



## Solomon Valley History

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### **Part 1 – Noble Prentis, 1878 Return To The Solomon Valley**

**The Weekly Commonwealth (Topeka), August 15, 1878.**

THE SOLOMON REVISITED

It was in the merry month of March, 1870, that a party might have been seen leaving Topeka by the Kansas Pacific Railway, their objective point being the Solomon Valley, and their object when the objective point was reached, the promotion of the building of the Solomon Valley & Republican River Railroad, a road which was to start from Solomon City, traverse the Solomon Valley, thence up the headwaters of the Republican to a point on the Denver Pacific Railway, near the town of Evans, Colorado. A magnificent scheme, and one that it was hoped at the time Congress would take to its bounteous bosom and nourish with a subsidy.

The party consisted of the Hon. John Guthrie, who in those days would cheerfully visit any point between Greenland's icy mountains and India's coral strand, to advocate the building of a railroad; Dr. W. E. Webb, then of the National Land Company, and the Romulus and Remus both of Hays City; A. V. Auter, Esq., of Topeka; Mr. Leslie, an attache of the National Land Company; a young gentleman named Parsons, from Northern Ohio; W. H. Spooner, the celebrated correspondent and indefatigable solicitor of the COMMONWEALTH; and the writer, then attached to the Daily State Record, of blessed memory "Vere ish dot party now!" Like the figures at the foot of the election returns, they come under the head of "Scattering." Dr. Webb lives in Chicago; Spooner, instead of traversing the plains and bluffs of Kansas, where "the stormy winds do blow," is "practicing at the law" in the close and heated confines of Nassau street, New York; and so it goes. The only man on whom the eight years "last past" have made no apparent impression, is Mr. Auter. That kindly and sagacious countenance in all that time has never shown "one ray the more, one shade the less." The promoters of the great artery of commerce did the "wind work" faithfully. Solomon City, Lindsey, Glasco, Beloit, then town sites, rather than towns, were visited. The settlers gathered in and speeches were made and resolutions were adopted, till one could almost hear the rumble of the locomotive as it sped up the Solomon Valley, crossed to the headwaters of the Republican, and went on with a rush to make prompt connection with the Denver Pacific "at or near Evans, Colorado." The letters written by Spooner and "your correspondent" to the Topeka morning papers spoke in glowing terms of the beauty of the landscape. Reading those letters one can almost feel on his cheek the balmy breath of June. But it wasn't June, it was March most detestable of months. The prospect was anything but charming. Where the bottom prairie had not been burned over the rank brown grass waved and rustled; where the fire had been, miles of dreary blackness stretched away, the scorched surface broken by the white bleaching bones of the buffalo. It was cold, very cold, and then the wind, great and mighty Boreas, how it did blow! Grass, rosin weed, buffalo bones, ashes, that was the prospect. As to houses, they were scarcely to be seen. Dugouts were the prevailing style of architecture, Lindsey was a county seat, and may have had thirty houses, probably less. Minneapolis was a water power and a little drug store ran by whisky power. Beloit consisted of one house, where Mr. Hersey's dam builders lived. Glasco was Capt. Potts' house. Cawker City was not in existence, and all the world beyond was covered with the buffalo grass primeval and waiting the approach of the Solomon Valley and Republican River Railroad.

The great trouble of the country was Indians. The red whelps had murdered settlers and carried off women not many months before. The settlers who came to the railroad meetings, a fine, resolute body of men, all carried revolvers; at Beloit the party was joined by Lieut. Borden with a corporal and eight men to act as escort. At the forks of Solomon a company of the Seventh Cavalry was stationed, commanded by an Italian, Lieut. DeRudio, a man with a history. Such was the Solomon Valley eight years ago.

The author of this narrative was the official reporter; he wrote up the "survey," and was to receive for his services a bond of the denomination of \$1,000, when the S. V. & R. R. R. had reached a point at or near Evans, Colorado. He has never received the bond, and until the present week has never revisited the scene of his railroad building labors in the Solomon Valley.

As this is not intended as a personal narrative, the events of last Sunday night will be touched on lightly; how the writer in company with Mr. Hillman, the efficient county superintendent of Ottawa county, journeyed by buggy, how it got darker and darker, and blacker and blacker, how it came on to rain, how it thundered and how it lightened; how the road was lost; how it was resolved to trust the sagacity of the black mare to find her way to Minneapolis; how the mare left the road altogether, and journeyed over several "breakings," to find a former residence of hers; how a light was discovered at Lindsey, was lost, was found again; how the mare was urged in a direct line for the light, and how the horse and buggy were suddenly swallowed up in a mass of sunflowers, and then piled into a hole in the ground. The historian of the railroad expedition of 1870 had reached an "objective point," he had got "home;" he was reposing in the cellar of the former "court house" at Lindsey, where once John Guthrie had made the rafters shake with his appeal for a railroad to pour into the lap of Europe the products of the finest valley that God's sunlight had ever shown upon, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to Mr. Potter and his lantern, the buggy was fished out, and at sunrise the remainder of the journey from Lindsey to Minneapolis accomplished by sunrise.

The day was spent in noting the difference between 1870 and 1878. Here in place of a few shambling houses was a nice town; the river was spanned by a high bridge; the swift Solomon had been set to work grinding grain; here was a railroad at last, and an elevator, and newspaper offices, and a big white school house; and a Normal Institute in session. The bearded pioneer with his revolvers was nowhere about. He was now a flourishing farmer coming into town on a load of wheat; and at night when the young ladies and gentlemen of the Normal Institute, and the townspeople gathered at the new little church, it was hard to believe that they or their fathers and mothers had ever lived in dugouts, on buffalo meat. A more refined and cultured looking audience, more patient and attentive, was never gathered even in Kansas.

On the afternoon of Monday, through the kindness of Mr. Olney, the writer was enabled to visit that great curiosity "The City of Rocks," about three miles from Minneapolis, on the opposite side of the river.

The slope of the bluffs which bound the Solomon Valley, at this point is very gradual and rock crops out only at or very near the summit. It seemed strange then, to notice a long line of scattered boulders lying half way up the long slope at a considerable distance from the regular rock formation. On near approach there are seen to be three groups of independent rocks, the whole length of the line being perhaps, forty rods; all around them, above and below is the green untouched sod of the prairie. The attempt of nature appears to have been to make out of the huge masses a number of spheres, but many of them have been spoiled in the making. One huge mass is as round as a billiard ball, and so that is its name. It is at least fifteen feet in diameter and looks as if a vigorous push would send it rolling down the slope. Each mass rests on a pedestal, or rather in a shallow cup of common soft sandstone. The masses themselves are of gray rock that sparkles where fractured like rock salt. They are checked and split in every direction, and some of them looked like petrified cable tiers, the creases and windings of the hemp being preserved. Many have been split in two, and the fragments lie about. The most remarkable rocks have been photographed, and named. One is the "Billiard Ball," another the "Sarcophagus," one we think Mr. Olney called the "Duchess," and so on. The place is a favorite resort, and distinguished people have visited it, at least we saw cut in the sandstone in proud letters the name, "Jones."

Leaving the "City of Rocks," and going to the top of the bluff—and a carriage can be driven almost to the very crest—and one may behold something that he will not forget; no, not if he goes where "Alpine solitudes ascend."

The long green slope, as smooth as any lawn, stretches to the Solomon, the doublings of that stream, which repeatedly turns back on its track, bring into view successive belts of timber with bright green spaces between, and the trees and the meadow bring to view the windings of the Thames, as seen from Windsor Castle, when one looks toward Runnymede where the barons extorted Magna Charta from King John. In the middle distance shine the white houses of Minneapolis and then comes again the prairie, rising gradually till the line of bluffs is seen in the blue distance. Looking to the northeast, the line of vision is unobstructed for twenty miles. One beholds what seems a green and placid, voiceless, waveless sea, while skirting it one beholds one beyond another, high bluffs projecting like purple headlands.

Notwithstanding the immense emigration, this country has hardly been touched as yet. The farms, numerous as they are, are but dots in the immense prospect.

The beauty one beholds now is that of nature, and a beauty that rude cultivation will destroy rather than enhance. But when this is a finished country; when the hedges are trimmed; when the rank weeds are kept down; when the snowy apple orchards (and the apple bloom is the "flower of civilization") whiten the slopes; when great elms line and shadow the highway; Kansas will be the loveliest land on earth.

But to resume. The train took us away in the morning from Minneapolis to Solomon City, and afforded us a sunlight view of the Valley of the Solomon. The railroad follows the course of the river over a plain as level as a floor. The river cuts down twenty feet into the soil, and at that depth no rock, gravel, or hard clay is visible. It is like a garden bed at that depth at least. The country looks like an old settled region. More has been done in the Solomon Valley in eight years than was done in Illinois in thirty years after its settlement. And the end is not yet.

Of the friends new and old we met and made at Minneapolis a long paragraph might be made; but it is unnecessary. That they live where they do is the highest compliment to their sense; the best guarantee of the prosperous future that we devoutly wish them.

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**NOTE:**

A few weeks later Prentis traveled the Solomon Valley again, covering "Congressional Canvass in the First District," with Republican candidate for Congress John A. Anderson. Since Prentis provides no information about Anderson, a short biography will be helpful. John Alexander Anderson, 1834-1892, was a native of Pennsylvania. He attended Miami University in Ohio, where his father served as president, and his roommate was future president Benjamin Harrison. Anderson became a Presbyterian minister and served as an army chaplain during the Civil War. He came to Junction City KS in 1868 as minister of the Presbyterian Church. In 1873 he was appointed president of Kansas State Agricultural College at Manhattan, a position he held at the time of his campaign for office in 1878. He was elected to Congress and resigned as president of Kansas State in 1879. Anderson served six terms in Congress, 1879-1891, after which he was appointed U.S. Consul General in Cairo, Egypt, by his old roommate, President Harrison. Anderson became ill in Egypt and died on his return to the U.S. in 1892. Anderson Hall at Kansas State University was named to honor him.

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**The Daily Commonwealth (Topeka), September 25, 1878, p. 2.**

Beloit, Sept. 21, 1878.

To the Editor of the Commonwealth:

Some weeks ago, under the head of "The Solomon Revisited," your correspondent had the pleasure of chatting with the readers of the COMMONWEALTH regarding the changes wrought in eight years in the lower Solomon valley from Solomon City to Minneapolis. On the 19th inst., the writer started on a mission connected with the salvation of this blessed country, and of the First Congressional District in particular, which has brought him into the Upper Solomon valley as far as this point.

The trip from Solomon City to Minneapolis was undertaken this time by rail which proved an immense advance over land transit by buggy, with a descent into a cellar by way of variety. The weather was dark and rainy, but snug and dry the trip was pleasantly accomplished. Enlivened by the company of Dr. McHenry, of Minneapolis, who "fit into the rebellion" in the old 22nd Illinois Volunteers, and so was an acquaintance of that curious old warrior, Capt. Harvey Neville, concerning whom Hanback tells heart-breaking stories. And, speaking of old soldier stories, now that so many "old boys" are dropping out of ranks here, and going into camp beyond the river, there is a tendency among the survivors to draw closer together and speak oftener of the old war times.

**(to be continued)**