The Cooper brothers, Thomas J. and Rollin C., played an important role in the early settlement of the county and in the building of the town in the center of their large land holdings.  T. J. was 50-years-old when they came here in the fall of 1880, while his brother Rollin was 35.  T. J.'s son, Charles, was 22 and also involved in the ranch operation.

The Coopers came here well prepared to begin large-scale farming and the timing was also in their favor with homesteads, pre-emptions, tree claims and railroad land awaiting settlers.  They came here with finances from success in Colorado mining.  They had experience in farming and also in managing a large force of men required in their operation.

In October of 1880 Rollin C. Cooper had followed the Sibley Trail across Barnes County to the year-old sod house of Ed.  Ladbury near Sibley's old Camp Corning.  As there was no room for him in the house that night he slept in the haystack.  In the morning he brushed the frost off that he had slept in and was ready for another day.  No one suspected that this large, genial, bearded man of thirty-five carried with him, or on his person, $25,000 to invest in the new land.  Such was the story told of Mr. Cooper's first trip into what was to become Griggs County.

In the fall of 1880 they began building their barn and "boarding house" for the men.  These buildings were located on the SW of Section 26 in Cooperstown Township, land taken by Thomas J. Cooper as his tree claim.  Rollin's homestead was on the NE'A of Section 34.  He also had a tree claim on the same Section.  T.J. bought 10,000 acres directly from the railroad in 1880 surrounding the ranch buildings and Rollin's homestead.  As the Cooper Ranch was located 35 miles from the railroad at Sanborn they built a "halfway place" with a barn 30 x 100 feet in the vicinity of the present town of Dazey.  As the Cooper's shipment of five carloads of mules did not come until 1881 when T.J., R.C., and Charles went to St. Louis for them there seems little question that part of his lumber and supplies of 1880 were hauled for them by early settlers near Sanborn and Valley City.

About 65 friends and acquaintances of the Coopers from St. Clair County in Michigan came in 1881 and 1882 and formed the Cooper settlement.  Several of the young men took pre-emptions on good land on even numbered sections adjoining Cooper's railroad land.  These men worked for the Coopers.  For these it has been stated that Cooper paid from $500 to $800 and their pre-emption costs of $400 per 160 acres.

None of Mr. Cooper's books or ledgers are known to exist. In 1957 Mrs. Myrtle Porterville had weekly installments in the *Sentinel - Courier* about the Cooper family and the Cooper Ranch.  Much of her material came from interviews of the people who had worked for the Coopers or knew them personally.  Mrs. Porterville also did considerable research in the *Courier* and *Sentinel* of the early years.  Most of the figures we have on the Cooper operation are from news items in those newspapers.  Being used for promotional purposes they may be exaggerated.  It was mentioned they had 18,000 acres of railroad land and some government land, in all 25,000 acres.  One item in 1883 stated they owned 23,620 acres of land, of which 7,140 were improved.

The Cooper's first breaking of 7,000 acres was in 1881 when their only crop was oats.  They had their first wheat crop in 1882 when they also had some oats.  That year they had 150,000 bushels of grain waiting for the completion of the railroad to Cooperstown.  Rollin Cooper played an important role in having the railroad extended to Cooperstown in 1883, where he was a member of the Townsite Company promoting the building of the town.

T.J. and R.C. Cooper's partnership was dissolved in 1886 when R.C. bought out his brother's share in the landholdings and also Townsite Company.  R.C. operated the ranch for many years but gradually land was sold to relatives and friends.  In 1908 Mr. Cooper had about 5000 acres remaining in his name.  By 1916 the original Cooper farms were split up and sold to local people.  At one time the Cooper farm consisted of three ranches.  The home ranch was on Section 26 in Cooperstown Township, Ranch 5 was on Section 5 in Cooperstown Township and Ranch 7 was on Section 7 in Washburn Township.  Ranch 7 became a year-around headquarters after Mr. Cooper had bought it in his own name and was maintained longer than Ranch 5.

Rollin C. Cooper had been appointed county commissioner during territorial days by Governor Ordway and continued to serve by successive re-elections until 1868.  In politics Mr. Cooper represented his district in the House of Representatives in 1895 and in the State Senate from 1899-1901.

Three fine buildings In Cooperstown remind us of the Cooper family.  The courthouse built in 1884 was located on land donated by the Cooper Brothers and they also donated $1000. towards the construction.  The Masonic Temple is located on lots donated by R.C. Cooper.  He also donated a Section of land (9-144-58) towards the building.  This land had an $8000. mortgage on it.  The third building reminding us of the Coopers is the fine home, across the street from the courthouse, which R.C. Cooper built in 1906.  It is now owned and occupied by the Willis Nilsons.

At the present time (1981) there are no descendants of the Cooper family living in Griggs County.  The last one to live here was Charles Cooper who had inherited the tree claim of his father, T.J. Cooper, which was the original ranch site.  Mr. Charles Cooper resided here at the time of his death in 1947.

**Other Cooper family descendants living of which we have a record of are: Patricia Cooper Champion of Gate, Ga., a great-great granddaughter of James Burnett Cooper; Robert L. Cooper living in Japan who is a grandson of Henry Cooper; John M. Merriell, of Campbell, California, wrote that Wallace A. Merriell was an uncle of his father and that Wallace had married Julia Cooper, a daughter of Thomas J. Cooper.  She was a sister of Charles Cooper.**

Mrs. Rollin Cooper died in 1929 and Rollin in 1938.  They are buried in the Cooperstown cemetery.

Source: Cooperstown, North Dakota 1882-1982 Centennial page 42

By Mrs. Myrtle Porterville

The English speaking settlers of Griggs County have left a personal and rather intimate account of their personalities and activities in the pages of the Cooperstown Courier. Its Volume I, No. 1 of January 26; 1883 was printed only two months after the plat of the town had been filed at Valley City. Editor E. D. Stair, twenty three, fresh out of the University of Michigan and financially backed by R. C. Cooper, found news in the doings of everybody and everything, and reported it exhaustively in a style of journalism that made the reader a member of the community. The "boom" atmosphere, and the enthusiasm of young, living people fills its issues. Illustrate quotations will be given. The land and personal property holdings in the county as first assessed in 1883 and following, complete to date are also there. W. H. Carleton, P. A. Melgard, Claus Jackson, and Bertha Langford Houghton, all pioneers, and others, verified and added details to information from other sources. The writer, herself a pioneer's daughter, and a resident of the Cooperstown area since 1888, personally knew many of the leading settlers and their children. Through biographies written by children and grandchildren of the pioneers, from facts furnished by the pioneers in the 1920's more details were verified.

The largest and wealthiest group of settlers of Griggs County has been called the "St. Clair" settlement. Of these former Michigan people, T. J. Cooper and his brother, R. C. Cooper - Cooper Brothers - had the largest investment of capital in railroad lands, buildings, machinery, and horses and mules. In the first assessment of personal property in 1883 there were only six assessments of one thousand dollars. All were in the "St. Clair" group. R. C. Cooper, Cooper Bros. and Washburn and Cooper together were assessed $15,580.00. The other three were George Barnard, George Bathey, and J. N. Brown. The average assessment of the county settlers was $75.00 to $200.00. The Coopers alone, besides property, owned or paid taxes on about a township of land.

Just when R. C. Cooper first visited Griggs County is not a matter of record. "Bonanza" farms had started in the Red River Valley in the late 1870's and it is said he visited some of them in 1879 or spring of 1880. He may have been in Griggs County too.

In 1880, R. C. Cooper made preparations for large scale farming operations in 1881. He located His land by starting at the farthest north surveyed and, then, with a marker on a wheel, and a compass, drove to where he wished to stop. Charles L. Cooper, son of T. J. Cooper, rode and counted turns of the wheel. Upon being surveyed it was found o be only a few rods from the surveyor's line.

Mr. Cooper got mules from Missouri. Five carloads arrived in 1881. Then, using fifty to sixty mules, he started an overland mule team freight line to bring lumber and other supplies from Sanborn or Valley City. He built a warehouse at Sanborn and a halfway house near the present town of Dazey where changes of teams were made, and drivers rested and got food. Later on two four-horse teams were added to bring passengers. Through the influence of the large Cooper Bros. investments, and the general land boom, large numbers left St. Clair, Michigan, and nearby St. Mary's in Canada to take homesteads, tree claims, and preemptions. Mr. Cooper and his relatives, Mrs. Cooper and her relatives, their friends and former neighbors from Michigan, New York, Missouri, Minnesota, Wisconsin, or Colorado, such was the composition of this settlement. To illustrate: **Mrs. George Bernard was Mr. Cooper's sister, Mrs. J. N. Brown was Mrs. Cooper's sister, Mrs. M. Zimmerman was a sister of J. N. Brown, B. B. Brown was a brother of J. N. Brown, Rev. Rockwell was Mr. Cooper's cousin, and Dr. G. F. Newell was related to Rev. Rockwell, Charles L. Cooper was son of T. J. Cooper, Mrs. Charles Cooper was a Husel, etc. A similar chain of relationships exists of other early families as Langford, Houghton, Sansburn, Davis, McCulloch, Glass, Rankin, Gimbelt, Haskell, Moffatt, Church Detwiller, Sinclair.** To mention some occupations represented other than farming there were land attorneys, a minister, a printer, a blacksmith, machine experts, and carpenters when Cooperstown was founded. These settlers had enough money to build frame houses and barns. They had horses and carriages, cutters, and sleighs. Mrs. B. B. Brown brought her grand piano, and the Carletons an organ. Mrs. Zimmerman was the first music teacher.

A few settlers brought families of children, others were young married couples. But the big majority were single. Many were recent college graduates, or had more than grade school training. There were enough of them to bring to life here their social customs, church, recreation and educational activities. The school house was started before a child of school age lived in town. Material '~or it was hauled from Sanborn by Mr. Cooper's mule freight. The building was used for church services, Sunday School, community gatherings such as "sociables," oyster suppers, a concert, or a temperance rally. However, by June, 1883, enough children were in town to start a school. Z. A. Clough, a graduate of the University of Michigan, was the teacher.

Rumors of the Cooper Brothers' big farming interests were spread by the newspapers of Fargo, Valley City, Sanborn, and Cooperstown, and letters to newspapers in their old home towns, brought another wave of immigration. And the general land "boom" brought other settlers not connected with the Michigan-Canadian group.

Said the Courier: "To this varied list of seekers for new homes, investment, and information, the 'Courier' would say come on, and if your avocation is honorable and you have a spark of push in your composition success can hardly fail to crown your efforts. The man or woman desirous of a choice one hundred sixty or three hundred twenty acre slice of Uncle Sam's domain should be here this spring without fail. The capitalist can do as he pleases, but the longer he delays investing the more he must pay. Intelligent and vigorous people can elect themselves to perpetual prosperity, and snap their fingers at 'bosses' and oppressive employers, by driving stakes in Dakota, and we might include the information that Griggs County is the liveliest spot for a permanent camp in creation. The coming season will present the last opportunity to get soil as rich as Croesus for the mere asking. Delay not and an independent competence is yours. Come to the land of sunshine and promise; the home of the warm-hearted and free; the country where work and prosperity are catching like the itch. Come and dance with joy and gladness while your pockets fill with golden ducats, and your heart rejoices that you are a denizen of the great wonderland.

"Laboring men and machines have vast opportunities in Cooperstown. Common labor commands two to three dollars per day, while mechanics, especially carpenters, obtain three to four dollars per day. Plenty of work for all who will labor, and living not much higher than in the east, as the figures below will attest. Here the laboring man has an opportunity to get a piece of prime land, and he can soon become as independent as a lord, while in the East he can plod for generations and then not have enough left at death to pay for a respectable wooden overcoat. The man who has a will can do wonders in Dakota. Try it.

"The many inquiries as to the cost of living prompted the Courier scribe to investigate, which he did by pricing the following articles at Odegard and Thompson's Flour, per hundred pounds, $3.25; wheat, per bushel, 85 to 90 cents; oats, 60 cents; potatoes, 60 cents; hay, $5.00 to $8.00 per ton; 'C' sugar, 11 pounds for $1.00; coffee, six, eight, and ten pounds for $1.00; butter, 30 cents per pound; kerosene oil, 30 cents per gallon; canned fruit, 20 to 25 cents per three-pound cans; soap, twelve to fourteen bars for $1.00; best prints, 7 cents; muslins, 10 to 15 cents; Good four-foot wood is plenty at $6.00 per cord delivered. House rent is higher than dead towns of the east, but not extortionate at all, only good fair investment being demanded."

From Cedar County, Missouri: "The Courier has got in its work on me. I have disposed of my stock of goods; am making settlement, and hope to be able to emigrate to your land by the 20th instant."

From Stockton, Missouri: "For over eighteen months I have desired to visit the much talked about Dakota Wonderland, and since reading the first copy of your new paper have decided to be with you this spring or 'split a tug."

From a Stockton, Missouri real estate dealer: "The Dakota fever prevails in this vicinity to an alarming extent."

About the Cooper Brothers: "That Cooper Brothers are great benefactors of this county is evidenced in more ways than one. To farmers coming to Griggs with stock and desirous of quick returns, the Cooper Brothers furnish land already with seed; to those desirous of work for their teams the Coopers set them to breaking at $3.00 per acre; to the young man wanting a job they say, 'Pull off your coat and wade in'; to the man who wants land without investing a dollar, they tell him to give them the first crop of all the land he wishes and take a deed thereof. To those who desire to work land on shares Cooper Brothers will furnish seed, machinery to put it in the ground and to harvest the grain, pay half the thresh bill and take their half at the machine. They want several thousand acres of breaking and backsetting done, which with the wants of others in the same line ensures remunerative work for all the teams that can be brought into Griggs County.

"Nowhere in this or in any other country arc such liberal propositions to the honest yeoman made. Add to the splendid offer the extraordinary, never failing fertility of the soil, and you have a proposition from R. C. and T. J. Cooper that ought to make one's eyes bulge with eagerness to scan one of their leases and sign his name thereto. As leaders in the development of a new county the Cooper Brothers have no peers."

Of Griggs County population Dr. G. F. Newell wrote:

"The most of them are Americans. There is, however, a large class of Norwegians, but they are of the very best. Three of our four principal merchant firms are Norwegians, also the Clerk of Court, sheriff, county treasurer, and several of the lawyers, and more noble and industrious men never lived. There are a few Germans, and so far as I have seen, a good class of people. But what I never saw or heard of on God's green earth - not a Jew."

The young men of Cooperstown organized a ball club, an orchestra, a whist club, a shooting gallery and laid out a half-mile race track outside the limits of the plat of the town on section nineteen. Among those who owned pacers or trotting horses were Dr. G. F. Newell, Dr. T. F. Kerr, Knud Thompson, A. B. Cox and Nathan Sifton.

Game and fish were plentiful and most of the men hunted. Several owned blooded hunting dogs.

Besides the church and Sunday School; the ladies in town formed a Foreign Mission Society, a Ladies' Aid and a Study Club.

Source:  Cooperstown Diamond Jubilee 1882-1957 Page 12

No early day story on Griggs County or Cooperstown would be complete without touching on the lives and activities of the Cooper Brothers. They were vigorous, energetic men, fired with optimism and enthusiasm, and, at the time they came to this area, quite wealthy. Thomas J. Cooper, the elder of the two, had spent much of his life in Colorado where he was engaged in numerous activities. He had accumulated considerable wealth when he and his younger brother became interested in bonanza farming in North Dakota. He had a home in Chicago and in later years spent much of his time there. He was the father of Charles Cooper who lived here many years.

Rollin C. was the youngest of the Cooper boys, and was born in Michigan in 1845. Accounts reveal that Rollin was a sturdy youngster, and at the age of 12 had attained almost his full stature. He hired out to a neighbor for a season's work at $8.00 per month, plus keep, which to him seemed like a king's ransom. When he received his $32.00 in a lump sum it was a great day for the boy who had never had more than fifty cents in his whole life.  The money enabled him at the age of thirteen to leave home the following year and start on his own under the sponsorship of T. J., who was then in Red Wing, Minnesota.

Spurred by the mining fever, both later left Red Wing and went to Colorado. There Rollin and another brother, Henry, instead of mining, rented a farm in one of the valleys. Weather conditions were unfavorable and they lost their crops that year. During the winter Rollin and Henry subsisted on corn meal and moldy salt bacon with an occasional potato on rare occasions. T. J. at this time was mining in the mountains without much success. After marrying in 1870, Rollin gave up the tinning business in which he was then engaged with Henry and started in the mining game. Luck was with him in this venture and he netted $10,000 on his first strike. This money enabled him to start in the cattle buying and selling business with T. J. in Kansas City. It was while thus engaged that the brothers became intensely interested in the N. P. land grant areas which were offered to the public at nominal prices.

Rollin C. Cooper came to this county on horseback in 1880 and immediately started negotiations with the railroads to complete purchases of great blocks of virgin land. North Dakota looked promising with its new and abundantly fertile soil ready to produce wheat which at that time was selling for over $1.00 per bushel. The advent of mechanization meant greater production with less labor, so the time seemed ripe to invest in this promising country and get in on the ground floor for the land boom which many felt was sure to come.

The railroads owned large blocks of land in both Griggs and Steele Counties. The Red River Land Company, incorporated by S. S. Small, J. A. and E. A. Steele, all of Minneapolis, purchased great acreages of land from the railroads as did the Coopers. Settlement of what is now known as the eastern portion of Griggs County and central and western Steele was influenced by this great land company. The Coopers were largely instrumental in effecting settlement of central Griggs County with settlers from Canada as well as from European countries. The bulk of lands purchased from the railroads averaged between $2.00 and $3.00 per acre. Poorer land sold for about $1.00 per acre. The struggle for land and the revenue from land transactions was a basis for the competition for power which sprung up between the Red River Land Company of Hope and the Coopers. The land company needed settlers with money to whom they, could sell their railroad land at a profit. Cooper needed the labor of the homesteaders for a dependable labor source. His plan was to receive his profit from the productiveness of this virgin soil. To these ends each wanted a railroad of his own to his respective holdings. Each platted and founded a town. Each had its own boarding house for the first carpenters, and each built a large hotel. Each plied the eastern states with "boom" advertising. Each wanted the county seat for convenience as well as prestige.  In the end, each got his own county but Mr. Steele eventually lost the county seat. The Red River Land Company had resources and credit in Minneapolis and New York, while the Coopers had theirs in Colorado, Chicago and also New York. In politics Mr. Steele had the help of attorneys Miller Spaulding and Mr. Cooper had Alexander McKenzie.

Although no railroad traversed the county, Cooper did not let that terminate his dream of owning a wheat-land empire on the Dakota prairie. Mule freight from Sanborn brought supplies and equipment, and in 1881 he harvested his first crop.  Cooper Brothers were established and from then on it was just a matter of expanding operations.  But three things were needed and needed badly - a railroad, a town, and a county seat. These three necessities R: C. Cooper sought to obtain in the shortest possible time. He had been named one of the county commissioners to further organize and establish county government. In this capacity he was able to cause an election to be held to name officers the county seat and it was this maneuver which swung the seat of government for the county from Hope to Cooperstown, although at that time Cooperstown was only a "paper" town. A portion of a granary standing where the H. A. Brown house now stands served as the original court house.

Once platted in 1882, Cooperstown grew as only an early day boom town could. It was a thriving little city when, on August 27, 1883, the iron horse reached Cooperstown which for the time was the end of the line. Griggs County's first railroad was constructed and operated by the Sanborn, Cooperstown and Turtle Mountain Railway Company, although it was quite generally known that the Northern Pacific was behind the operation. The Townsite Company of Cooperstown which laid out and was responsible for the early development of the pioneer city also was a backer of the railroad company. The Northern Pacific had a gentlemen's agreement with the Great Northern that they would build no branch lines north of their main lines if the Great Northern would build none south. Purchase of the line after the construction was completed did not seem to violate this agreement. The Northern Pacific continued to operate the line and eventually the tracks were extended to Jessie and Binford in Griggs, and to McHenry in Foster County.

While T. J. Cooper had heavy investments in land in this county, it was R. C. who was the active farmer. He was intensely interested in seeing the start and development of a town here primarily to enhance the value of his operations. He was a member of the Townsite Company which platted and originated the town and, while he was interested in seeing business locate here, he did not seem interested in starting any of his own. It is true that he had grain elevators but these were built primarily to handle his own grain.

Even though this account can only touch briefly on the many and varied facets of the Cooper operations it can be noted that the farming venture seemed to start off quite well but in a few short years ran into difficulties. Apparently, this bonanza farm was made up of three units: the home or headquarters ranch was located one mile west and a mile south of the outskirts of Cooperstown on what is now the Max Arndt place. Another was situated on section 7, a few miles northwest, and the third on section 5, Washburn Township, on the present Clarence Edland place.

Much of the land was farmed from the home ranch, using many teams for one operation. Early day residents recall seeing as many as thirty binders in the field. Plowing, seeding and other operations were handled in like manner. Mules furnished much of the power in those early days.

**Cooper's Wheatland Empire**

From early accounts it appears that Rollin and his brother, T. J., had a working agreement whereby T. J. invested in the land and Rollin in equipment. It is not known definitely how much land the Coopers owned but it is estimated that they either owned or controlled close to 20,000 acres of which 10,400 acres was acquired from the railroads.

It appears also that T. J. suffered financial losses in a plunge in the grain market along about 1885 and as a result mortgaged his land quite heavily. The "squeeze" resulting from reverses and especially the heavy loss from the early and particularly heavy freeze of 1888 dealt the Cooper interests a heavy blow.

A liquidation of the partnership of the two brothers in 1886 resulted in R. C. buying from T. J. 7,000 acres of land which carried a mortgage of $25,000. He also rented 4,400 acres on a cash rental basis and in addition purchased T. J.'s interest in the Townsite Company for $9,000. To finance operations R. C. was then forced to mortgage livestock and equipment.

The big freeze of 1888 put the squeeze on everyone including R. C. Cooper. The county bought seed for nearly everyone in Griggs. The '89 crop which was so badly needed was light, and as a result, foreclosure proceedings started on 21 1/4 sections of Cooper land which had a combined indebtedness of $87,700.00. 1890 was the year of grace and an opportunity for Cooper to redeem, but this crop, too, was light and as a result Cooper was in no position to have his land.

**But he took his beating with good grace and when Quincy A. Shaw of Boston arrived to bid in the mortgage and complete the transfer Cooper treated him with such consideration and graciousness that when Shaw boarded the train for his return trip to Boston he gave Cooper free use of the land for another year. This enabled Cooper to recoup his losses and put him back in a solvent financial condition again. 1891 was a good year and Cooper's crop was so tremendous, it was reported, that 50 railroad cars were required to ship his barley crop.**

While this marked the end of Coopers' bonanza farm, Cooper was left in such financial condition that he was able to buy back part of his former lands which he continued to farm until about 1916 when he started liquidating his holdings. The original Cooper farms were split up and sold to local people. The Shaw interests made no attempt to farm the land as Cooper had. They were interested only in getting their money out of the land.

Cooper's wealth, prestige and personality caused almost overnight development of this county. This was far, far faster than other territories where settlement and development was more gradual.

Rollin Cooper lived for many years in the town which bore his name, and in later years moved to Florida where in 1938 he died. His wife preceded him in death. Both are buried in the Cooperstown Cemetery. T. J. died and was buried in Colorado.

While jealousy often colored some of the appraisals of Cooper, it cannot be denied that he was a man of unusual ability and character. His humble beginning, his many financial ups and downs, his tactfulness in handling men, his foresight and aggressiveness all point to the fact that he was a man of more than average capabilities. Some will argue that Cooper's overnight development of the bonanza farm, the county and the town, later caused a stagnation which limited the town, in particular, to a city half the size of its potential. But, there are so many factors which enter into such a viewpoint that such as opinion is hardly worth consideration. In any appraisal it must be acknowledged that Cooper had the ability to leave an imprint in local history that will remain as long as there is a Cooperstown and a Griggs County.

Source:  Cooperstown Diamond Jubilee 1882-1957 Page 8