

NORTHERN NEBRASKA.

Minute Description of Madison, Knox, Cedar, Holt and Antelope Counties.

Magnificent Farming or Stock Raising Land to be Had for Almost Nothing.

Correspondence of The Bee.

OMAHA, Neb., March 20, 1882.—To one who for a number of years have lived in the Platte valley or on the level plateau in Southern Nebraska between Ashland and Kearney, and has got accustomed to the monotony of the level prairie with its hundreds of sections of fertile land, which can hardly be told one from another, it is like making a trip to another state to visit Northern Nebraska.

At present time when not only all the homestead land has been taken, but also nearly all of the best railroad land has been sold in the former mentioned district, a correct and impartial description of this hitherto step-motherly treated part of our state may be of public interest. In this hope I have taken my pen in hand, but even if I should be mistaken in regard to the value of the information, I think myself able to give in regard to this part of Nebraska, I shall still consider myself well paid for my trouble in writing this letter, if I only thereby should guide a few of my fellow-citizens to a selection of a good future home on Uncle Sam's domain, and thereby free themselves from the necessity of strikes on account of ill-paid labor.

Let me here remark that since 1865 when the writer first beheld the Nebraska prairies in their virgin beauty, I have been a constant and zealous advocate of the advisability for people without sure incomes, to take up public land, and by their own effort work themselves up to become independent owners of "happy homes" sooner than to swell the throng of applicants for labor with its fluctuating supply, which often forces them to travel from town to town, and every winter almost invariably compels them to spend the last dollar which they, even with the strictest economy and diligence, were able to save during the summer. How enviable compared with such a fate seems to me even the struggles of the homesteaders.

It is not my intention to undervalue the desirability for anyone undertaking to obtain a new home on public land, to have at least a few hundred dollars to start with; but on the other hand I have known and can mention cases where people who started with nothing but empty labor, harnessed hands and an uncomparable will, even to succeed better than others who had their hundreds and even thousands to start with, and I believe that what has been done can be done again. The homestead law does not prevent anybody from working for others until the owner has his land in culture, and then is able only to work for himself for the balance of his life. From this long transgression let me proceed with my theme.

The main difference of Northern Nebraska from its half sister south of the Platte river is two-fold.

1st. It has as a general thing more rolling land, and second, a great many more running streams, and on account thereof also less depth to water than Southern Nebraska. Both of those seem only to be in its favor at the present time, when Nebraska farmers are going largely into the raising of corn, cattle and hogs, and lots of wheat and other small grain beautifully alone.

In other regards Northern Nebraska stands very far behind its sister half. I mean in the number of its inhabitants. The cause thereof is obvious. Until of quite a late date it has had no railroads, and consequently it has been more trouble and expense to hunt for a home there than in Southern Nebraska, and the north part of the State has had no incorporation influence used whatever trying to bring residents within her borders. Still another cause for the poorly settled condition of a good deal of the best land in Northern Nebraska exist, to-wit: It is owned by speculators, who have bought it for a trifle direct from the government, and who unlike the railroad companies are willing to sell or improve, and far less will make any effort or expenditures to that effect. A single honorable exception to this rule I shall mention further on.

MADISON COUNTY. What a change since I was here several years ago, I involuntarily exclaimed when I stepped from the cars of one of the railroads that centres at Norfolk in Madison county. I was so much more able to notice this change as in former years my own humble little log cabin gave shelter to myself and my family not far from where Norfolk stands to-day. I shall not dwell long on this subject, or go into poetic eruptions by the remembrance of the time when I walked barefooted behind a pair of oxen breaking Nebraska land. Suffice it here to say that Madison county is traversed by the beautiful Elkhorn river and its north branch, Union creeks and other streams, and is one of the best and best settled counties in all of Northern Nebraska.

Only little railroad and speculators land remain unsold in Madison county and homesteads are out of question to obtain. I found my former neighbors all in very prosperous conditions with fine frame houses and barns for which the more modest log or sod houses had given room.

Norfolk with its net of railroads will in my estimation in the future become what Hastings is to-day in Southern Nebraska, one of the largest and most prosperous of the towns.

PIERCE COUNTY. North of Madison county comes Pierce county and connected there with by a branch of the Sioux City & Pacific railroad running from Norfolk to Creighton in Knox county. The land in Pierce county varies very much, from some of the richest in the State to some almost worthless sand land. In the east half of the county there is a great deal of speculators land and some railroad land. From Hadar, the first station north of Norfolk, and north,

only a few houses are seen and quite a lot of good land may yet be obtained at fair prices between there and Pierce, the county seat. From Pierce north the train runs through fine bottom lands traversed by small streams but hardly a house is in sight before you come near to Plainview, a fine little new town. For miles around this place the country was well settled on account of no speculators land being found here, as the west half of Pierce county was never in market, but was reserved for the use of actual settlers. From Plainview I went northeast into Knox and Cedar counties. In the northeastern part of Pierce county I found quite a number of new built, roomy houses with adjoining barns on different quarter sections of land and with considerable new breaking on each quarter. I learned that they were all owned by Mr. Thompson, of Davenport, Iowa, who is a wealthy land owner in the district. During 1881 he had over 4,000 acres broken (80 acres on each quarter), and built the aforementioned houses on the farms, which he now rents out, mostly to German farmers. If other speculators would do likewise they would not only benefit themselves very materially, but also the whole district where they have invested their means. In Pierce county some vacant government land remains untaken.

KNOX AND CEDAR COUNTIES.

As far as I saw and could ascertain, both of these counties are very much alike in their general features. Both have excellent land and an uncommon number of fine small creeks, rippling near the undulating surface, and also some larger streams carrying the water into the Big Muddy (Missouri river), which forms the northern boundary of both counties. In both counties are also found some very rough land, especially where the heads of the creeks are found, and in fact land so rough that it is unfit for anything but stock raising, for which it probably is even better adapted than the most level land, as both the soil and grass is good.

Some fine settlements are found in both counties along the larger streams; but the cold weather forced me to return before I could visit those settlements, which was my intention when I started. The whole part of those counties I visited, that is the south-west part of Knox and the southeast part of Cedar was only (next to the land as described above) remarkable by the almost total absence of settlers. For over 20 miles I only found two houses, and the same solitude reigned, as I was informed, for at least 10 miles further east until the traveler reaches Smithland postoffice, located in about the center of Cedar county.

As a storm and very cold weather came upon us while I visited those parts in the inhospitable regions, we were indeed lucky in finding two days good quarters by the family of Mr. A. M. Lee, who lives close to a very fine lot timber on one of the branches of Bow creek. The residence is located on section 33, township 31, range 2 west, on the south line of the section. A well-built frame house and a kind grey oak log sheltered by a very estimable family. Mr. Lee was absent, but his wife, with the help of two newly grown up sons and a daughter 13 years old, took care of the place and its business, which consisted principally in stock raising for which the place was remarkably well selected, not only on account of the shelter offered to stock in the rather large grove of timber along the creek, but also near by, as the oldest son informed me, that for five miles around there was running water on each half section of land. Mr. Lee's postoffice address is Blyville, Knox county, Neb.

Only very little and this very rough government land remains in the part of the two counties I visited. A good deal of land is vacant in Knox county as well as in Antelope county yet, but I also learned that quite a lot of good land was offered for sale on long credit at the quite reasonable price of \$3 per acre. As this very likely is selected land, and part of it probably has running water, I hardly see that any better place for engaging in stock-raising in Nebraska can be found.

Mr. C. B. Nelson, of Omaha, was said to be general agent for the land offered for sale in the two counties. I forgot to mention that in the whole part of described part of our state no failure of crops is said to have occurred on account of drought for the last thirteen years, or as long as the county has been settled, and the vicinity of all the land to the Missouri river seems to insure an abundance of rain each year.

On another recent trip to Long Pine, the present terminus of the Sioux City & Pacific railroad, I stopped off at Neligh, in Antelope county, where the U. S. land office for this district is located, in order to obtain full and correct information about the vacant government land, and I am pleased to state that all information I desired was cheerfully given by the gentlemanly officer of said land office, which also was the case at the land office of North Platte, where I also inquired for information. It is my duty especially to mention this, as quite a different treatment was offered by the gentlemanly officer of said land office, which also was the case at the land office of North Platte, where I also inquired for information. It is my duty especially to mention this, as quite a different treatment was offered by the gentlemanly officer of said land office, which also was the case at the land office of North Platte, where I also inquired for information.

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either owned by railroad companies or speculators. The bluffs are rather rolling, and in some places even rough.

It struck me that already in the west part of Holt county the country, if by no means unfit for general farming, was still better adapted to stock-raising in its various branches. At the head of Elkhorn river there is a very large area of bottom land subject to overflowing in the rainy season, but containing excellent grass, well adapted for being made into baled hay for shipment, especially so, as it lays right close to the station Stewart, and two next stations west. A large portion of this hay land is yet vacant government land. It lays in the Niobrara land district.

A careful examination of the township plats of Wheeler county (Wheeler county has double the amount of all ships of ordinary counties in Nebraska, or 32 in place of 16), revealed the fact that here is still a large portion of the land vacant yet or subject to be taken under the pre-emption, homestead or timber culture laws, and also, that there is quite a lot of good land in said county, a large portion of poor or sandy land, especially in the west part thereof, and this, I believe, holds also good for all the lands further west. It is spotted, or good land surrounded by bad land, or vice versa.

It will here only be just to add that while the land in Wheeler county, and also in parts of Antelope and Holt counties are, at present, rather situated some distance from railroads, that there is more than a prospect that the branch of the U. P. railroad now running to Albion in Boone county will, before long, be extended into this very district, and most earnestly do I consider this part of the state to contain the most valuable vacant government land in Nebraska, and well worth a trip of the land hunters, as hundreds and even thousands of good claims can yet be taken here.

LONG PINE AND THE COUNTRY AROUND.

Still further west, in the unorganized territory west of Holt county (judicially belonging thereto), the Sioux City & Pacific trains land the passengers at Long Pine Station. It is after midnight when the trains arrive here, and passengers have to wait till next day before they can satisfy their curiosity in regard to the surrounding country about which so much has been said lately. The first glance will surely disappoint the beholder, for the land around the new town is very sandy, and yet he will find a cornfield not far off, which shows that good corn was raised here.

On my first visit to Long Pine I heard so much about the good land further west, six to eight miles, at Boone and Turkey creeks, that I concluded to make a more careful examination of the country, and therefore I visited it a second time. I found most beautiful laying land there, level or slightly rolling, extending over at least three townships, and the soil was all that could be desired, or from good to rich, and resting either on clay subsoil or gravel. I also saw some smaller and larger creeks with crystal clear water running in winter and summer. Besides, on the Long Pine creek there was considerable timber growing in the large canyons, which affords most excellent shelter for stock.

In regard to farming, or whether this vast, far-west territory of our state in the near future be a well settled and prosperous part thereof, the only question that can arise in the negative is: Does it rain enough for successful farming? Many, and among them the oldest settlers, claim that it does. Others are doubtful yet. It seems to be a proven fact that all kind of vegetables grows there to perfection, also that corn (especially the earlier kinds) can be raised, while many still doubted that the large and later ripening kinds would mature here.

In my estimation the whole country from Long Pine north to Niobrara and Keya Paha rivers, and west to Snake and Minnehaha rivers, which is mostly vacant yet, is wonderfully well adapted to stock-raising, and may in time also prove to be a very good farming country, but I hardly think it advisable for anybody to go there and at once break up a lot of land for extensive farming. Rather go slow and feel your way! In one thing is the district here decidedly ahead of other parts of Nebraska. I mean in regard to timber for fuel and fences, and also partly for buildings. In spite of the nearly total destruction of the cedars (for fence posts) which is daily going on, where they can be reached in a day's drive from the station, there is still pine, oak and elm trees enough left as a supply for the eventual settlers for a good many years. The destruction of the cedars could be called shameful, but for the fact that poor people make a living thereof who else could not have succeeded in the district and supported their families.

The question in my mind and why I have written this long letter is: Can we, at the present time, when so extraordinary efforts are being made, by fair and foul means, to draw not only the foreign emigration, but also the native settlers, to far off northern states and territories; can we here in Nebraska see this without at least to give the hint, that a far better country may be found nearer by, and a country that at least, in regard to health and pleasant climate, is all that can be desired, and where thousands may yet find happy homes on vacant government land. The answer to this question ought to be "Yes."

To the best of my ability I have tried to give this hint, and in accordance with the strictest facts, and at least for a part of the here described territory (the eastern part) can I with a good conscience advise anybody to look for a future home and to receive as a gift from Uncle Sam 160 or 320 acres of free land under the homestead and timber culture laws. In conclusion I will say that it is my most ardent conviction that land which today can be had for the taking, and ere many years passes, be entirely out of the reach of the poor man or those with only moderate means.

FAITHFUL.

John G. Jacobs, (For nearly of Gish & Jacobs.)

LAND TAKER

OPERA IN NEW YORK.

By Richard Grant White, Is one of the richly illustrated articles in the April CENTURY MAGAZINE.

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