



Red River Valley History

1670-1870

Hudson's Bay Company was incorporated in England on May 2, 1670. The Hudson's Bay Company engaged in the fur trade during its first two centuries, establishing a number of posts on the shores of Hudson Bay. After the British conquest of Canada (1759-60), the company began to build fur-trading posts inland.

1730's

The first European explorer to reach the Red River Valley was the French voyageur, Pierre Gaultier de Varennes. He reached the Red River in 1732 and established a series of posts in the area, including Fort Rouge on the present site of Winnipeg. He called it the Red River because of the reddish brown silt it carries. The French trade cut severely into Hudson's Bay Company profits at its post by the bay and forced the company to expand inland.

1811-36

The first permanent settlement by Europeans in the Red River Basin was founded on the banks of the Red River near the mouth of the Assiniboine River (in present-day Manitoba). The Red River Settlement colony, whose official name was Assiniboia, was founded in 1811-12 by the Earl of Selkirk, who purchased a land grant from the Hudson's Bay Company of 116,000 square miles in the Red and Assiniboine river valleys.

1812

Several Scottish families emigrated to the area. They became the first permanent settlers to farm in the Red River Valley. They built

the first known man-made dam in the Red River Basin, near present day Winnipeg, Manitoba.

1816

The Seven Oaks Massacre destroyed the Hudson's Bay Company's Red River Settlement. The Red River Settlement colony was restored the following year.

1818

The Red River Valley below the 49 degree of North Latitude became a part of the United States by treaty with Great Britain. The Red River Valley portion of North Dakota and Minnesota did not become a part of the United States by way of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

1820's

Pembina became an important hunting and trading center and a major link in the transportation network which developed between St. Paul and the "lower" Red River Basin. There were trails along both sides of the river to carry products to the Selkirk Settlement or to St. Paul.

1820-1850's - Red River Ox Carts

The flat plains and uniquely designed ox carts made it much easier and cheaper to supply the Red River Valley settlements from Minnesota than from eastern Canada. In the early 1800's, supplies were shipped on trails from St. Paul, via St. Anthony to Fort Garry and other Red River Valley settlements. The earliest trail led south along the Red River from Pembina to Lake Traverse and followed the Minnesota River southeastward. By

1850, hundreds of carts were making the trip each year. The Red River Ox Carts were built entirely of wood. Though crudely made and noisy because of the wheels' screeching on the wooden axles, the carts provided effective transportation. The boxlike body of the cart, resting on the wooden axle, rode high, making the fording of streams easier. A single ox could pull a cart with a load of eight or nine hundred pounds.

1836

The Hudson's Bay Company purchased the Red River Settlement from the Selkirk estate and created the District of Assiniboia. The region became part of the province of Manitoba in 1870.

1858

Minnesota became a state. Its western boundaries were cut back from the Missouri River to the Red River.

1859-1871—Steamboat Era

The Anson Northup was the first steamboat on the Red River in 1859. Four additional boats were built between 1871 and 1874.

Steamboating on the Red River lasted 53 years, with steamboats carrying a variety of trade goods on the Red River between the Selkirk Colony and Georgetown. The last steamboat sank at Grand Forks in 1912.

1860's

Decline of the fur trade in the Red River Valley begins.

1862

The Homestead Act was passed by the U.S. Congress, giving title to 160 acres of unoccupied public land to each homesteader on payment of a nominal fee and required five years of residence. This legislation opened up the Valley to a flood of pioneers who turned to wheat farming.

1867

Great Britain enacted the British North America Act of 1867, forming the Dominion of Canada and giving Canada self-governing authority.

1870

Canada established the province of Manitoba.

1871

Railroads reached the Red River from St. Paul and Duluth, Minn., providing a vital trade link between the Valley and St. Paul, and further opening the basin to settlement. The railroads influenced development of the Red River Valley by selling vast acres of railroad lands, and by much promotion and advertising of the area.

1871-1886

The era of Red River Valley "bonanza farms." Many bonanza farms had thousands of acres under the plow. This was also the era of a boom in settlement which saw the population increase almost sixfold.

1889

Dakota Territory was divided, and both North and South Dakota were admitted to the Union on Nov. 2, 1889.

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