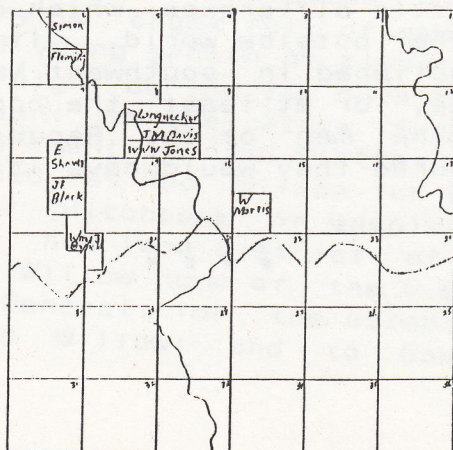


CHAPTER III

THE SETTLEMENT

The average American is a restless being who is never satisfied with his surroundings. Be he never so well situated with respect to family, influence, wealth, and personal comfort, he is always looking ahead for something, either in nature, or art, that will satisfy his longings. It is this trait of character, united with a love for adventure that has stimulated emigration westward.

In the first days of 1872, John Roberts went into the city of Plattsmouth to arrange the platting of Red Willow with the Surveyor General.⁸⁶ Shortly after his return, a dozen others left for Beatrice where, on the 10th of January, Milton Fleming, Charles Simon, Elizabeth Shaw, W.W.W. Jones, Wilburne Morris, John Black, J.M. Davis, John and William Byfield, and John Longnecker, each filed a claim at the U.S. Land Office; claims centering around section 17, township 3, range 28 west.⁸⁷



The plat and claim of the town site of Red Willow was filed in the Land Office at Beatrice . . . and the same day there were eleven homestead and preemption claims filed within a mile of the new town.⁸⁸

If Royal Buck did file a claim that day, the records do not show it until July 7, 1873.⁸⁹ He was, however, keenly interested in the project he presided over. On the 14th of January, to show others that he firmly believed in what his company wanted to accomplish, he put his home up for sale and placed an ad with the newspapers.

HO! FOR REPUBLICAN RIVER.

A Beautiful Residence for SALE CHEAP!

A well built, commodious dwelling, with nine rooms and closets, &c., two good cisterns, with pumps. Twelve lots, about 100 choice Fruit Trees—many of them bearing—including Apples, Pears, Peaches, Plums, Apricots, Cherries, Grapes, Currants, Gooseberries, Blackberries, Raspberries and Strawberries—a large assortment of Ornamental and Flowering Shrubberr; grounds elegantly laid out, beautiful arbor, grass plats, croquet grounds, out houses, &c.; all surrounded by a beautiful Orange hedge, with maple rows outside side walks, and it

Must be Sold!

For terms inquire of ROYAL BUCK, on the property on Kearney Heights.
An elegant Chickering Piano for sale cheap, together with other valuable furniture. jan13

As will be seen by an advertisement in another column, Royal Buck, Esq., offers for sale his fine estate and grounds on Kearney Heights. Mr. Buck and family are bound for the new town of Red Willow and he wants to sell out clean. His residence and grounds give the finest view up and down the Missouri River, and a vast extent of the Iowa bottoms and bluffs, and the line of the C.B., & K.C. & St. Joe & B. & M. railroads, that these cars can be seen for twelve to fifteen miles on their route.

The house is very convenient and complete for a family residence, and the grounds are well stocked with fruit bearing trees and vines, besides an abundance of ornamental shrubbery. It offers a splendid home and a rare bargain for the lucky man that has the money to buy it.⁹⁰

* * * *

With the help of Buck's Diary, Ellis' notes on the town survey, and the state surveys, the Republican Valley Land Company was now striving to put together a newspaper to circulate its plan for settlement in southwest Nebraska. In February, their goal was accomplished with the first issue of the Red Willow Gazette. Of "our paper," the editors said, "It is the intention of our company to publish the Gazette at Nebraska City monthly; until we get thoroughly located at Red Willow, when we shall swing out at that place as a permanent institution."⁹¹ The Nebraska City News wrote,

The books of the Republican Valley Land Company . . . show that many of our best citizens have pecuniary [money] faith in the enterprise; and we are running off a 1000 edition [actually 5000 copies were printed] of the report made by President Royal Buck, Hon. John Roberts, and the explorers who went there last November.⁹²

It goes on to give a description of the land surrounding Red Willow, of the Republican River and its tributaries, and their prospects for the future. Here, the authors of the report note, "The surveys have been made during the past year as far up as range 28 west,

and the demands of settlement early next spring will oblige the government to make early contracts for more extended surveys.⁹³

There was a great deal of expectancy for their new town. The Republican Valley Land Company envisioned large numbers of people establishing themselves at Red Willow. This is shown by a statement found in the Gazette.

The river bottom lands average in width nearly four miles, making 800 square miles or 3200 quarter sections of 160 acres each, of as fine lands as exist anywhere in the west, with plenty of water and wood, and stone of very fine quality. These figures are based on the river bottom alone, and when the valleys of the creeks tributary to this are counted, will add full one third to the list, making 4000 good homesteads, three fourths of which are yet unoccupied.⁹⁴

They also ran a notice in the paper telling when they planned to leave and for all who would go with them to send in their names.

The Red Willow Colony will start from Nebraska City as soon after the 15th of April as there is grass for the stock to live on Those who wish to join us from further east would do well to send in their names immediately, that we may know how many we will have in our first train.⁹⁵

Letters started pouring in from all over, showing in interest in the Red Willow townsite. Five were from Iowa, and the names of E.S.Hill, William Weygent, his son Day, G.A.Hunter, L.B.Korn, and his brother-in-law, Henry Madison were enrolled with the colony.⁹⁶

Another man whose name may have been found on this list was Russell Loomis of Michigan. His daughter, Mary Loomis McDonald, said that her father was a cousin of William McKinney, a company stockholder and a member of the exploring party who had first hand information concerning the townsite and land surrounding it.

Will corresponded with father and he wrote of this Nebraska country and its opportunities for obtaining free land. I suppose he also told father about the buffalo and wild game that was so plentiful on the prairies -- knowing⁹⁷ that my father was a great hunter.

* * * *

In January, when the people of Nebraska City were talking of settlement on Red Willow Creek, another party from North Platte was anxiously waiting the arrival of the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, who was visiting in this country and coming here on a buffalo hunt. When he arrived on January 12th, the entire troop, which included Gen. Phil Sheridan and his aids, Gen. George Forsyth, and William F. Cody among others, with "five or six ambulances and wagons, fifteen or twenty horses and a company of cavalry under Captain Egan"⁹⁸ went to a camp Cody had established on Red Willow Creek. It was located in what is now Hayes County, but what the eastern papers of the time only know was north of the Red Willow townsite.

When the hunt was learned to have been a bounding success, the Nebraska City News reported it under the headline, "Glory For Red Willow."

The Grand Duke Alexis left North Platte on the 13th, escorted by Gen. Sheridan, Buffalo Bill and two cavalry companies, and found away down on Red Willow creek near where our Republican Valley homesteaders have laid out their town⁹⁹

For years, R.F.Loomis spoke proudly of the land he homesteaded and said it was the site where the Grand Duke had camped. "I found a place in the woods where a big fire had been built. There was where they camped. I asked a man who I saw at the Platte where they camped when they were over here, and from his description I know that was the place."¹⁰⁰ This was later disproven.

In the 1930's it was shown that the camp definitely had been in Hayes County¹⁰¹, but the idea of such an occurrence taking place so near the proposed townsite did nothing to hurt the cause.

Patch proposes that we have a grand immigrant hunt on the same ground next October, during which time both pleasure and profit may accrue to the settlers and the last bison be slaughtered there -- giving place to the homesteaders and their cattle.¹⁰²

* * * *

In March, following the second issue of the Red Willow Gazette¹⁰³, a statement appeared in one of the newspapers "It is not at all necessary to become a member of the Republican Valley Land Company in order to go out in this colony. All that is necessary is a good team and a sufficient outfit to settle on a homestead and state on it until it produces a support."¹⁰⁴ This may have helped further interest as it sought to answer the question in back of everyone's mind: What does it cost?

* * * *

When J.H. Noteware, State Superintendent of Immigration received the letter from the Republican Valley Land Company's directors asking that a military camp be established on Red Willow Cree, he in turn wrote to General O.E.C. Ord, commanding officers of the Department of the Platte in Omaha. In answer, it was not Ord but his assistant, General George D. Ruggles, who conveyed the message.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter to him dated April 1st, 1872, and to inform you that camps will be established by the first proximo . . . on the Republican river, at or near the mouth of Red Willow, to protect settlements from any possible incursions from hostile Indians.¹⁰⁵

Some weeks later, it was learned an officer had been named to command "Camp Red Willow" in the newly created District of the Republican. It comprised "all that part of the Department lying between longitude 99 and 102. Headquarters, Fort McPherson: Colonel J.F. Reynolds, 3rd Cavalry, is assigned to command."¹⁰⁶

Also received in the mail was good news from Senator Hitchcock, who had been petitioned to ask Congress about creating a new land district in the Republican Valley. "I shall certainly do my best to give you a new land district in the Republican Valley at this present session, and have little doubt of success in the matter."¹⁰⁷ The Nebraska City News gave this comment:

This is certainly a very just measure. At present homestead and preemption settlers up this valley have to travel from one to three hundred miles to enter their claims [in Beatrice] and a very large number will have to make this pilgrimage before the first of July¹⁰⁸

A month later it appeared the Senator had met with success when the Nebraska State Journal reported, "We learn from the Land Office in this city that the boundaries of the new Land District west of here have been established and that Red Willow has been selected as the location for the office."¹⁰⁹ Shortly after the Omaha Tribune issued in its legal section this statement:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress Assembled, that all that part of the State of Nebraska which lies west of Range twenty eight west of the sixth principal meridian, in the State of Nebraska, be, and the same is hereby constituted and erected into a new land district to be named and called the Western District.

Sec. 2. That all those parts of the present South Platte and Nemaha district, in the State of Nebraska, which lie west of range four and east of range twenty eight west of the sixth principal meridian be, and the same are hereby erected into and constituted a new land district to be named and called the Republican Valley district.

Sec. 3. That the President be, and hereby authorized and directed to appoint, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, a registrar and a receiver for each of the said land districts, who shall be required to reside at the site of the land office in such case, respectfully, and shall perform like duties and be entitled to same amount of compensation respectfully, as are now prescribed by law for other land offices in said State.¹¹⁶

* * * *

Of their efforts to organized Red Willow County during the spring session of 1872, Buck said that when the legislature met in January, it found a bill prepared by the Republican Valley Land Company calling for a county 24 by 30 miles. "The bill fell into the hands of a bad general, was delayed in its passage, and unfortunately did not reach Governor James for his approval." He also said a quarrel developed between the governor and his legislative body to the point where Governor James refused to "sign this or other bills."¹¹⁷

Here, Mr. Buck suffered his first set back in establishing the Red Willow townsite, for in failing to organize Red Willow County and having his city named the seat of county government, a vacancy was left open for other competing townsite companies to vie for the same position. This is inevitably what happened.

Another set back, of which there were several, occurred in April. When the authors of the Red Willow Gazette said they would "start from Nebraska City as soon after the 15th of April as there is grass for the stock to live on . . .," many of the prospective homesteaders expected to leave on April 15th or shortly thereafter. When they started to arrive, Buck and the others found they were not quite ready.

Emigrants are still pouring in. Most of them seeking cheap western lands.¹¹²

Hundreds of emigrant wagons have passed through Nebraska City this spring and still they are coming.¹¹³

Though he may not have realized it then, by 1876, when recalling the history of the county, he did see that his company had failed in this aspect.

But there was some extreme bad management by the company, and those who should have started out in a body, under competent guides and help, were left to start alone, or in small groups, and when they arrived in the valley, were beset by parties interested in other towns and counties east of us . . . and this a large number of Red Willow colonists are settled all along the valley east of us.¹¹⁴

Buck said most of these settled in Harlan and Furnas counties, that they "reaped quite a heavy harvest of our sowing."¹¹⁵

On April 19th, when the Daily Chronicle reported Nebraska City's first emigrant train had left,

W.J.Novins, Esq. . . . left this morning for Red Willow, with a large party, where they go to make new homes and fortunes.¹¹⁶

its headlines seemed to scream out the message, "Ho! For Red Willow," and when the Nebraska City News reported with as much enthusiasm,

"immigration teams are every day rolling out for the Red Willow homesteads,"¹¹⁷ it seemed the rush was on; as a Mr. Butler had predicted almost a year earlier, "The Republican Valley will be taken up during the present season."¹¹⁸

* * * *

Among those arriving in Nebraska City on April 15th, were a party of six from Iowa: William Weygent and his son, Day, from Davenport; E.S.Hill, G.A.Hunter, L.B.korn, and his brother-in-law, Henry L. Madison¹¹⁹, all of Tabor. They came in three wagons, each with "farming tools, seed wheat, corn, and potatoes," all bound for that same location -- the area surrounding Red Willow. None had yet filed on a claim in the vicinity and would not, unless "good locations were found."¹²⁰

Finding that the main body of homesteaders were not yet ready to move out, and not wanting to wait for Novin's party leaving on the 19th, Hill and the others started by themselves. When he wrote to the Indianola Reporter in 1918, Hill said after leaving Nebraska City they traveled through Lincoln, moved west to Plum Creek (Lexington), and turned south, arriving in the Republican Valley near the present site of Arapahoe. Again, they traveled west and after crossing several creeks, built a camp on the west side of Dry Creek. Here they found a marker designating the site of "Billingsville," which was nothing more than a "stake driven into the ground with a piece of cracker box nailed to it. . . ."¹²¹

The following morning their camp received an unexpected visit from John S. King, credited with being the first settler in Red Willow County. He was returning to his log house somewhat north and west of here after having just come from the mouth of Red Willow Creek, where he viewed the location of the new town. Upon seeing Hill and the others, he knew their intent and tried to "persuade them to turn back," promising to show them the "best land" on the river bottom. When Hill pointed out their plans and said they "would not change their minds," King decided to join them.¹²²

From this point, the party continued their trek and had gone only six miles before they were forced to stop. Hill said they "encountered a little hard luck" when trying to cross Coon Creek. One of their wagons got stuck in the creek bed, and "were only able to get out after several hours of hard work." Again, they established camp.¹²³

Finally, on April 29th, Hill and his party reached Red Willow Creek where they remained for three days. During this time, a general survey of the land was made. They waded across the Republican and "went up the river five or six miles to . . . look at the country," but not seeing what they wanted, returned to their former camp on Coon Creek where, all but Madison, claimed land. He took his claim near the Red Willow townsite, a half mile south of the river.¹²⁴ Of the Red Willow Colony, they were the first to arrive.¹²⁵

* * * *

After Russell F. Loomis sold his farm of thirty acres in Michigan, he and his eldest son, Myron, boarded a train bound for Nebraska City. Reaching their destination three days later, on April 14th, they found Loomis' cousin, William McKinney, waiting for them. Together, they made plans to settle with the Red Willow Colony and Loomis arranged further with Royal Buck "to drive a wagon into this country for him."¹²⁶

As they prepared to go, Loomis surveyed the party of four: himself, Myron, Mr. and Mrs. McKinney, two head of cattle and two oxen. In his wagon, he carried some 4000 pounds of farm equipment and household furnishings that would be needed¹²⁷; a conglomeration belonging to himself and McKinney, as well as Buck.

Leaving in the final days of April, they followed the same route as Hill's party: through Lincoln, west to Plum Creek, then south and west again, arriving at Red Willow on May 22. Here they awaited the arrival of Royal Buck.

Although Mr. Buck had had his home on the market since January, he did not find a buyer until the end of April.

Royal Buck, who goes to Red Willow next week with his family, had sold his slightly property on Kearney Heights for \$4800.00 to R.L. Wilson...cashier of the Plymouth, Pa. National Bank, who will remove here to live.¹²⁸

Now he was free to move to his new home on the Red Willow creek, over two hundred miles west. With him were his wife, Thankful P., and four children: Ella, Flora, Ada P., and Amos Reed Buck.¹²⁹

It is uncertain if the Buck family rode in one or two wagons, or if there were any others who left Nebraska City with them, but it is known that several people joined him along the way. At Beaver Crossing, for instance, being bogged down by a rain shower, they were met by John Black, James H. Prickett, and a man named McKee. Again at York Centre, they were joined by T.P. Thomas and family, "with their large herds of stock ...; and our train consists of three horse teams and three ox teams and about 75 head of loose stock..."¹³⁰

When the group stopped to make camp at Kearney City on May 19th, Buck took pen in hand and wrote a letter to company officials in Nebraska City. In it he told of meeting Black, Prickett, McKee, and Thomas; of an accident that left Prickett somewhat lame; of rain showers and camps made; of his visits with the people of Kearney.

Citizens here and at other places along the road agree that not less than one hundred teams have already passed on to Red Willow this spring. The Republican Valley is now the land of promise; and will be well filled up before another autumn.¹³¹

Again, after leaving here for Plum Creek where they turned south, Buck's party reached the Red Willow only a few days behind Loomis and McKinney, and just a few days ahead of the Longnecker family.

John Longnecker remained in Nebraska City long enough to file a claim at the land office in Beatrice on January 10th, at which time he left for his home in Mason County, Kentucky, to the town of Mays Lick. There he proposed marriage to Miss Katherine Owens.¹³²

They were married on February 2nd, 1872, and were together only two months when the decision was made; they would follow John's dream and move to the new frontier of southwest Nebraska.¹³³

Leaving their home on April 23rd, they went to Maysville, on the Ohio River, where they boarded the Steamship "Bostona." After landing at Cincinnati, Ohio, they traveled by rail across Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri to St. Joseph, where they probably boarded another steamer to arrive in Nebraska City on April 28th.¹³⁴

Staying at the Cincinnati House, they spent 18 days "getting our outfit and provisions for our future home," and finally on May 15th, with L.K. Sittler, two boys named Ed Campbell and Jim Emory, and Mr. Colby (the "Bostonian who had a horse), in one wagon; John and Mrs. Longnecker in another "with all our possessions except a box or two which were hauled by Mr. Sittler," they left Nebraska City. The following day, they were joined by W.W.W. Jones at Lincoln, and for two weeks the company traveled together, reaching Red Willow on the 29th. "The first night we camped over on the school section . . . The sound of the bugle at the soldier's camp revived war times."¹³⁵

* * * *

As President of the Republican Valley Land Company, Mr. Buck had been assured of many things, one of which concerned a military presence at the new townsite. The Morning Chronicle told its readers in March,

Gen. Ord, commander of the Department of Nebraska . . . informed Royal Buck . . . that there would be a cavalry or infantry camp at or near Red Willow the coming summer for the protection of the settlers in that country.¹³⁶

During the first part of May, Company C of the 2nd Cavalry and Company B of the 9th Infantry had been ordered down on the Republican to establish what became known as Camp Red Willow. The North Platte Democrat commented,

Captain Spaulding's Company C, Second cavalry passed through town last Sunday, bound for the Red Willow. This company has been stationed at Sidney for the past winter and last summer they did duty on the Republican. The settlers were so well pleased with their conduct that they petitioned the commander .¹³⁷ to send them there this season.

Approximately 110 men were stationed on the Red Willow during the summer of 1872, many of them unknown today. It is, however, known that:

John D. Devin was Captain of Company B, 9th Infantry.

Morris C. Foot - First Lieutenant

Will H. Miller - Second Lieutenant

E.I. Spaulding was captain of Company C, 2nd Cavalry.

Thomas F. Gregg - First Lieutenant
Gen. H. Smallwood - Second Lieutenant

M. Dickson - Post Surgeon

Captain Devin was commander of the post until September, when Captain Spaulding took charge; also, that during the late summer, soldiers from Companies F and K, of the 3rd Cavalry, were stationed here, further increasing the number of men.¹³⁸

From May until mid-November, the military maintained a camp on Red Willow Creek opposite the townsite, and some became friends of the Longnecker's. In July, when Mrs. Longnecker suffered an accident in which she injured her back, it was Army surgeon Dickson who treated her, and in the days and weeks that followed Charles McKinley took a special likeness to her.

Once he brought a mosquito bar - the mosquitoes were terrible . . . another time a sack of fresh apples. Again canned fruit, a watermelon, etc., and when demurred to his going to the expense, he would say other men spent a good many dollars treating each other, and why shouldn't he do this for a sick lady.¹³⁹

One story, in particular, which she told about McKinley, occurred in November near the end of the military tenure there. With her back still ailing her somewhat and her husband leaving, she writes:

It had become necessary, during the fall, to replenish our provisions, getting flooring, shingles, doors and windows for our log house . . .

This involved a trip [to Lowell, Nebr.] of one hundred and eight or ten miles . . . and two weeks . . . time and the question was, what was I to do. The only woman on this [east] side of the creek, in a tent for the winter! One of the soldiers had been very kind . . . wishing to show still further kindness, proposed that we speak to the Colonel and he would detail soldiers, two at a time, to stand guard over me during the night. I told him I should be more afraid of the soldiers than of what they would protect me from. He said they all knew how I had been hurt. and what kind of a lady I was, and there wasn't a man but what would do all he could for me.¹⁴⁰

When W.W.W.Jones arrived at Red Willow and saw the difficulties he was going to have to deal with as a homesteader, he completed his survey of the town and returned to Nebraska City. "W.W.W.Jones is among us again . . . ; and disposed of his claim to advantage. He gives a good account of the place A company and a half of soldiers are there to keep the buffalo off the settlement. There are no Indians."¹⁴¹

However, during the months of July and August, the military presence proved itself worthy when the Pawnee Indians enveloped the Republican Valley on their annual buffalo hunt.

We had 2,700 Pawnees and Ponca Indians here two or three days, and they killed 200 or 300 buffaloes, drove off some cattle and stole two or three horses and tried to sell them, but the owners paid them something to help them hunt them up and bring them back. Poor things.

They mean no harm, but it is so natural to steal that they can't help it, and the troops being here, they were afraid to be too bare faced about it.¹⁴²

Mrs. Longnecker was terribly frightened when she first saw them. "I had never been near one before, had never seen one since a little child . . . when a delegation from Washington was shown at school."¹⁴³

Coming north from the army camp, Mrs. Longnecker saw what she thought a woman and her two daughters, known to be in camp with the soldiers. "I wondered what on earth they were coming to our tent for and why they wear [sic] such short, scanty clothing." As they drew nearer, she realized her mistake; as they stood in her doorway offering their hand in friendship, she recalled what Mr. Byfield had told her only days before, " . . . if an Indian offered his hand, no matter how dirty or bloody it was, I mustn't refuse to shake."¹⁴⁴ She continues,

I remembered that but when they asked "Where my white man was," I was afraid to say he was not there. Once again, I was frightened, they were right at the tent, and then started off when they saw a buffalo, and came running back to tell "white man" "to get gun" and shoot "buk-no" (as well as I can spell their pronunciation). John got on his horse and ran after it, when a tall Ponca came to me . . . and said "Now white man gone, must have some to eat."¹⁴⁵

Having been told since morning not to give them anything to eat for fear of having the whole tribe demanding food, Mrs. Longnecker refused him. When he stooped down, picked up a watermelon rind and was told she had none to give him, "he looked quite threatening, but it was done only to frighten me as the soldiers were quite near and he didn't dare."¹⁴⁶

In mid-November, when officials deemed the area had been secured and the threat of possible Indian attack no longer warranted a military presence, Camp Red Willow was closed and the soldiers ordered back to Fort McPherson. Much of the camp equipment and bulky material was sold, and Mrs. Longnecker was very pleased with the purchases her husband had made. "A cottonwood bunk allowed us to rise from the ground to the dignity of a bed. A gunny sack weatherbreak around and over the tent and a sheet iron stove made it comfortable for winter . . .¹⁴⁷

Thus, when General O.E.C.Ord granted Buck's request for an army unit to be stationed at Red Willow, he not only established a security basis for the incoming settlers, he also furnished them with some household necessities they may not have had otherwise when closing it out. The military served a vital need in the development of southwest Nebraska.

* * * *

After he left Red Willow for the more populous Nebraska City, W.W.W.Jones told reporters that soldiers were keeping buffalo off the townsite, but he also noted that about forty families were living there.¹⁴⁸ The idea seemed to be very popular. People were coming from all over the nation: Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, New York, Ohio, Michigan, Massachusetts. One set of brothers had origins in Canada, and another individual homesteaded in the Beaver Valley shortly after arriving in this country from England. Yes, Red Willow was popular, but somehow not popular enough. The Nebraska City News said,

The company will select a townsite of 640 acres and have a population of 200 or more within twelve months to comply with the laws.¹⁴⁹

This apparently refers to the Articles of Incorporation drawn up in October, 1871. It was now June, almost eight months since this agreement was made, and still no sign of a town.

The town was there. Lathrop Ellis had surveyed it in November, 1871, and Jones had surveyed it again in June¹⁵⁰, but it seemed people were more interested in homesteading the land than building a town. This was further complicated when word was received about the Land Office.

Another assurance Royal Buck thought he had on leaving Nebraska City was the location of the U.S. Land Office at Red Willow. Newspapers had been saying for weeks, "The new Land Office is established at Red Willow."¹⁵¹ Now, word was received that the Land Office was to be placed at Lowell, over one hundred miles to the north and east. The Nebraska City newspapers seethed with anger.

Senator Hitchcock could not resist the temptation of a B. & M. railroad subsidy; and so has allowed the Land Office which should have been located at Red Willow, to be put in line of that railroad away off in the corner at Lowell. Our people have worked up that country and district; and by rights should have the office at the enterprising town of Red Willow.

Hon. John Roberts, to whom belongs the settlement of that town, in a great measure, went to Washington to look after it, but found the job done up, and Red Willow sold out . . .

¹⁵²

This was a severe blow to the people; the President, the stockholders, and those who believed in the prospects of the town. A.T. Andreas says in his "History of Red Willow County,"

Already over \$1,000 had been spent, and the company could not as yet see where they would ever secure payment for the time and money that had been expended. Dissatisfaction among the members of the Town Company soon began to be exhibited. Dissention arose, and the funds of the company failing, and none desiring to invest any more in a scheme where the prospects were no better than those of the townsite at this time, the company failed and was dissolved.¹⁵³

It is very difficult to say at what point this occurred, for in July, a man appeared at Red Willow representing the Burlington and Missouri Railroad Company of Nebraska. His name was D.N. Smith, and he "was prospecting . . . [the] location for a townsite on which he believed the county seat of Red Willow County could be located."¹⁵⁴

When he approached Buck and the others, he found them quarreling over where they would place the town, "each one wanting it on his claim."¹⁵⁵ Although it is possible that the Republican Valley Land Company had gone under by this time, it is highly doubted. More likely, when Smith showed an interest in the townsite and said he "would have to have deeded land for that purpose,"¹⁵⁶ they either couldn't supply it, or with renewed hope for their failing townsite, refused to sell their interests in it.

* * * *

When E.S. Hill, L.B. Korn, G.A. Hunter, and William Weygent chose the area they would homestead, it was near the mouth of Coon Creek, a half mile north of its convergence with the Republican River.

Having arrived here only two months prior, Hill was the only one remaining; his friends having gone back to Iowa, leaving him to look after their interests with an assurance they would return for settlement in the fall.¹⁵⁷

In his sojourn along Coon Creek and in an area where few had yet established themselves, Hill visited the mouth of the Red Willow as he had done before, but this time found the grove of trees he was looking for. With his ax, and the strength of back and arms, he made the "chips fly" until he had a sufficient number of logs, then, with the help of an ox team, dragged them into the river. Following them east with the slow, steady current until south of his claim, he again enlisted the oxen, pulling the logs up a slow incline to where his home would stand.¹⁵⁸

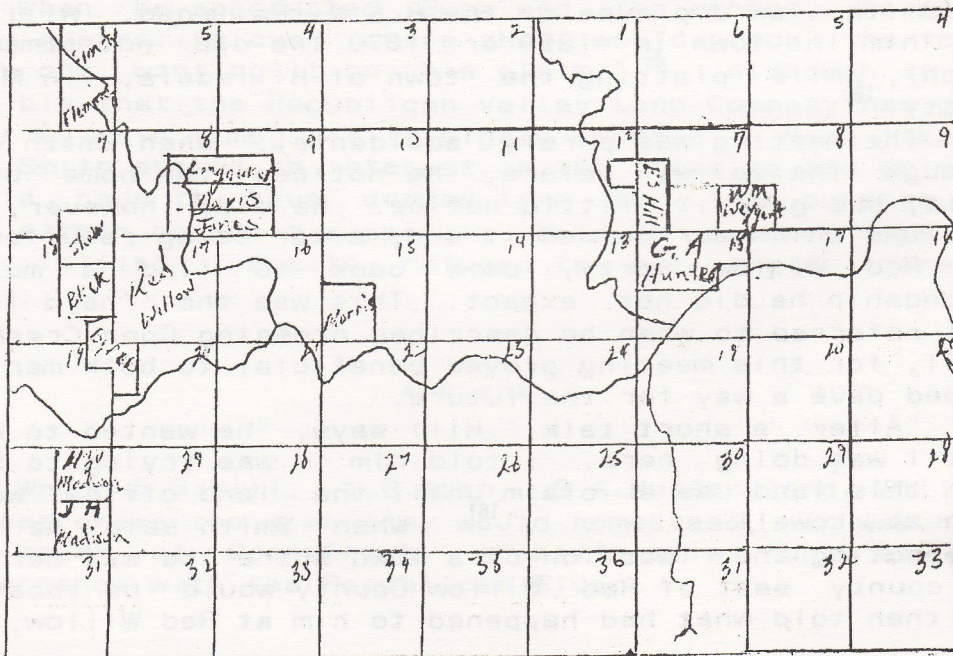
Although the summer of 1872 was wet, with rain showers nearly twice a week during June, July, and August¹⁵⁹, Hill was able to partially construct his home. He was working on this the day a voice hailed him from a distance. Not recognizing the man at first, he soon realized a friend he had not seen for some time; D.N. Smith, an employee of the B. & M. Railroad. Hill had met him in Iowa in 1869 or 1870 (he did not remember which), while platting the town of Hillsdale, in Mills County.¹⁶⁰

The meeting was purely accidental. When Smith came through the valley before, he noticed the home being built, but gave it little notice. He did, however, see the land which surrounded it and, after being rebuffed by the Red Willow party, came back to find a mutual friendship he did not expect. This was the "hard luck" Hill referred to when he described crossing Coon Creek in April, for this meeting proved beneficial to both men and helped pave a way for the future.

"After a short talk," Hill says, "he wanted to know what I was doing here. I told him I was trying to hold down this land as a claim until the land office would open at Lowell"¹⁶¹ When Smith said he was prospecting the location of a town where he was certain the county seat of Red Willow County would be located, and then told what had happened to him at Red Willow,

I asked him what was the matter with my claim for that purpose. He replied, "That's so." After looking it over he said it was just the place he was looking for, but he would have to have deeded land I had a soldier's right and could obtain title by living on land for two years; but that was too long to wait. I wanted him to wait until the land office opened, when I could pay out [for the land] and then go ahead, which I did. 162

On the 12th of August, Mr. Hill stood in line, waiting to see the registrar of the new land office. When it came his turn to file, he chose the SE quarter of the NE quarter in Section 12, town 3, range 28; he also chose an area in section 7, range 27, claiming the SW quarter of the NW quarter, and the West half of the SW quarter, for a total of 160 acres. ¹⁶³



Satisfied with his selection, Hill boarded a train and went back to his home at Tabor, Iowa, where he gathered his wife, Della, and two year old son, George. In September: with L.B.Korn, his wife, Sarah; William Weygent, his wife, Sophronica; G.A.Hunter and wife; and Henry Madison; he went to his homestead and they to theirs, and together they made the first permanent settlement on Coon Creek. In due time, this area would grow in both size and popularity.¹⁶⁴

* * * *

At Red Willow, progress was slow, but present in all aspects. W.M.Hinman arrived from North Platte with his portable saw mill and established himself near the river.

As I am inclined to romance and pioneering, I have moved my steam saw and shingle mill to this locality -- fifty four miles due south of Fort McPherson, on the Republican,¹⁶⁵ and at the mouth of the Red Willow.

During the summer of 1872, he was doing a substantial business. In a letter to the Nebraska City News, Royal Buck wrote, "Our saw mill is slashing out lumber and several white roofs tell that some of our people are patronizing it."¹⁶⁶

John and William Byfield, who had origins in Canada, opened a trading post in their sod house just south of the townsite. Here they carried supplies for hunters, bought and sold animal hides, smoked buffalo meat, and kept a general supply of necessities.¹⁶⁷

Toward the end of August, Buck wrote another letter to friends in Nebraska City reporting on growth in the community. Of those who came early enough in the spring he wrote,

We are now beginning to reap the fruits of our planting. Plenty of beans, peas, corn, potatoes, pumpkins, squashes, melons The early planted fields of corn are very fine -- comparing very favorably with your Otoe fields, although all on sod.

By the way, I must not forget to tell you that we have an increase in our population of Red Willow -- weighs 7 1/2 lbs., and no doctor bills. His name is "Enterprise"; and he has a pledge from the President of the Republican Valley Land Co. that he shall have the first deed executed of a choice town lot.¹⁶⁸

* * * *

In a letter, written in December, long after the summer months when most settlers arrived, Buck wrote, "We still continue to have a few new accessions to our settlement."¹⁶⁹ Many of them, however, came to hold down a claim, as in the case of E.S.Hill before the land office opened, and many left without ever leaving an official record of them being here. While others stayed and did file on homesteads, most of their names have fallen into obscurity.

Still, others almost demanded a place in the history books; men such as Royal Buck and members of the Republican Valley Land Company, who are remembered for their contributions to the area as a whole. Another of these was William S. Fitch.

Born in Johnson County, Missouri, on December 28, 1838, he came west in the spring of 1872, and took a claim, not at Red Willow, but eight miles west and south in an area overlooking Driftwood Creek. Here, he established himself and soon opened a trading post, similar to that of the Byfield brothers at Red Willow. It provided a center around which others would congregate.¹⁷⁰

* * * *

After his marriage in January, 1869, Elias Canaga had hoped to make his home at Elmhall, Michigan, where his wife's people lived, but after a year of almost constant disappointment, he became frustrated. His wife later wrote,

We had been reading about the Plains of Nebraska . . . [with] broad and rolling prairies. We thought it would be fine to live in a country where the ground was ready for the plow . . . and did not have to take the time to clear it of the timber and rocks before we could plant our crops.¹⁷¹

As they considered the state's short history: its admittance into the Union; the removal of the Capital to Lincoln; the University, the Union Pacific; they were impressed, but what enthused them most was a chance to obtain free land. "We thought this a chance to get a home where we could give our children an education."¹⁷²

Announcing their decision to her parents was not as difficult as some would expect. In fact, when his father-in-law heard it, he announced with as much enthusiasm and determination as Canaga himself had, "If you have decided to move I will have a sale and go with you. It is too dangerous for young folks to start out alone over the barren and trackless plains"¹⁷³

By the end of March, 1870, when the entire neighborhood had heard that the Crockford and Canaga families were moving to Nebraska, many of them turned out to wish to emigrants well, and when someone hollered sarcastically, "I hope you don't get killed by Indians," a stark realism overcame them of the dismal legacy Nebraska held.

There were nine of us going, Father and Mother; three brothers, John, Jacob, and Joe [Crockford]; sister Lib; my husband, Elias Canaga, and myself and daughter.¹⁷⁴

In the long, endless days of travel by team and wagon, Mrs. Canaga saw that her daughter was becoming quite ill, as she herself was, and when they reached Rippley, Illinois, where relatives lived, it was decided they would stay here until the child was able to travel again. Continuing their westward trek after several months delay, they arrived in Lincoln sometime in the early days of October.

Canaga and his in-laws seemed able to find odd jobs to help pay expenses and, when they found an old farmhouse to rent, spent the first winter in relative comfort. The following spring, excitement increased when a train¹⁷⁵ of over sixty-seven wagons came through Lincoln. Many of them headed into the Republican Valley.

When Victor Vifquain and his men returned to Lincoln after exploring the Republican Valley in 1869, they began to promote what was then known as the "Napolean" settlement, expecting to colonize it as early as 1870.¹⁷⁶ It was not, however, until the spring of 1871, that this occurred and Elias Canaga, Joseph Crockford and his three sons, were among those who traveled west with them. Each took a claim in the area.¹⁷⁷

They returned to Lincoln the happiest men you ever saw. They told many stories about the beautiful country in which they had chosen their homes. Mr. Canaga was anxious for me to see our new home, and I was too.¹⁷⁸

Canaga had chosen a quarter section of land near the mouth the Methodist Creek in Harlan County, and in September when he went back to make a few improvements he brought his wife, that she might see what he had seen in the new land.

When we arrived . . . and I saw the land that he had filed on, I declared that we were rich without a dollar in our pockets. We had received the thing we had come so far to get -- a farm of our own, a home.¹⁷⁹

Although Canaga had cut logs to build a house, he did not stay, but spent another winter in Lincoln, returning to Harlan County in April, 1872. While others were establishing themselves further west at a place called Red Willow, he seemed satisfied with his claim. This would change in just a few very short months.¹⁸⁰

Soon after his arrival in Harlan County he became acquainted with G.B. Nettleton, who homesteaded land adjacent to his, but resided in nearby Republican City.

Like Canaga, Gilbert Nettleton had become part of the westward movement, but during the spring of 1871. Leaving his family in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, he sought work as a carpenter in Cheyenne, Wyoming, where he expected to take up residence. When he learned of the severe winters however, which were common there, he returned home.¹⁸¹

In September following, although it is uncertain how he came to this decision, he purchased tickets at the train depot for himself, his wife, five daughters, one son, his mother-in-law and her sister, bound for Nebraska. After five days of travel, each departed at Lowell Station, and when each had rested a full day, turned south to arrive at Republican city just before the onset of winter.¹⁸²

Being unable to construct a house before the weather grew cold, he rented the upstairs of the "McPherson Block."

This . . . was a poorly constructed frame building on whose lower floor were three stores and the Post Office. On the upper floor was a very large room or hall . . . and four smaller rooms, three of which were occupied by the Nettleton family.¹⁸³

Here, he spent the remainder of the winter and next spring. When friends invited him on a buffalo hunt in May, Nettleton gladly accepted.

Following the river west, he saw land which he thought better than what he'd homesteaded in Harlan County, and when the hunting party stopped at a place on Driftwood Creek Nettleton grew excited because he knew this was where he would build his future. Returning to Republican City, he went hurriedly to his family and described for them "A creek flowing into the river, a beautiful view, a splendid site for the new home." They would be moving again.¹⁸⁴

His belongings filled three wagons, one of which belonged to Elias Canaga. When Canaga saw the area, he was as much in awe of the place as Nettleton had been and decided to take a claim there was well.¹⁸⁵

Because his wife had not yet fully recovered from their journey out of Michigan, it was difficult to convince her that moving a hundred miles west and south of the river would be best for both their interests. She writes,

On account of my poor health I hated to move so far from mother. And then the claim that my husband had filed on . . . was on the south side of the river. There were no bridges and you never knew when it would flood, and fording the river was a dangerous thing on account of the quicksand shifting. I dreaded to think of moving¹⁸⁶

Over a year later, in August, 1873, when Canaga brought a load of household goods for their new home, with full intent to locate on the Driftwood, someone pointed him to an area on the Red Willow, saying "'it had plenty of wood and water. Why don't you take it,'" and he did, for when he saw it he knew it would please his wife. They would live north of the river.¹⁸⁷

* * * *

The first real threat of confrontation with the Indian faction occurred in February, 1873, when Whistler, Fat Badger, and Hand Smeller, chiefs of the Cut-off band of Oglala Sioux, were murdered while hunting buffalo near the forks of the Republican River.¹⁸⁸

The Sioux Indians are gathering in the Republican Valley. They evidently mean mischief. Several bands of them, numbering from 1000 to 2000 have already met, without being accompanied by their squaws and papooses. Hunters who have just come in from the upper Republican all agree . . . that the Sioux are determined to revenge the deaths of Whistler and Fat Badger, who were killed by white men.¹⁸⁹

When the people of Red Willow felt their safety threatened, they organized a Home Protection Company by electing E.S.Hill, Captain; J.H.Prickett and L.H.Lawton, First and Second Lieutenants; Royal Buck, Orderly Sargent; and D.E.Brothwell, Secretary. A letter was petitioned to the governor asking for help.

In March, 1873, when William Doyle saw advantages to be gained by moving his herd of cattle north from Kansas into the Republican Valley of Nebraska, he may have written to his brothers telling them the same.

Dear Sir:

Enclosed please find proceeding of a public meeting held here . . . by which you will see we have organized a Military Company for our home protection. We are in some danger of molestation from Indians in consequence of the killing of "Whistler" and two other chiefs by white men in December last, and we therefore ask for sufficient arms and ammunition to equip our company which numbers about seventy five men.¹⁹⁰

Paul Riley, however, in his study of Southwest Nebraska, questions any actual threat of attack and suggests it was simply a ploy to obtain guns and ammunition. "It is interesting," he says, "that the settlers did not petition the governor or write letters to the newspapers until nearly three months after the murders, when the possibility of an Indian up-rising was slight."¹⁹¹

Page T. Francis was 29 years old when he file a preemption claim on Dry Creek and, although he was some distance from Red Willow, he still took an active role in everything that happened. In 1911, he recalled those early events and said that although the Indians were present, there was no real threat.

As ammunition was a little high and guns scarce, we organized a company of militia to protect ourselves from the Indians, which were around here, but they never done any harm . . . that I know of; but we needed the guns for killing buffaloes.

We reported our dangerous position to the government, and we got a provision of eighty needle guns and a lot of ammunition, and that helped materially in supplying the people of the county. There was a scare put up¹⁹²

Though it seems this was done as an act of trickery, it did supply the settlers in case the need for arms should arise and, according to Francis, who said the guns "killed a lot of buffaloes",¹⁹³ the state issued rifles were put to good use.

* * * *

When he crossed the Missouri River in January, 1872, he gave little thought to the thickness of the ice that held the river as he looked to Nebraska City from the Iowa shore. He probably had done this many times before, but this time the error almost cost him his life.

X A man by the name of James Doyle, who resides in Fairmont [Fremont] county, Iowa, lost his team of horses, wagon, and load of wood, by the breaking of the ice on the river. All went under together, he narrowly escaping. The ice was considered safe.¹⁹⁴

It may have been here that he first heard of the Republican Valley, for Nebraska City at the time was alive with excitement for the Land Company and their proposed townsite. It is not known, however, just how the Doyles' came to locate at Red Willow.

In March, 1873, when William Doyle saw advantages to be gained by moving his herd of cattle north from Kansas into the Republican Valley of Nebraska, he may have written to his brothers telling them the same.

It was not long after this that James and Dan Doyle, and a cousin, Montgomery, arrived from Iowa and Missouri to claim their share of this valuable land.¹⁹⁵

Red Willow, Nebr.
Red Willow Co.
April 8, 1873

Dear Father,

I received a letter from you some time ago and I will answer it now. Spring has opened and we all feel well. The farmers are sowing grain now. They are going to try to raise a crop here this year and if they don't raise anything they are going to leave the country for they have tried for three years to raise a crop and have failed to do so. The state is furnishing seed and provisions or they would have left before now. We have [had] a big rain, the first one . . . this spring.

I will try and answer the questions you wanted to know. We buy cattle in Kansas from parties that drive them from Texas . . . , generally big steers and heifers [sic] This last summer yearlings was six or seven dollars a head; two year olds, from nine to eleven; cows, twelve to fifteen; beef cattle, eighteen to twenty-two; oxen, fifty to seventy-five a yoke.

A cheese factory and butter factory would pay well here. A market for butter is most too far off. There is not much market, only at the railroads, and that is seventy miles from here.

Texas cattle would answer the purpose very well. Stock buyers generally aim to winter stock and then they are ready to sail [sic]. The cattle I have charge of were bought the fifteenth of last June for 6 [dollars] a head and were sold the first of last month, March, for twelve dollars a head. These cattle have not had any hay this winter and was drove from Texas last summer. [I] have lost only three head this winter and two of them was very poor last fall, and the other was a heffer [which] died from the effects of having a calf. There is a good many having calves and are doing well.

Chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese would not pay here, nor bees . . . until they get to raising something for them to work on. There is no wild ones here.

This is a splendid hay country. This is as level and as nice a country as you ever saw or any one else. I still have the gathering in my head and my lungs are about as they use to be, and I have not had the sick headache but three times since I left Missouri. I have a dull headache once in a while but not often. I think this as nice a country and would suit you exactly, but you had better come and see it for yourself before you sell your place.

You wanted to know if I had to stay with the cattle day and night. I don't stay with them at all. We manage to see them once or twice a week.

We count them in bunches as they are scattered around, and lots of times we don't see any of them for a week at a time unless they come around when we are there.

There are some ninety good claims here you can get, and if they don't raise anything this summer, there will be still better ones with some improvements on them.

I send my best respects to all. Kiss mother and the children for me. Tell mother I will write her a letter before long, as I write you all the letters. So write soon.

From your son,
Frank P. Allen

Others soon followed with the opening of the emigration season, and an influx of settlers, such as Royal Buck had hoped for a year earlier, began to arrive, filing claims on all the major tributaries of the Republican: many of them centering around the Red Willow townsite; E.S.Hill's homestead; on Dry Creek; and on the Driftwood; but perhaps the greatest settlement took place on Beaver Creek, where virtually no one had settled previously.

There were a few people who chose land here during the spring and summer of 1872; one man came as early as 1871. His name of George N. Gilbert and, although very little is known about him (he died in 1875), the area he chose twelve miles southeast of Red Willow proved a wise choice, for it too became a center around which others would settle.¹⁹⁶

When B.F.Bradbury left his home in Wisconsin he, like so many others had been overcome with that "western fever," and in the spring of 1872, he felt this to be a turning point in his life.

Leaving his family behind, he and a neighbor friend traveled by team and wagon to Lowell, Nebraska, where like Gilbert Nettleton before him, Bradbury took up carpentering for a living. He soon wrote home, telling his wife to "sell out, pack up and come to him."¹⁹⁷

Despite the time of year, Mrs. Bradbury loaded her family in three wagons and, on November 14th, with a total of nine people, left Green Lake, Wisconsin, "traveling all that first day in a glorious snowstorm" The party traveled nearly six weeks, probably under the leadership of her son-in-law, N.S. West, arriving in Plattsmouth December 30th.

There we were told that we would surely perish if we tried to cross the plains in our wagons, so we chartered a car, loaded our goods and came by rail the remainder of our journey, arriving at Lowell the first day of January, 1873.¹⁹⁸

At some time during the following winter, both Bradbury and West visited the Land Office in Lowell, where each had sought work. Here, Bradbury chose an acreage south of Beaver Creek on the northeast quarter of section 17, township 1, range 26, and it is assumed that N.S. West filed his adjacent to it. This land proved itself worthy in the fact that when Bradbury moved to it in April, he not only pitched a tent for his family to live in, he also opened a store, trading with Indians and settlers alike.¹⁹⁹

However, with his responsibilities as a father, homesteader, and storekeeper, he also accepted a role in the most heated political argument to encompass the area as a whole; he could not have been established yet, or become well known in the community when someone asked the question: Where will we place the County Seat of Red Willow County?