

Morton's History of Nebraska

Authentic—1400 to 1906—Complete

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INTRODUCTORY.

The history of Nebraska was projected in 1897 by the late J. Sterling Morton, who was assisted by Dr. Geo. L. Miller. It was the ambition and dream of Mr. Morton to have the history he had undertaken complete in all details. He did not live to see this wish realized, yet he worked diligently up to the time of his death, having assembled a vast portion of what is now the most complete historical work of any state in the Union. Mr. Morton vividly realized the task he had set out to accomplish and in a prospectus of the history, written when it was projected, he, in enthusiastically setting forth important features of a worthy work of that kind and its great importance, expressed the following vivid appreciation of the great labor and expense involved in the undertaking, by reason of its magnitude and the fact that its field was as yet unexplored:

"But as yet the story of those stirring times and the narrative of the first struggles between barbarism and civilization on these plains is unwritten. More than thirty years have elapsed since Nebraska ascended from territorial to state government and was transformed from a federal dependency to a sovereign member of the American Union. In all those years no faithful history of the commonwealth from its inception has been essayed and only a few meager sketches of its morning time and its pioneers have ever been published. The time and the opportunity for a history of Nebraska has arrived. It is our duty to gather together in good and enduring form all the stories and heroisms of the frontier territory and to truthfully portray the moral and mental strength of the courageous men and women who made it so strong and vigorous that it evolved the state.

"And then, uniting the forerunners of the frontier with the pioneers of the new state, this history shall demonstrate the self-reliance, the self-denial, and the self-respect which characterized and glorified those men and women who relinquished friends, relatives, and all the charms and associations of their dear homes in the East to become the forerunners of a new civilization on these plains. There is a universal demand for a creditable history which shall give the youth of Nebraska a correct understanding of its founders. In almost every county there are men and women whose influence and labors have made them italicized forces in industrial and social progress. Many of these are of relatively recent citizenship, but by their superior abilities and tireless energies they have impressed themselves ineffaceably upon the welfare and growth of their respective localities, and in fact upon the entire state. Such men and women not only make the history of a state—they construct and fashion the state itself.

"The editors and publishers realize that this historical work requires vast labor and research and the outlay of a very large sum of money. But they have faith in the pride of ancestry, pride of home, and pride of state which permeates Nebraska citizenship, and therefore enter upon the work with an exultant assurance of making it a marked and triumphant success."

HISTORY OF NEBRASKA.

CHAPTER I.

Natural Conditions, Traditional, Fanciful, and Authentic.

In the long run physical environment, such as soil, climate, and topography, shape the man and the society; but human character and social propensities, formed in older states and in other and older countries, have been transplanted into this new state, and, while, according to a marked American instinct or characteristic, the people have been quick to adapt themselves to a somewhat important change of conditions, yet the time during which they have been subject to them has been too short appreciably to change their character or social aspect. If they had only the richest and most easily tillable soil in the world to conjure with, this might tend to breed mental and esthetic dulness; but they have been saved from this influence by the rarefied and bracing atmosphere, by the sunshine in which they are almost perennially bathed, as well as by certain adverse climatic conditions which challenge their vigilance and ingenuity. While the people of the plains have missed the comforting companionship of brooks and hills and groves, whose friendly presence sustained the courage and inspired the esthetic sense of the settlers of the Mississippi valley, yet these plains have a beautiful aspect of their own which often inspired the limning pen of Irving and engaged Cooper's romantic eye. The illimitable expanse of landscape, the unrivaled beauty of morning and evening lights and shades, the marvelous clearness of the air, however monotonous, do not fail to excite the esthetic sensibility and widen the spiritual vision of the people. But when Irving undertook to estimate the material value, and to picture the future usefulness and devel-

opment of this vast prairie empire, he looked with blindfold eyes and painted a dismal black:

"It is a land where no man permanently abides. . . . Such is the nature of this immense wilderness of the far West, which apparently defies cultivation and the habitation of civilized life. Some portions of it along the rivers may partially be subdued by agriculture; others may form vast pastoral tracts like those of the east; but it is to be feared that a great part of it will form a lawless interval between the abodes of civilized man, like the waters of the ocean and the deserts of Arabia; and like them be subject to the depredations of the marauders."

And then, as this polished post-historian continues to contemplate the lurid prospect, his style, in general the refinement of grace, dignity, and self-control, breaks into an almost grotesque delineation of the fate of a land which was destined within the space of a man's life to become "the home, the portion fair" of nearly ten million prosperous and happy people. And Cooper, the leading romanticist of that day, observes in *The Prairie* that the plains are "in fact a vast country incapable of sustaining a dense population in the absence of the two great necessities"—wood and water. This great story-teller affected a knowledge of geology, but it was not profound enough to penetrate to the inexhaustible sheet of subterranean water which, fed by the eternal snows of the Rocky mountains, is co-extensive with the great slope between these mountains and the Missouri river and within easy reach of the modern and post-Irving-Cooper windmills which now dot these plains in such profusion that they would set a whole legion of Don Quixotes in simultaneous frenzy. Nor could the lively imagination of these great romancers foresee the practicability of the substitution for the lacking wood of the great deposits of coal in the adjacent mountains and underlying a large part of these vast plains, because railroad transportation was beyond Irving's ken or fancy and Cooper's practical view. As to this, Cooper skeptically remarks: "It is a singular comment on the times that plans for railroads across these vast plains are in active discussion, and that men have ceased to regard these projects as chimerical."

And Long, in the story of his expedition of 1819, gives the following hopeless characterization to the Nebraska plains, which, in their easterly portion at least, for prolific production of live stock and of the forage which sustains them, including the staple cereals, and for ease of cultivation and lasting fertility, excel any other region of so large an area in the world:

"The rapidity of the current [of the Platte river] and the great width of the bed of the river preclude the possibility of any extensive inundation of the surrounding country. The bottom lands of the river rise by an imperceptible ascent, on each side, extending laterally to a distance of from two to ten miles, where they are terminated by low ranges of gravelly hills, running parallel to the general direction of the river. Beyond these the surface is an undulating plain, having an elevation of from fifty to one hundred feet, and presenting the aspect of hopeless and irreclaimable sterility."

Logically Long's conclusion as to the hopeless sterility of the plains of the Platte should be an inference from the misstatement of fact by Marbois, made as late as 1830, in his history of Louisiana: "On the two sides of the river 'Platte' are vast plains of sand from an hundred to an hundred and fifty leagues in extent where no indication of living creatures is to be found." The ignorance of Marbois is not as inexcusable or remarkable as the lame logic of Irving and Long, for the abundance of wild animals with which they perceived the plains were stocked should have suggested to them that the region would be peculiarly adapted, under cultivation, for the sustenance of domestic animal life.

When some phenomenon which may have been an eternal fact or is a manifestation of an eternal law of nature, but which has been hidden from our imperfect understanding, is, from the changing point of view or in the natural course of events, suddenly revealed, we call it Providence. And so this vast hidden reservoir of water and the man-wrought miracle of the steam railroad, which opened the way for the waiting millions, were the Providence of these plains. Because Irving and Cooper and their compeers failed mentally or physically to penetrate to the one and to divine the coming kingdom of the other, they consigned the whole region to the doom of eternal desolation. God indeed moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. This "wilderness which apparently defies cultivation and the habitation of civilized life" is the granary as well as the shambles of the world. Of two typical states—Iowa and Nebraska—which cut through the heart of the plains, the first is the imperial agricultural commonwealth of the richest farming country of the world, and in the production of the great good staples the other lags but little behind.

During incalculable numbers of centuries there was a like providential preparation on the surface of these

plains of the richest soil in the world to cover so wide an area.

CHAPTER II.

Aboriginal Occupants—Spanish and French Explorers—American Expeditions—Fur Trade—First Settlements.

The natural tendency of migration since history began has been westward; and the movements of the Amerind are not an exception to this general rule. As the streams which drain North America have a general trend from north to south, and as the rule for human activity is to proceed along the lines of least resistance, it might be supposed that the Amerind would follow up these streams and change the general order by moving forward from south to north or from north to south. There was a stronger influence than the mere contour of the land which drew the tide of emigration, although this had its effect to such an extent that the route of travel had a west-by-northwest trend. The food supply became the main factor in determining the direction of migration. The buffalo, which though indigenous to the whole central region of North America were partial to the open country, enticed the Indian to the Nebraska plains which they possessed in vast herds. This useful animal was the source of supply for every want: food from his flesh, raiment and shelter from his hide, implements from his bones, vessels for holding liquids from his intestines, and fuel from his dung. The buffalo made it possible for great numbers of Indians to subsist in comparative ease on the treeless plains of Nebraska. How much of the food supply of the aborigines, before the advent of the buffalo, may have been derived from agricultural pursuits is unknown; but it is certain that as the tribes spread westward and the buffalo became more numerous agriculture decreased, until, when white settlers first came in contact with the tribes of Nebraska, little attention was given to it.

By far the greater number of Indian tribes, which have inhabited the territory that now comprises Nebraska, followed this general rule of migration from east to west. These tribes belonged to two linguistic families, the Algonkian and Siouan. Both of these great families sprang from the region east of the Appalachian mountains and in turn occupied nearly the whole of the Mississippi valley.

The first occupants of Nebraska did not follow this rule. The Caddoan linguistic family had its home in the south near the banks of the Red river, and migrated northward, occupying the valleys of the Kansas river, and reaching northward to the valley of the Platte river and westward to the foothills of the mountains. Two other linguistic families, the Shoshonean and Kiowan, encroached on our territory from the west. They hunted along the headwaters of the Republican and Platte rivers, and claimed part of the territory of this state, but few, if any, ruins of their permanent homes are found within its present limits. Only these five linguistic families were found in Nebraska, and but two of them, the Caddoan and Siouan, are of importance to our history. Tribes of these two families had their permanent habitat within the state, and fought with one another and among themselves for supremacy on our eastern border and along the Platte valley.

The original home of the Caddoan linguistic family was on the Red river of the south. Prior to the year 1400 one band, known as the Skidi, branched off from the main stock and drifted to the Platte valley. The exact line of migration is difficult to determine, but a tradition says this tribe lived as allies of the Omahas near the mouth of the Ohio river. It is not impossible that they may have followed up the Missouri river in coming to the Platte valley, where, according to Dunbar, they were located in 1400. Prior to 1500 another band branched off from the main stock and drifted northward to a point near the present Kansas-Nebraska line. Here the Wichitas turned back and went south, while the Pawnees moved northward and occupied the Platte valley and intervening country. In 1541 Coronado found the Wichitas near the Kansas river and sent a summons to the "Lord of Harahey" (the Pawnee) to visit him, which he did with two hundred naked warriors. This is the earliest authentic record of Indian occupancy of Nebraska. This is the first time civilized man (if we can call Coronado's followers civilized) ever saw an Indian from what is now Nebraska. All history before this is legendary, and legendary history is so conflicting that we may only say that it is possibly true.

How far Onate penetrated in his trip northeastward from New Mexico, in 1599, is difficult to determine. He says he visited the city of Quivera, which was on the north bank of a wide and shallow river (very like the Platte). He says he fought with the "Escanzaques" and killed "a thousand." This battle may have been in Nebraska. Penalosa also claims to have visited the same locality in 1602, to have met the "Escanzaques," and to have beaten them in a like encounter. When these brief glimpses into

Spanish history are substantiated by further research we may be able to add some early data bearing on Indian occupancy of Nebraska.

The Pawnees (proper), consisting of three main tribes, the Choul (or Grand), the Pita-how-e-rat (or Tapa-ge), and the Kit-ke-hak-l (or Republican), emigrated to the Platte valley prior to 1500. They held the country fifty miles west of the Missouri river, and eventually conquered the Skidi band, which had come here a hundred years before, and adopted it into their own tribe. Before the Pawnees came, however, a band called Arikara had drifted away from the Skidi band and established itself on the Missouri river, but out of the bounds of Nebraska. The Arikaras came into Nebraska and lived with the Skidi tribe for three years, from 1832 to 1835, when they returned home.

In the *Huntsman's Echo* of February 21, 1861, the editor thus perceptively describes the condition of the Pawnees on their reserve at Genoa, as he had ascertained it by a visit there a few days before:

"The Pawnees number at present about four thousand souls and a fraction over, and when 'at home' live in a cluster of huts built with croches and poles, covered, top and sides, with willows, then with grass and dirt, giving the appearance at a little distance of an immense collection of 'potato hills,' all of a circular shape and oval. The entrance is through a passage walled with earth, the hole in the center at top serving both for window and chimney, the fire being built in the center. Along the sides little apartments are divided off from the main room by partitions of willow, rush or flag, some of them being neatly and tidily constructed, and altogether these lodges are quite roomy and comfortable, and each is frequently the abode of two or more families. In these villages there is no regularity of streets, walks, or alleys, but each build in a rather promiscuous manner, having no other care than to taste and convenience. The tribe is divided into five bands, each being under a special chief or leader, and the whole confederation being under one principal chief. Each band has its habitation separate and distinct from the other, three bands living in villages adjoining and all composing one village, the other two villages, some little distance. There is frequently some considerable rivalry between the several bands in fighting, hunting, and other sports, and not infrequently one band commits thefts upon the effects of another."

At this time, we are told, the Pawnees had several thousand horses, but owing to the hard winter hundreds had died from sore-tongue and other diseases. The animals lived out all the winter upon the dry grass; but if the snow was too deep for them to reach it, cottonwood trees were cut down and the horses would subsist upon the bark. These horses were above the luxuries of civilized life, and refused to eat corn when it was placed before them. They were valued at from thirty to sixty dollars each.

The Pawnees at this time usually took two general hunts each year in which all the people, old, young, great, and small participated, abandoning their villages to go to the buffalo range. From the spoils of the summer hunt they made jerked meat and lodge skins; and from those of the fall hunt, in October and November, they made robes, furs, tanned skins, and dried meat. These Indians had a field of considerable extent near each village where the land was allotted to the various families, and goodly quantities of corn and beans were grown. With these and a little flour and sugar they managed to eke out a miserable existence, sometimes full-fed and sometimes starved.

"The females are the working bees of the hive; they dig up the soil, raise and gather the crops, cut timber and build the lodges, pack wood and water, cook, nurse the babies, carry all the burdens, tan the skins and make the robes and moccasins. The lords of the other sex recline by the fire or in the shade, kill the game and their enemies, do the stealing and most of the eating, wear the most ornaments, and play the dandy in their way to a scratch. They are of a tall, graceful, and athletic figure, as straight as an arrow and as proud as a lord, whilst the squaws are short, thick, stooping, poorly clad, filthy, and squalid. Perverse children and the very aged are sometimes left behind, or by the wayside, to perish as useless."

Pike visited the Republican Pawnees in 1806; they dwelt near the south line of the state until about 1812, when they joined the rest of the band north of the Platte river. Dunbar gives the location of the various tribes in 1834: the Choul band resided on the south bank of the Platte, twenty miles above the mouth of the Loup; the Kit-ke-hak-l lived eighteen miles northwest, on the north side of the Loup; the Pita-how-e-rat, eleven miles farther up the Loup, and the Skidi, five miles above these; and he says they changed their villages every eight or ten years. In 1833 the Pawnees ceded the territory south of the Platte to the United States. In 1857 they ceded the territory north of the Platte, except their reservation in Nance county. The territory ceded, according to Chas. C.

Royce, embraced the central third of the entire state. The reservation above mentioned was ceded in 1876, and the Pawnees were taken to Indian Territory, where they now have a reservation.

The various branches of the Siouan linguistic stock have come to this state at five different times. The first were the Mandans, whose coming is shrouded in antiquity. Catlin claims to have traced their earthworks and habitat down the Ohio river and up the Missouri. McGee says the Siouan family began to cross the Appalachian mountains one thousand years ago. The Mandans were among the first to break off from the parent stock, and the only excuse we have for including them in our history is the probability that they crossed our borders on their way up the Missouri river some time prior to the coming of the Skidi band in 1400.

McGee says the Omaha tribe was near the mouth of the Ohio river in 1500, so its coming to Nebraska must have been earlier than that. It is traced quite accurately up the Missouri and Des Moines rivers to its present home in the northeast part of Nebraska. The Osage tribe branched off and remained at the Osage river. The Kansas tribe came on to the Kansas river, and there established its permanent habitat. The date of the arrival of the Kansas tribe is sufficiently early to allow the "Escanzaques" of Onate to be regarded as Kansas Indians. The Omahas and Poncas remained together until about 1650, when the latter moved northward and occupied the country from the mouth of the Niobrara west to the Black Hills. By the treaty of March 16, 1854, the Omahas ceded the northeast third of the present state to the United States, excepting that part north of a line drawn due west from the mouth of the Aoway river. That tongue of land which was added to Nebraska in 1890, by authority of the act of Congress of March 28, 1882, and which lies between the Niobrara, Keya Paha, and Missouri rivers, was ceded by the Poncas in 1858, except a small reservation. In 1877 the Poncas were moved to Indian Territory.

The *Dakota City Herald*, in noting that the Omahas had just received their annuity on their reservation from Captain Moore, Indian agent, makes the following observation as to their condition: "They are being gathered to their fathers fast, very fast, as they now number only 964 savage souls. The amount of their payment was \$23,000 and averaged about \$24 a head. Since Uncle Sam supplied them with a few 'scads' they have paid frequent visits to our town, and laid something out for the purpose of laying something in." From the observant editor's remarks it appears that the Indians did not confine their inebriety to alcoholic drinks. He relates that "five of these red sons of the forest, two red squaws in red blankets, and one pale red papoose put up at the Bates house on Sunday night for supper." They had a table by themselves, by courtesy of the landlord, and, "in the language of the Arkansas bride, 'they sot and sot' until they stowed away everything eatable within reach or sight. Seventy-seven cups of coffee were drank at the sitting, and but one, a young squaw, gave out. After getting down seven cups she fell on coffee; the others kept on until the kettle gave out. When the meal was over they paid the landlord two bits apiece and departed."

The third detachment of the Siouan family to occupy Nebraska consisted of three tribes, the Otoe, Missouri, and the Iowa. The Otoes and Iowas have always been closely related. They were first seen at the mouth of the Des Moines river by Marquette in 1673. They are said, by tradition, to have sprung from the Winnebago stock. It is stated that in 1699 they went to live near the Omahas. The Missourians have had a very checkered career. They were first seen in 1670 at the mouth of the Missouri river. Soon after 1700 they were overcome by the Sac and Fox and other tribes. Most of them joined the Otoe tribe, but a few went with the Osage and some joined the Kansas tribe. They have never ceded land to the United States except in company with the Otoes, but they have been a party to every Otoe transaction. To all intents and purposes the Otoes and Missourians have been as one tribe during their occupancy of this state.

The Otoes and Missourians ceded the southeast portion of the state to the United States in 1833; this cession embraced the land south and west of the Nemaha. The remaining portion of land which they claimed lay between the Nemaha, Missouri, and Platte rivers, reaching as far west as Seward county. This last tract was ceded in 1854, when they returned to their reservation south of Beatrice. This they relinquished in 1881, and they now live in Indian Territory. Most of the Iowas remained east of our border until 1836, when they were given a tract of land along the south bank of the Nemaha. This they retained in part in individual allotment, but they remain under the Great Nemaha agency. This tribe was always closely associated with the Otoe, but was never under the same tribal organization as was the Missouri tribe. All three tribes belonged to the same branch of the Siouan family as the Winnebago.