders, seldom exceeded in fiendishness and cowardice, caused great
consternation among the early settlers, as, during the absence of the Second Nebraska
Cavalry in Dakota, they were without defense.

In the year 1864, occurred what is called the great stampede. The Sioux, Cheyennes and
other hostile tribes of Indians threatened the annihilation of the frontier settlements. Almost
the entire population of the counties lying west of Cedar were fleeing before a supposed
pursuing body of 10,000 warlike Indians. The settlers of Cedar County hastily consulted
among themselves and decided to remain and defend themselves as best they could. At St.
James, a fortification, 100 feet square, with an embankment nine feet high around the
courthouse, was constructed. The inhabitants of St. Helena also fortified themselves, four
families in number, re-enforced by quite a number of Norwegian families from across the
Missouri River in Dakota. Thus they awaited an expected attack by the Indians, which, for
some unexplained reason, although carefully planned, was never attempted to be put into
execution. Portions of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry were stationed at St. Helena and at St.

James. At the latter place, a fort, called Fort Jackson, was built and the company remained about a year, when they were removed. Since then the Indians have caused the settlers but little trouble.

Other circumstances have retarded the settlement of the county. The war of the rebellion may be mentioned as one, and much of the choicest land has been held by non-residents, so that but little has been subject to homestead or pre-emption. The grasshopper visitations of 1874 have also had much to do with it, but now a steady increase in the number of inhabitants is observable, and the prospect is exceedingly encouraging for a bright and prosperous future.

In 1872, the County Commissioners purchased a pile-driver, to be used in building bridges. About fifty pile bridges have been built, besides many others. Communication between the different parts of the county is, therefore, easy, especially as the roads are always good. Probably no country in the world has better natural roads than Nebraska. The great need of Cedar County now is a railroad to facilitate communication with the outside world, to render markets more easily accessible and to induce more rapid immigration into the county.

COUNTY ORGANIZATION.

The county was organized by an act of the Territorial Legislature approved February 12, 1857, and the county seat located by the same act at a town called St. James, by the mouth of the River Petit Arc. The first election was held in the fall of 1857, and the following officers chosen: Commissioners, John Patterson, A. S. Chase and D. F. Ames; Probate Judge, M. Jones; Clerk, George L. Roberts. In 1858, an election was held with the following result: Commissioners, Abraham Haling, John Patterson and D. F. Ames; Probate Judge, George L. Roberts; Clerk, Nelson Collamer; Treasurer, George A. Hall. The county officers elected in 1880 were the following: Commissioners, Dennis O'Flaharty, Amos L. Parker and Joseph Hochstein; Probate Judge, Guy R. Wilbur; Clerk, Baptiste Joesten; Treasurer, Thomas Ebinger; Surveyor, Andrew McNeal; Superintendent of Schools, R. T. O'Gara.

Cedar County was represented in the Territorial Legislature by George A Hall, elected in 1865, re-elected in 1866, and in the State Legislature by Lewis E. Jones, elected in 1868; L. M. Howard, elected in 1872, George A. Hall, elected in 1876, and J. A. Zeigler, in 1878. John Aten was elected to the State Senate in 1876.

The first children born in the county were twins, a son and a daughter, to Mr. and Mrs. George A. Hall.

There are three saw-mills in the county, one in connection with the Bow Valley Mills below St. James, one on St. Helena Island, just below St. Helena, built in 1878 by A. J. J. Lee, and one in the St. Helena timber above St. Helena, built in 1870, by J. J. Ferber.
The first saw-mill in the county was brought in by the company which settled at St. James in 1857; the second was brought in in 1858, by Lewis E. Jones, and located near St. Helena. In the spring of 1860, it was burned down, but rebuilt the following summer.

**COUNTY MATTERS.**

At a special election held April 8, 1876, the electors of Cedar voted in aid of the Covington, Columbus & Black Hills Railroad, $150,000 in bonds. The total taxable valuation for 1875, upon which the amount of bonds was based was $1,013,495. The amount of bonds was, therefore, nearly 15 per cent of the assessed valuation. As no county could legally bond itself for more than 10 per cent of such valuation, the bonds were declared illegal by the Supreme Court of the State, and were not issued. The road was partly graded to the middle of the county, when work ceased.

The schools of Cedar County are in good condition. There are thirty-one districts, twenty-nine schoolhouses, 1,168 children of school age, and thirty-eight teachers. The schoolhouse sites are valued at $307, houses at $13,645, books and apparatus at $1,230. The school at St. Helena is in an exceptionally flourishing condition, about seventy scholars being in attendance.

The taxable property in the county in 1881 was as follows: horses, 1,618, value, $57,716; cattle, 9,603, value, $95,312; mules, 49, value, $2,097; sheep, 2,652, value, $3,980; hogs, 3,121, value, $5,042; vehicles, 422, value, $7,246; money in merchandise, $10,527; in manufactures, $888; agricultural implements, $14,888; credits, $22,100; furniture, $3,236; other property, $8,062. Number of acres of improved lands, $29,362, value, $94,737; number of acres of unimproved lands, 310,351, value, $668,407; number of improved village lots, 115, value, $9,543; unimproved, 12,591, value, $18,116. In explanation of the assessment of this large number of unimproved village lots, it may be added that 10,768 of them are in the paper town of Curlew, which town, although having a legal, has no real, existence, and the lots in it are worth no more than open prairie.

The population of the county in 1860 was 246; in 1870, 1,032; in 1880, 2,789; and in 1881, 2,933. Males, 1,591; females, 1,342.

**THE FLOOD OF 1881.**

In Cedar County the great flood of March, 1881, caused great loss of property, but fortunately no loss of human life. A number of farms on the Missouri bottom were overflowed, some of them with all the improvements in buildings and fences, together with most or all of the livestock, not only submerged but washed away and destroyed. Their owners, who thus without warning lost the toilsome accumulations of years, were in many cases obliged to commence life anew, as they had begun ten, fifteen or twenty years before.
Among those who lost heavily was Sabie Strahm, after whom the town of Strahmburg received its name. About sixty acres of his land was washed away, together with house and barn, horses and cattle, his total loss being about $12,000. John Nelson, a farmer living about half a mile south of Green Island, lost about fifty cattle, eight horses, twelve mules and the frame portion of his house. The other part of his house was constructed of brick, and furnished a refuge for six hours for fifty people while the flood was at its height. Upon the roof of this house, while destruction was going on around, prayers were offered up by Rev. Mr. Seccombe, for the safe deliverance of themselves and others in similar dangers. About eight at a time, they were safely conveyed in a skiff to Henry Morton's house, a mile and a half away. At Mr. Grime's house, two miles east of Green Island, thirty people collected for safety. From the house they were driven to the barn, and from the roof of the barn some of them fled to a scaffolding constructed in the branches of a large tree. Here they remained from 3 o'clock in the afternoon to 3 o'clock next morning, when, as the weather had become freezing cold, they crept back into the barn. When daylight came, five young men and two young women, Emma Mallory and Mattie Mix, started over cakes of ice for land, four miles away, which they reached in safety, the water being fourteen feet deep under the ice most of the way. But, during the continuance of this great flood, the center of danger and interest, and the scene of the most destruction in Cedar County, was at Green Island, immediately opposite Yankton, Dak. The town was situated on bottom land, close to the river and from six to fifteen feet above it. Before the flood, it was a busy town of 150 inhabitants, containing about fifteen dwelling houses, the post office, a blacksmith shop, a hotel, a store and two churches--Methodist and Congregational. The waters began to rise on Tuesday, March 30, and entirely surrounded the town. Many people, apprehensive of high water, had moved their stock and household goods to places of safety. On Wednesday the 31st, the gorge in the narrows above broke, and suddenly there rushed down around and upon the devoted little town an irresistible and overwhelming torrent of waters bearing on their bosom great masses of ice, which carried away and destroyed almost everything in their course. The Congregational Church, a fine structure with a tall spire, unable to withstand the tremendous blows of the immense cakes of ice, left its foundation, turned half way round, and swaying as it went, gracefully floated away with the current, until, about a mile below, it was lost to view behind some trees, where it was broken to pieces. It is said that people in Yankton, of hearing the tolling of its bell, although they well knew there had never been a bell inside the church. Shortly after the church, building after building followed, including the schoolhouse and large hotel, until all were gone but one, which was but partially destroyed. On the roofs of several, their owners and others floated, until they either were rescued or rescued themselves. Within two hours this all occurred. "The most imaginative writer of fiction never pictured a destruction more swift, more dreadful nor more complete." The farms were destroyed by the washing of sand on to their surface, covering them up to the depth of several inches. On the old town site of Green Island (Strahmburg) there have been since erected two hotels, a blacksmith shop and a house or two.

The total loss of property, real and personal, by reason of the great flood of March 31, 1881, in Cedar County, is estimated at $100,000.
A large, new steam ferry-boat now connects the old town of Green Island with Yankton. Its first trip was made April 18, 1882.