

— History of the Red Jacket Valley —

Preface

This beautiful and picturesque valley with its wooded hills and meandering rivers, has seen many changes over the past one hundred fifty years. Progress quickly brought about changes to the natural landscape of the river valley.

Driving through the valley today it's hard to imagine the landscape void of roads, small farms and homes. Let me take you back in time and imagine looking over the ridge only to see the LeSueur River winding between the wooded hills. Wildlife is abundant and bald eagles soar overhead. As you follow the smoke of a campfire you see a few scattered teepees along the river. All you hear is the wind rustling through the trees and the birds singing their peaceful song. This is what Pierre Charles LeSueur, the French explorer saw when he and his men first arrived in the pristine LeSueur River valley in 1700.

Picture arriving in 1870 as a young immigrant in search of opportunity. As you near the edge of the ridge with your team and wagon you stop to view the beautiful valley. Small log cabins can be seen dotted throughout the valley. In the distance is a flour mill in operation along the river. A farmer with his team of horses and wagon are carrying wheat to the mill and as he nears the river a hand pulled ferry is ready to transport him across the river. Another farmer can be seen breaking ground with his team of horses with a one-bottom walking plow. Several school children are carrying their lunch pails as they walk to the one room schoolhouse.

Can you hear the sounds of the hammer as the workmen lay the track for the new railroad? How about the steam engine chugging up the hillside? Later came the sound of the first automobile to the valley and the workhorse disappeared with the emergence of the tractor.

Long gone is the Red Jacket Mill and the sound of the old locomotive is no longer heard in the valley. Even though many changes have taken place in the valley over the last century and a half, the natural beauty of the bluffs, hills and valley still remain. This book is an attempt to preserve the history of the Red Jacket Valley. The beauty of the valley is nature's gift for all to enjoy. With this gift comes a responsibility to preserve and protect the land and pass on our history to future generations.