

## CHAPTER VI

### ADDENDUM

Immigration has continued to flow in upon us steadily . . . . There is a very marked contrast between the present time and one year ago; where there were wild wastes are now many fine neighborhoods, and lights in the windows can be seen at night in many directions.

With settlement throughout the valley surrounding Red Willow, efforts were made to pull the community together. In August, about fifty people met at the home of Royal Buck and there, organized a "Union Sabbath School."<sup>257</sup> Although there were many religious overtones, due to its being a Sunday School, it was a first in the county to establish education outside the home.

When we settled in Red Willow County there was not even a Sunday School nearer than ten miles. So Sunday morning we rose earlier than usual, yoked the oxen and rode behind them in a big wagon to that Sunday School [at Red Willow.]<sup>258</sup>

Following the general elections of October, 1873, when B.F. Bradbury was reelected County Commissioner; G.N. Gilbert was named Sheriff; E.S. Hill, Probate Judge; B.B. Duckworth, Treasurer; I.J. Starbuck, Clerk; J.D. Hill, Coroner;

and Page T. Francis, Surveyor; Gilbert Nettleton accepted the role of County Superintendent of Schools, replacing Edward Lyon of the Beaver Valley.<sup>259</sup>

It was he who organized the first school district . . . . We had no team but oxen, so father walked. Miles and miles he traveled on foot in the interests of education, forming new districts and starting school in different sections until his shoes were a wreck and his feet sore from their numerous blisters.<sup>260</sup>

Nettleton had separated the county into six school districts: Red Willow was Dist. No. 1; Indianola became Dist. No. 2; the third on Driftwood Creek; District No. 4 was near Danbury; the fifth was probably near Lebanon; and No. 6 was probably located on Dry Creek.<sup>261</sup>

This, of course, was not the first time the county had been districted. That moment came shortly after the first primary election in May. In June following, Commissioners Berger, Bradbury and Fitch met in Indianola and separated the county three ways. Since each of the men came from a different part of the county, each was given "district."

That part of the county known as Commissioner District No. 1, to be called Indianola [Berger] Precinct. That part known as Commissioner District No. 2, to be called Beaver [Bradbury] Precinct. That part known as Commissioner District No. 3, to be called Driftwood [Fitch] Precinct.<sup>262</sup>

As the area became more and more organized, the people began to congregate. In a letter written December 18th, Royal Buck noted,

A literary society has also been organized and meets once a a week, at which essays, selected readings, declamations, and debates, interspersed with music, and bi-weekly papers are the order. The exercises are very interesting, and many of the productions are of a high order.<sup>263</sup>

The farmers on Driftwood Creek gathered to form an agricultural "Grange" society, which was very popular at the time. When he wrote to his brother in Louisville, Nebraska, William Berger said, "We organized a Grange here [Indianola] yesterday with 21 members. Have you joined yet? I think it a good thing."<sup>264</sup> The group even petitioned the Postmaster General to give them a post office. On September 27th, Valley Grange became the fourth established in Red Willow County. The others were at Red Willow, Indianola, and Lebanon.<sup>265</sup>

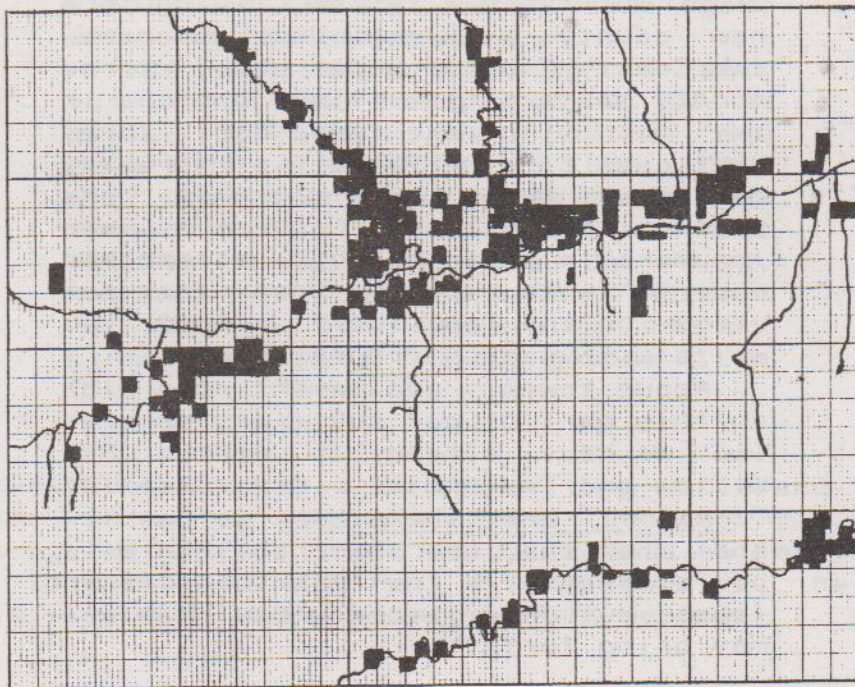
During the summer, as land was being taken up along the Beaver Valley around his home, B.F. Bradbury took the notion to establish a post office in his store. However, when it came to naming a postmaster, Bradbury found he could not fill the role because of the office he held with the county. Knowing this, he delegated the position to his son-in-law, N.S. West<sup>266</sup>, and on September 12th, the Lebanon post office was opened.<sup>267</sup>

When George Gilbert petitioned the government to establish a post office on his homestead, three names were suggested for it. At a public meeting someone thought the name "Cedarville" fitting, for there were a lot of cedar trees along the bluff in the southwest. Someone else suggested "Gilberton," to honor the man who would be postmaster.<sup>268</sup> G.E. Orton liked this name and said so clearly when he wrote the Omaha Bee.

First then, just where we are homesteading, and at what we may reasonable expect - by spring - to call "Gilberton," as Uncle Samuel has most graciously consented to give us a Post Office that we may date our communications from Gilberton, Red Willow County, Nebraska, which will look well in print.<sup>269</sup>

However, Gilbert himself offered the name of his hometown in Connecticut and on December 24th, when it became official, the post office was opened and given the name "Danbury."<sup>270</sup> A new era had begun.

It had been a year and a half since the first people arrived to build their homes at Red Willow and each had been given the assurance that others with the same vision would follow to build the new town. Yet, during this time, few chose to locate at the townsite itself, but scattered themselves within the area encompassing Red Willow County, forming very distinct settlements.



Settlement of Red Willow County, December 1873

Each would become its own entity, drawing away from that center which had been the first to focus attention of southwest Nebraska. Settlement was extending itself further west: the towns of Culbertson, Trenton, Stratton, Wauneta, Palisade, and many others were to be built. All would be larger than Red Willow.

As the year came to a close, three men confided their thoughts to paper, and from each is given a somewhat different prospective of life in Red Willow County. The first is from a man near Valley Grange on Driftwood Creek, who states emphatically his disappointment.

When last we met, I promised to send you an occasional letter, but that I have failed to do so is not my fault, but rather of the monotony that surrounds us. You live in an enterprising city [North Platte] . . . But fancy a fellow living in a new county with six Commissioners, two County Clerks under seal, three county seats on the fleet and one in the moon, in one precinct; three Justices of the Peace, all praying men; two towns, no jurymen, one blacksmith, one coyote and innumerable prairie dogs, asleep and covered with snow. Does that not verge on the poetical? Could you write with such surroundings.

About towns, excitement runs high on this part of our sublinary sphere. Two we have already in embryo [Red Willow and Indianola]. One is called "I-own-it" and the other "we-own-it" and when they are hatched they will be elephants. The mountain is in labor, but Jove alone knows what she may bring forth.<sup>271</sup>

It is doubted whether this man stayed long enough to see the outcome of the events he writes about. The county seat fight was a heated subject within the county for a number of years, and may have been a factor in Indianola's loss of the county seat in 1896. While this man, who signed himself "homo," didn't like the political turmoil within the county, he probably did not have much to say of the land either.

For G.E.Orton, this was not the case. He was not disappointed at all. In fact, he tried to entice others to homestead beside him in the Beaver Valley, inviting anyone who would "drop this way [to] please give us a call, and we pledge ourself to treat you to a very delicate buffalo steak and a turkey hunt . . . ."

. . . this is one of the loveliest places within the entire state of Nebraska and make no mistake; I have seen all parts . . . and can make no exceptions. The Beaver Valley has no superior soil in any state. There is plenty of timber, water privileges, and land to homestead.

True, settlers are coming in fast, but there is enough while it is going, and when the bottoms and woodlands are taken up then there will be thousands of acres of uplands remaining. The climate in these valleys is all that one can wish. Not too cold, not too warm. The soil is adapted to the raising of all kinds of grain, fruits, grapes . . .

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Royal Buck also took to his writing table and issued a letter to the Nebraska State Journal. It is surprising, after all the disappointments he endured in trying to establish the Red Willow townsite, he never lost his vision of what the area could become.

His letters were almost always enthusiastic and upbeat. They were always informative and but rarely did he ever have anything negative to say when concerning the people or the land of southwest Nebraska.

The new claims which I notice in various directions, the new names which are constantly being added to our post office list, and a large increase of letters mailed and received tell of a good number of newcomers among us. And yet there is plenty of room for more. A few weeks since I took a trip up Red Willow about forty miles, and I am free to say that some of the finest stock ranges are yet unoccupied up this creek. . . .

There are now settlements up about 12 to 15 miles, and before another years rolls around the line will lengthen out wondrously. Our farmers are beginning to find out that the table lands are really the best for ordinary agricultural purposes. . . .

Society begins to assume a form; we have sociables and surprise parties in which both old and young participate with much zest. We also have a literary society formed, which meets once a week . . . and many of the exercises would do credit to an eastern old settled community.

On Christmas eve we had a Christmas tree for our Sabbath school, and about 80 people were present and received fruit from it. Of course, we had no toys . . . but the ingenuity of our ladies was brought into action, and the tree was a decided success.

This will be noted as the first Christmas in Red Willow County.

Our worthy County Superintendent of Public Instruction, Mr. G.B. Nettleton has been busy for a week or ten days past in districting the county. Red Willow is District No. 1. There are some four or five others . . . . We shall proceed at once to organize and hope to have a school in running order soon.

We had a beautiful autumn here but very dry. Since December came in we have had several little snow squalls which have just whitened the ground, but on the 11th unit, quite a heavy storm took place, the snow falling to a depth of about six inches . . . . It is now mostly disappeared. We have had but little wind this month and not very cold weather.

The principal herds of cattle are being wintered so far without hay and are doing well.<sup>273</sup>

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Royal Buck was 52 years old when he moved to his claim north of Red Willow, and during the 17 years he remained here he was convinced the land of southwest Nebraska would develop and grow. He continued to write occasional letters to the Nebraska State Journal until just a few months before he left Red Willow County in the summer of 1889. When his wife's brother, Amos Reed, died at his home near Washington D.C., Buck moved there to help settle the estate. In a final correspondence from him, dated August 7th, 1889, he tells of his journey from Red Willow.



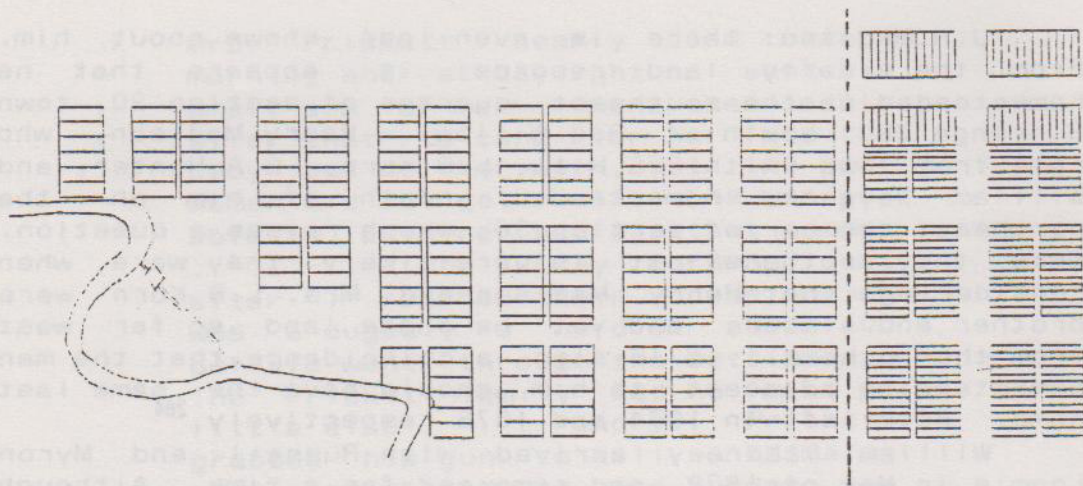
He was not well at the time, but says "My health has not suffered by the journey, and I feel encouraged to hope that the change will be favorable."<sup>274</sup> He died a year later on November 20, 1890, at "Hope Dale," his brother-in-law's estate, near Branchville, Maryland.

Buck was not the only one, however, who stayed at Red Willow after the town failed. Of the original townsite company who visited the area in 1871, six of them homesteaded in southwest Nebraska. They were: Royal Buck, John Longnecker, John Black, John and William Byfield, and L.K. Sitler. J.H. Madison homesteaded and remained a short time, as did William McKinney.

Buck established himself a mile north of Red Willow next to the creek and called his estate "Forest Home." He served as post master for a number of years and also was Justice of the Peace when the Red Willow Precinct was created in 1874. He owned over 800 acres<sup>275</sup> before he left the area, and seemed contented with all he had done.

John Longnecker was the only one that remained in the area to the end of his life. He and his wife had a large family: four boys and two girls. He was active in social affairs of the community, and when his wife died in 1913, continued until his death on November 8, 1923. His family still lives here.

John Black established himself as a shepherd near Red Willow and kept a variety of stock. In 1880, prior to the arrival of the B. & M. railroad, he came into possession of the northwest quarter of section 17, township 3, range 28, part of the original town of Red Willow. He still held to the dream that a town would grow here and had the area surveyed and platted. Adjacent to this, on the northeast quarter of section 17, but a year earlier, two men named Leland and Brown established a flour mill next to the creek bottom<sup>276</sup> and surveyed an area they called "East Red Willow." When put together with Black's townsite, it gives us a rare view of what Red Willow may have looked like in 1872. Black remained in the area until the mid 1890's; his share of the Red Willow townsite was vacated in 1896.<sup>277</sup>



Map of the Red Willow Townsite 1879-1880.

The street separating the business and residential districts is the gravel road (1992) running north and south. It separates the quarter sections.

The Byfield brothers opened their store south of Red Willow during the summer of 1872 and operated out of it for several years. Following the county seat fight of 1873, John (1842-1906) often laughed when he told that the "Coon Creekites were forced to buy nails and other goods from my Post."<sup>278</sup> Due to a conflict of some kind, he left Red Willow in 1876 and moved to Massachusetts.<sup>279</sup> William (1850-1918) left in 1879, but returned six years later and stayed until 1910.<sup>280</sup>

L.K. Sitler is an interesting person. Very little is known about him except for the fact that he did homestead in Red Willow county. When W.W.W. Jones vacated his homestead north of the townsite, Sitler took over his interests in it. He later moved up into Hayes County and established a ranch which he called "Carrico."<sup>281</sup> A post office was established there in 1896<sup>282</sup>, but by this time Sitler was long gone. According to his wife, they "lived on [the] Red Willow twelve years . . . going there in 1872, but lived 40 miles above when we sold old [in 1884]."<sup>283</sup>

J.H.Madison: there is even less known about him. From the early land records, it appears that he homesteaded on the southeast quarter of section 30, town 3, range 28, south of Red Willow. Henry Madison, who came from Iowa with E.S.Hill, L.B.Korn, G.A.Hunter, and William Weygent, homesteaded north of him on the northeast quarter of section 30, which raises a question. Were they brothers? It is very likely they were, when considering that Henry Madison and Mrs. L.B.Korn were brother and sister, and yet he chose land so far west from the others. It is also a coincidence that the man homesteading adjacent to him should have the same last name. Both left in 1874 and 1875 respectively.<sup>284</sup>

William McKinney arrived with Russell and Myron Loomis in May of 1872, and remained for a time. Although it is not known where he established his home, it was not far from John Longnecker's. When Mrs. Longnecker hurt her back during the fall of that year, she commented on how she became "much annoyed by Mrs. McKinney coming, and her dog, wet from the creek . . . ." <sup>285</sup> After leaving Red Willow, the McKinneys' returned to Michigan.

It should also be noted that J.H.Prickett, who homesteaded adjacent to John Black in section 18, west of Red Willow, fathered the first child born in Red Willow County. Contrary to every known history of the area, which say the first child born was Edna Berger, daughter of William Berger, in the early months of 1873<sup>286</sup>, there is now evidence to show that the Prickett baby was born in July, 1872.

In Buck's letter of August, 1872, he commented on "an increase of our population of Red Willow -- weighs 7 1/2 lbs. and no doctor bills." In 1929, Sarah (Wildman) Leach Black added more to the story when she recalled,

A child was born to Mrs. Prickett one night. Though Mr. Prickett fired his gun repeatedly in the air no one heard and came to his aid.

Mrs. Prickett nearly died before morning and at daylight he sent his small son for me. I went their daily after that to care for her and the baby and do her work, but the poor woman did not get well. She was not able to leave her bed all that summer . . . . One Sunday morning, just after I reached their house, which was a dugout, a herd of about 100 buffalo went through the settlement. The Prickett family had no meat or little else . . . and Mr. Prickett grabbed his gun to kill a buffalo, then remembered it was Sunday and hung his gun up again . . . . Mr. Byfield had a nice garden the morning the buffalo came, but after they crossed it there was no garden at all. <sup>287</sup>

When John Black noted these events in an article he called "The first Expedition," he did not remember the child, but said that "Byfield got up one Sunday morning to witness a few hundred buffaloes wallowing in his field. He even told of his own loss. The buffalo had "toraged off the entire twenty-five acres" of corn. <sup>288</sup>

The reason this child is not remembered in the annuls of previous county histories is because Abbie Prickett, the baby's mother, did not recover from the birthing. After several months of waiting and watching, Mr. Prickett saw that his wife was not getting any better and took her back to their home in Ohio. As far as is known, he never returned and his homestead entry was canceled. <sup>289</sup>

There are a few other interesting facts which correlate the Red Willow townsite with the settlement of southwest Nebraska.

When the townsite was contested in October, 1873, George Rowley and Leslie Lawton (1848-1926) each claimed the northwest and southwest quarters of section 17. Shortly after this, Rowley moved his ranching operation up into Chase County and established himself next to the falls of the Frenchman River. The town of Wauneta grew up on his homestead. He and his wife lived here until his death during the Indian outbreak of 1878.

Leslie Lawton, Rowley's brother-in-law, moved into Hitchcock County in 1875 and was the first settler near the present town of Palisade.

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To say that the townsite and the area around it ceased as a community after the town failed in 1873 would be ludicrous. The post office was established April 22, 1872, and for a number of years it was Red Willow, although the Byfield brothers operated a store there and in 1876, Leland and Brown built a flour mill on the former townsite. In 1879 and 1880, the town was surveyed again in hope the railroad would pass through it. It didn't however, but passed a half mile south. Again the town failed.

Red Willow played a vital role in the second county seat fight between Indianola and McCook (1890-1896). If John Helm didn't own the ground the railroad crossed for its right-of-way in 1881, by 1892 he did, and this area became a deciding factor in the county elections of that year and the one that followed in 1896.

Helm wanted a shipping dock on his property and when railroad officials promised him a side track if he could sway the voters of Red Willow Precinct to name McCook as county seat, he gave them his support.

Now Mr. Helm had told the editor of this [Indianola] paper and many other citizens here that McCook had promised him a shipping point at Red Willow if he would use his influence against Indianola . . . Mr. Helm was so quickly converted to McCook simply by listening to . . . the two McCook lawyers . . . He told our people that McCook would have the Red Willow [votes] in the fight if she [McCook] had to give Red Willow 200 votes.<sup>290</sup>

McCook was named the county seat of Red Willow County in 1896, after six years of litigation had taken the case to the Nebraska Supreme Court, who voted in favor of the change. Shortly after, a side track was built at Red Willow, and Helm had a town laid out and platted on the southeast quarter of section 17. In 1899, he constructed a store building and an elevator was built<sup>291</sup>, but there still was not much of a town to speak of; no lots were sold or any houses built.

When the post office closed in August, 1912<sup>292</sup>, it seemed the town would fade also. The store remained open for a number of years before it was sold out, and the elevator stood as a landmark until just a few years ago when it was destroyed by fire. There is still an elevator to buy, sell, and store grain, but nothing to compare with that tall, frame structure, that monument which seemed to say, "I am Red Willow." It is gone and no longer gets the attention of passers-by, as it once did.

Many do not realize, however, that there is still a remnant of the old town in existence, having survived the trials of time; the Red Willow High School beckons us to remember the past and offers us a vantage point to see the future. Built in 1920, it is an old building that has seen better days. When Red Willow and Indianola High Schools consolidated in 1969, it became known as Republican Valley.

Now the question arises, "Shall we close this relic of our antiquated past and build new, or retain what we've got and make due." It is a difficult question and one of heated debate, only to be decided by a vote of the people. Times really haven't changed.

When he completed his history of Red Willow County in July, 1876, Royal Buck offered this comment. Although it is outdated and suggests the religious zeal of the day, it is still fitting, even for us.

As a whole we have no reason to be ashamed of our record. Indeed we have much of which we can approve, that is mere planting for a future harvest, and in the coming year let us remember that it is ours to plant, which, if we do wisely and well, there is an all wise ruler above us who doeth all things well and he will surely give us the increase.