



Solomon Valley History

To Read More about
Solomon Valley History
visit our website at
www.hwy24.org

Noble Prentis, Exploring the Solomon Valley

Recent issues of SVA included a reprint of "Exploring the Solomon River Valley in 1869," the diary of Robert McBratney of Junction City. The purpose of that exploration was to evaluate the Solomon Valley for a possible railroad.

Another group, from Topeka, came to the Solomon Valley in 1870, promoting the Solomon Valley and Republican River Railroad. **Noble L. Prentis, Topeka newspaper reporter**, published articles in the Daily Kansas State Record. In 1878 Prentis returned to the Solomon Valley and wrote articles for The Commonwealth of Topeka, telling about the changes that had occurred since 1870. These articles, provided by SV24 member Ron Parks, will be reprinted here and continued in future issues.

It should be noted that the 1869 exploration and the 1870 promotion trips did not result in a railroad because the sought-for land grant to build the line was not awarded. Although 1/5 of the land in Kansas was given out as railroad land grants, no grants were awarded for lines in the Solomon Valley. Other railroads built into the Solomon Valley later.

Noble Lovely Prentis, author of the following articles, was an important figure in early Kansas newspaper history. He was born in a log cabin in Illinois in 1839. His parents died in the cholera epidemic of 1849, and Noble went to live with an uncle in Vermont. When he was 18 he learned the printer's trade and moved back to Illinois to work for a newspaper. When the Civil War began Prentis enlisted in the 16th Illinois Volunteers. He served with that regiment to the end of the war.

He published a newspaper in Alexandria, Missouri, after the war. He married Maria Strong in 1866, and they had two daughters. In 1869 Prentis moved to Topeka and became a reporter for the Daily Kansas State Record.

He later worked for other newspapers, including the Lawrence Journal and Junction City Union, before returning to Topeka to work for the Topeka Commonwealth, where he worked when he wrote the 1878 articles of his return visit to the Solomon Valley. After the death of his wife Maria, Prentis married Mrs. Carrie Anderson of Topeka. He later worked for the Atchison Champion, Newton Republican, and in 1890 joined the editorial staff of the Kansas City Star, where he worked until his death in 1900. Prentis wrote several books, including A History of Kansas in 1899, which became the standard textbook for Kansas History in the public schools.

The story of the 1870 railroad promotion in the Solomon Valley began with the following notice. W. E. Webb of that party deserves further identification. He was a land agent for the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division (later known as the Kansas Pacific Railway) that, with the help of a large land grant, constructed the first railroad across Kansas, from Kansas City to Denver (completed in 1870). Webb was the founder of Hays City in 1867, a project that destroyed the nearby town of Rome started by Buffalo Bill Cody and William Rose. Webb was involved with several railroad projects, including the proposed Solomon Valley and Republican River Railroad.

The following notice appeared in the Daily Kansas State Record (Topeka), March 15, 1870, p. 4: "The following gentlemen left yesterday on the 12:40 train for a trip up the Solomon, viz: Hon. John Guthrie, W. E. Webb, W. F. Leslie and A. V. Auter, of this city; and S. H. Parsons, of Ohio. They were accompanied by Mr. Prentis, of the RECORD; and Spooner, of the Commonwealth, and are to be joined at Solomon City by Hon. Mr. Snead, of Salina, and Hon. Mr. Lambert, of Ottawa. Gen. [Nelson] Miles, commanding at Fort Harker, will also join them at Solomon with an escort. They were to hold a public meeting at Solomon City last night, and at Lindsey to-night; at Lake Sibley

Tuesday night, and at some point in Mitchell county Wednesday. The object of the meetings are to talk up the Solomon Valley & Republican River Railroad."

Prentis's first article appeared in the Daily Kansas State Record (Topeka), March 16, 1870, p. 4. They traveled on the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division. He wrote:

Enthusiastic Railroad Meeting

Solomon City, March 13, 1870

Dear Record: -The Topeka party arrived here safe, sound and cold this evening. The ride up was not particularly inspiring, the drifting snow hiding the country from observation on one side of the train and the smoke of the engine the other. The party left the cars but once, and that was to partake of a good square meal at Wamego.

The train was crowded with passengers bound for all the points between Topeka and Denver. A good many people left the train at Junction City, to go down the Neosho Valley, but their places were refilled by others.

On arriving at Solomon City, the party met a hearty reception from mine host Hall, of the Hall House, who "fired up" vigorously in all the stoves in the house, and had a smoking supper ready "in a jiffy." We found the Hall House crowded from ridge pole to cellar with explorers, and others bound "up the Solomon Valley."

At night all hands turned out to one of the heartiest railroad meetings you ever saw or heard of.

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Searl, and Mr. Marvin was called to the chair, Dr. Searl acting as Secretary.

Dr. Wm. E. Webb being called on, briefly explained that the object of the meeting was to obtain the views of the people respecting a railroad up the Solomon Valley, then up the Republican to Evans, Colorado, with a branch to Julesburg, on the Union Pacific. To do this it was desirable to obtain a grant of lands from Congress, and it had been found that Congress was more willing to make such a grant when the plan received the hearty endorsement of the people. It was intended to obtain the endorsement of the people of the counties through which the road was to pass. Dr. Webb alluded to the advantages of the railroad to the country generally, and to Solomon City in particular.

Hon. John Guthrie said Topeka felt an interest in the development of the West. She had nothing to expect from the East, North or South, she looked to the West. When this Western country was filled with people, with grain and with cattle, Topeka expected to be the depot from which this section would draw its supplies. He alluded to the influence of railroads in building up a country. He had visited Solomon City, last May and again in September, and but one or two persons got off the train here, but now twenty often leave the cars here in a day. How, he asked, was this country to be developed? In the first place it needed advertising. It was comparatively unknown. . . . Ottawa county had been organized for seven years, and had now perhaps 250 voters; this county had say 300. Thousands of people have gone into the Neosho Valley and into Southern Kansas, simply because that county has been advertised. The next thing needed is a railroad. If you can get a land grant to build a railroad and a telegraph line from Solomon City to Evans, it will be built. Any man conversant with that country will say that without a railroad, the county will not be settled in forty years.

(to be continued – Part 2 forthcoming)

Part 2

Noble Prentis, Exploring The Solomon Valley

[The articles written by Noble Prentis about the 1870 excursion of promoters for the proposed Solomon Valley and Republican River Railroad continue. Prentis's account continues as printed in the Daily Kansas State Record (Topeka), March 18, 1870, p. 4. They are at Lindsay in Ottawa County. Lindsay was the first county seat of Ottawa County. It is located less than a mile southeast of Minneapolis, which was founded later and became the county seat. He wrote:]

Mr. Guthrie followed in a speech stating the intentions and expectations of the company. He spoke of the length of the road; the advantage such road would be to the vast unoccupied and uninhabited territory. That much of the land lying between the head waters of the Solomon and Denver Pacific would be as worthless to the present generation without the aid of railroads as so many acres of sunshine. He suggested that the only way to advance the standard of civilization was to build this road; that this would not be done without a land grant.

Mr. Tucker knew something of the country to be traversed by the road. He had accompanied Senator Ross on his expedition, and also Col. Forsythe. The upper Solomon Valley he described as a superior

country, better timbered than the lower valley. Coal also abounded, and he had seen a strata of white limestone 25 feet thick, and the soil on the top of the limestone hills was three feet thick, and pronounced by Prof. Mudge to be of excellent quality.

Mr. Speer said the men of Ottawa County were for railroads. He believed every man in the county would sign a petition to Congress to grant the land to a railroad. Every man up at the Forks is asking about the railroads; they have settled up there in expectation of its arrival. Of course we want a railroad. The women, too, are all for it, and the boys of Ottawa are educated to believe in railroads. Mr. Corning wanted a railroad. If he supposed there would not be one built within five years, he would not stay in the Valley. He had a saw-mill, and was an interested party, he wanted to sell and ship lumber, and he believed he could do it when the railroad was built. Money was what the people wanted, and with a railroad to raise the value of their lands three-fold, they would make the money, and he hoped some of it would find its way into his pocket.

Mr. Kiser had been a citizen of Clay County, and was a director of the Republican Valley and Denver R.R., but he had purchased land in Ottawa, and expected to aid in its railroad enterprises.

Mr. Underwood, of Georgia, did not come to this country expecting a railroad, but because he had found in this Valley the finest land in the world. He had bought the land from friends, but on coming he found that as the Queen of Sheba, who visited Solomon, said, the "half had not been told" him. He expected to make Ottawa County his future home, and was heart and soul in favor of the railroad.

Messrs. Tucker, Lambert and Corning were appointed a committee on resolutions, and reported a series of resolutions strongly endorsing the project as of vital importance to Ottawa County, and memorializing Congress for a land grant.

Resolutions were also adopted, thanking the gentlemen from abroad, and also the representatives of the press, for their attendance. A rousing "aye" also greeted a vote of thanks to the chairman.

As at Solomon City we found the people wide awake on the railroad question, and hospitable to the railroad people from Topeka. The reporters of the party, and in fact all the members of the "army of observation," were placed under special obligations to Hon. W. W. Lambert, Representative from Ottawa county, and to the ladies of his family, for their extreme kindness and generous hospitality. [Daily Kansas State Record (Topeka), March 22, 1870, p. 4.]