



Solomon Valley History

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Noble Prentis, Exploring the Solomon Valley – Parts 3 & 4

Daily Kansas State Record (Topeka), March 23, 1870, p. 4.

Up The Solomon

The Railroad Meeting at Glasco

Speech of the "Record's" Reporter

In the Commonwealth's very excellent letter from Glasco, yesterday morning, our readers doubtless noticed a statement to the effect that "Mr. Prentis, of the RECORD, was called out, and made a speech" at the railroad meeting there on the 16th inst. The known modesty of "our reporter" of course forbade any mention of the fact in his letter of the same date to this paper. Late last night, however, "an intelligent contraband came through the lines" from Glasco, via Lindsey, Solomon City and the K. P. Railroad, bringing us a verbatim report of Mr. P.'s remarks, the same having been taken down with chalk on buffalo-chips. And, thus, we have the happiness of laying before the country another brilliant contribution to the eloquence of the nineteenth century. The speech of our distinguished co-worker, as near as we have been able to decipher it, was substantially as follows:

Mr. Chairman and Fellow-Citizens: Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I cannot find it in my heart to resist your call upon this occasion. This is my first visit to the frontier, and as far as I've got, I must say I like it. [Cheers.] The Solomon Valley suits me exactly. It's a nice thing-a big thing, I think I may say without fear of contradiction. [Great applause.] There's more land to the acre out here than anywhere in the world-to the best of my knowledge and belief. [Cheers.] My friend, Dr. Webb, assures me that this is the veritable "Garden of Eden"-with the snake and the fruit trees left out; and I believe it. [Continued applause.] I wouldn't dare to express any different opinion, even if I felt it, for I am under contract to corroborate everything the Dr. says on the subject. [Cries of "Bully for Webb."] But, fellow-citizens, it does not become me to expatiate on the manifold beauties and advantages of this incomparably-splendid valley I am no orator, as my friend Spooner is. This theme is "too hefty for my intellect." I am not skilled in the art of word-painting. And even if I were, I wouldn't have the "cheek" to attempt it on such a topic for who can

"Throw a perfume on the violet,
-or add another hue
Unto the rainbow?"

There, my beloved listeners, how's that for "high?" [Cries of "hi," "hi,"] You do me too much honor, fellow-citizens. That violet-rainbow "gag" is not original. It is borrowed from one of the old poets. [Great applause.] Your generous plaudits embolden me to say, however, that I do sometimes write verses myself. "Lend me your ears" and I'll recite a few lines that I got up yesterday afternoon, while gazing upon your lovely valley, and thinking about S. V. & R.R. Railroad:

I thought the day a Train of golden hours,
Drawn by an engine all compact of light;
A viewless track it took, up-borne by flowers,
Which scarcely bent beneath the burden slight,
From shining East it sped to sombre West,
Where the great depot, Night, loomed dusky-clear;
Then on, through level leagues of dark it pressed,
The Sun the great red light upon the rear!

That, my fellow-citizens, is what the critics call a 'similitude.'" [A voice: "Three cheers for old 'similitude.'"]

So much, my patient hearers, for poetry. Now to business. You need a railroad up here. No country can get along now-a-days without a railroad. I believe in railroads. It would be queer if I didn't, when they "dead-head" me wherever I want to go. I repeat it, fellow-citizens, I believe in railroads. [Uproarious applause]. They develop the country, and create towns, and raise the price of property, and put double-column advertisements in the newspapers, and carry excursion-parties at half-rates, and make things "git up and git" generally. [Deafening cheers.] You ought to have-you must have-a road right up this magnificent valley. And our little party is "on it." A company has been organized to build such a road. The Secretary of the Company is in the room, and is prepared to furnish you certificates of stock. [Cries of "Trot him out."] And while on the subject of subscribing for things, fellow-citizens, permit me to say, what I ought perhaps to have remarked before, that I have the honor to represent here the KANSAS STATE RECORD newspaper-the largest and liveliest and handsomest journal between the Alleghanies and the Pacific Ocean-price \$2 a year, invariably in advance, and perfect satisfaction guaranteed. I shall take pleasure, fellow-citizens, in receiving your names just as fast as we can make change. [An en masse approach of the audience, each man bearing a \$2 bill, forced the speaker to subside. After entering all the names, and pocketing the funds, he resumed.]

To return, my friends, to the subject proper before the meeting. This railroad is bound to be built. There is a necessity for it; and whenever and wherever there is a necessity for anything in this age and country, it is sure to come. Besides, this project is in the hands of energetic and substantial men, who mean business. They have confidence in the practicability of the scheme, and, with your aid and encouragement, will certainly carry it through-making the proposed line the great connecting link-an umbilical cord, so to speak,--between the Kansas Pacific and the Union Pacific--starting say at Solomon City, and coming out at Evans--running through one of the most fertile and inviting sections of our glorious young State-attracting immigrants by the thousands-giving you a double outlet, east and west,--making your salt-springs a treasury of wealth, and your rich mineral deposits ditto,--bringing, in fact, every advantage and every blessing now enjoyed by the most favored portions of the new Western States. [Long continued applause.] I know these statements are correct, for I got them out of the Company's circulars--and such documents never exaggerate anything. [Cheers.] But, fellow-citizens, time admonishes me that I must "switch off"--as we railroad fellows say. I beg you to be of good cheer. Possess your souls in patience. Have confidence. Railroads are not built in a day. It takes time and trouble and talking to do such things. But don't fret. Go on with your house-building and grain-raising. The railroad will come along one of these days. [Applause.] In conclusion, permit me to tender you my heartfelt thanks for your very kind and approving reception of my scattering and unpremeditated remarks, and to assure you that when the S.V. & R. R. Railroad is completed to Glasco, I'll be here to help you celebrate the event if I have to pay my way clear from Topeka. Good-bye, fellow-citizens of Glasco. Peace be within your borders, and plenteousness in all your cabins. I am loth to close. But I suppose I must. Good-bye. Vouchsafe me a place in your prayers. Read the STATE RECORD regularly; or the Commonwealth, if you prefer it--both are first-class papers, and "they will do you good." Bear in mind and obey our excellent and practical Governor's recommendation concerning the increase of population. And, finally, be sure to remember--do not forget, for a moment, I pray you,--the noble legacy of the old Iriquois chief, Stick-in-the-mud, to his beloved son, brave young Gewhilikins: "Be virtuous, and you'll be happy." "Hail and Farewell!"

Daily Kansas State Record (Topeka), March 24, 1870, p. 1. [<associated with the above bit or the following??](#)

Solomon Valley R.R.

Enthusiastic Meetings Everywhere

The Excursionists on Their Way Home

[Salina, Kansas, March 23.](#) [< this date does not jive with the prior March 24 date above](#)

The Solomon Valley Railroad party reached this place at noon to-day, on their way home. They went up the Solomon to the forks, and from there twenty miles up the north fork of the river. Crossing to the south fork, they returned down the river. On their way up they held a meeting at Willow Springs [now Beloit], in Mitchell county, twenty miles below the forks. Nearly sixty men turned out to the meeting. Mitchell County has probably about one hundred and fifty voters. The meeting was addressed by Messrs. Webb, Spooner and Prentis, and citizens of the county. The party

report that throughout the entire valley there is great enthusiasm in favor of the proposed railroad. The valley is unanimous for a land grant. The meetings were largely attended and all felt a great interest in the road. The expedition has been a great success. Every county has petitioned sold for the grant.

The cold weather did not turn the party back. They feel well repaid for their trip, and report the Solomon Valley to be one of the finest on the continent. The bottoms are broad and have the richest soil in the world. The citizens of the Valley were hospitable and gave the excursionists every encouragement and assistance. At Willow Springs, a military escort joined them, commanded by Lieutenant Geo. P. Borden, of the Fifth Infantry. The entire party will return to Topeka to-morrow.

Daily Kansas State Record (Topeka), March 25, 1870, p. 4.
Returned.

The Solomon Valley Excursionists returned yesterday, after having pursued their investigations to a point twenty miles up the North Fork of Solomon and fifty miles above whisky. On yesterday afternoon the party invested in clean shirts, and with the fertile soil of the Solomon Valley removed from their faces, might have been seen on the streets of Topeka receiving the congratulations of their friends on their safe return, and enlarging to astonished groups on the wonderful richness of the Valley aforesaid. All that the expeditionists did and said, accompanied by statistics showing the number of buffalo, turkeys, elk, and antelope they didn't kill, will appear in the RECORD from day to day until everything is told.

Mitchell County, Kansas

Railroad Meeting at Willow Springs [Beloit]

A large meeting of the citizens of Mitchell County interested in the construction of a railroad up the Solomon Valley, was held at Hersey's Ranche, Willow Springs, on Thursday evening, March 17th, 1870.

Mr. C. F. Welch called the meeting to order, and Mr. B. F. Moody was elected Chairman, and Mr. C. F. Welch Secretary.

Hon. W. W. Lambert, of Ottawa County, stated the object of the meeting and was followed by Dr. William E. Webb in a more extended explanation of the meeting.

Mr. Spooner, of the Commonwealth, addressed the meeting, devoting his remarks principally to a comparison of the Solomon Valley with the other valleys of the State, and gave a history of the railroad resolution in the Legislature, and the reason why that body failed to endorse the Solomon Valley and Republican River Railroad last winter, and the good influence of railroads in the pecuniary, moral and educational advantages brought to a country by them.

Mr. Welch had always been in favor of a railroad up the Solomon Valley, but had been opposed to land grants as given to railroads heretofore, but he felt satisfied from what he had heard that this grant would be given on terms just and equitable to the settlers. With that view of the case he should heartily support the railroad movement.

The chair appointed Messrs. Brown, Gates and George a committee who reported a series of resolutions strongly affirming the necessity of a railroad up the Solomon Valley, and memorializing the Senators and Representatives of Kansas in Congress to use their influence to obtain a grant of lands for the Solomon Valley and Republican River Railroad.

Daily Kansas State Record (Topeka), March 26, 1870, p. 4.

Up The Solomon.

From Glasco to "Camp Freeze-out"-Willow Springs-the Great Waconda Da-A Rough Night-Homeward Bound.

The "line failed" at Glasco, as far as sending letters to Topeka was concerned, and consequently the "Editorial correspondence of the STATE RECORD" from the Solomon River party came to a sudden termination at that point. Dropping, therefore, the epistolary style, we will close this thrilling narrative after the ordinary style of historians.

On leaving Glasco, the party soon passed through a large settlement; the houses seemed commodious and comfortable and the principal inhabitants, who stood at the doors of their residences and watched us pass, looked fat and prosperous. We must remark, however, in explanation, that this flourishing place was a prairie dog town.

The face of the country exhibited little change. We crossed several creeks, among them Asher creek, on which is situated one of the older settlements of the upper Valley, the scene of the Indian outrages of 1868. Some of the improvements are very good. "Asherville," the last post office on the route, is situated on Asher creek; we believe the post office is, at present, the only house in town. Plum creek is another famous stream in this region, and a company of militia were at one time stationed in some sod barracks on its banks. After their departure several families took possession of the quarters, and a few weeks ago a prairie fire destroyed a portion of the ranche, burning up the settlers' houses, household furniture, etc. Next to Indians, prairie fires have injured the people of the Valley more than any other cause.

We reached "Willow Springs," also known as "Beloit" and "Hersey's Ranche," in Mitchell County. This city consists of two houses; a cabin temporarily vacant, and a large shanty occupied by the hands employed by Mr. Hersey, of Abilene, who is building a grist mill on that point of the Solomon. The original name of the place, "Willow Springs," is derived from some beautiful springs in a ravine near the shanty, once a favorite resort for Indians. We found the ranche in charge of Mr. Gaylord, who, though suffering from ague, did all he could to make our party comfortable. At night, a fine railroad meeting was held, the proceedings of which have already been published. The meeting was a striking proof of the soundness of the old maxim, "Appearances are often deceptive." The rough-bearded men, with their revolvers in their belts, who gathered in the evening, and held their meeting by the light of the fire and a solitary "dip," [candle] were not exactly elegant in their "style," but it has not often been the writers good fortune to meet a more sensible and intelligent "crowd" of the same number of men.

The men attending the party was reinforced by a corporal and six men from Fort Harker, the whole "outfit" being in charge of Lieut. Geo. P. Borden, of the 5th U.S. Infantry. Lieut. B. brought tents, blankets and rations, but most valuable of all an extra ambulance and his own society. We found the Lieutenant, like the "Captain of the Benoni," a "charming fellow by the way," and many of the laughs which echoed up the Valley and were possibly heard by the distant "Shiowas and Kiowas" were directly traceable to his instigation.

With Lieut. Borden came also Mons. Joseph Berrier, late of the Chasseurs D'Afrique, who fought for the late unlucky Maximilian. "Joe" was, after his arrival, chief cook for the expedition, and, in that capacity covered himself all over with glory.

The "cavalcade," now quite formidable in appearance, proceeded up the valley from Willow Springs, crossing Brown's creek, which has upon it some fine timber, and thence to Limestone creek, the name of which is sufficient description. Between Limestone and Granny creek, 'so-called,' we suppose, on account its dried-up appearance, the road runs over a high rolling prairie, covered with buffalo bones, and looking desolate enough. On the edge of this prairie, near Limestone, is the lonely grave of Dr. Rose, who was killed the Indians, and buried where he fell.

On crossing Granny creek, the party "struck out" for the great Wagonda Da, the Great Spirit spring. This spring is the object of considerable reverence among the Indians, and is the source of many incredible stories among the whites. It is really a curiosity. This spring is situated on the prairie near the Solomon, on top of a rocky mound perhaps thirty feet high. The mound stands in the centre of a sort of amphitheater, and no rock of a similar character can be found in the surrounding banks or anywhere in that region. The spring is a sullen, turbid pool, thirty feet in diameter, said to be quite deep in the center, but nearly filled with mud elsewhere. The spring is always even full, the surplus water escaping by a subterranean passage at the foot of the mound. The water tastes like a mixture of Epsom salts, common salt, and saleratus, flavored and scented with old cheese. The rocks were covered with a white deposit which tasted like the water, only "more so." Two dead buffaloes laid near as if they had asked each other up to drink, and died after the operation. The gentle and imaginative savage who formerly trotted over these plains, awed by the awful taste of the water, called the spring Wagonda Da, the Great Spirit Spring, and was accustomed to fling in an old gun or blanket to keep the Great Spirit good-natured while his red children went off to steal something. Our party fished vigorously, but failed to find anything save some very suspicious rags.

Having "done" the "Wagonda Da," the march was resumed, and before nightfall he party reached the forks of the Solomon. Here we found "Troop G," 7th U. S. Cavalry, commanded by Lieut. C. C. DeRudio, an Italian gentleman, and a faithful and vigilant officer. The brief acquaintance formed with this gentleman and Dr. Arms, the Surgeon of the "garrison," was a very pleasant one.

The prairie and timber about the Forks are good, and on the level prairie on the north side a Hays City party propose to build a town.

We made our first camp on the Solomon, and to some of us it brought strange fancies to sleep once more beneath canvas roof. The next morning under a lowry sky, we broke camp and started up the North Fork. The day was a wretched one, dark and cold. After marching up Oak Creek, one of the best timbered streams in Kansas, we crossed, and after traveling over the prairie in a rather irregular manner, crossed Twelve-mile Creek and thence to the North Fork, where we went into camp in a fine oak grove. Here a hunting party composed of the "braves" of the party went out and compassed the destruction of a squirrel and a prairie chicken. The weather grew no warmer very fast, and that night what Charles Lamb called "cursory language" grew alarmingly prevalent. The mules, indignant at their surroundings, eat up the whips and were about to eat up one of the ambulances and its driver, when their ears fairly "wilted" under a storm of the most fearful imprecations it was ever "your deponent's" bad luck to listen to. The next morning it was announced that rations and forage were getting low, and it was decided to give up the further exploration of the Valley in a northwest direction. The clouds had cleared away in the night, and the morning was bright but chilly; as we struck our tents, rolled up our blankets, and left "Camp Freezeout" and traveled not up, but down the Solomon.

[That concludes Prentis's account of the 1870 railroad excursion "up the Solomon." Although there was strong support for the construction of a railroad up the Solomon Valley, the hoped-for land grant never materialized. There were additional railroad efforts and, eventually, lines were built without a land grant and new towns were founded.]

The Solomon Valley Railway, a branch of the Kansas Pacific Railway, opened a line from Solomon City to Beloit in 1879, going through the towns Prentis had visited in 1870. The railroad changed names, for a time known as the Central Branch of the Union Pacific, and eventually became part of the Missouri Pacific Railroad. It built westward to Downs, and from there lines were constructed up both forks of the Solomon River. The railroad along the North Fork was built as far as Lenora in the early 1880s, and the line along the South Fork built as far as Bull City (now Alton) where it stopped until extended as far as Stockton in 1886. The railroads made the settlement and growth of communities along the Solomon River possible.]