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.

*Ron's supplement: I have found BLM records showing that the land that Rollin and Henry purchased now appears to be within the city limits of Colorado Springs. One parcel appears to be very close to where South Academy Blvd intersects I-25. Some more parcels were south of that. Interesting to speculate on how much that land would be worth today and compare the tremendous increase to the much more modest increase in Griggs County land values.*

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.

*Ron's note: Griggs County has 20 townships. Each township has 36 sections times 640 acres or 23,040 acres. 20 Townships would be 460,900 acres. The Coopers had less than 5% of the land in the county, but I think local myths picture them as owning most of the County.*

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.

Ron's note: T. J. was quite a bit older than R.C. I suspect they had a lot of differences in opinion, probably going back to Colorado and even beyond that back to Minnesota and Michigan.

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.

By 1882 many people had come to Griggs County. Since there was no more land to get along the Sheyenne River settlers were building homes in the prairies. The influx of homesteaders, workers, etc. served to emphasize the need for a town close by. Early settlers were forced to go to Mayville, Grand Forks or Valley City for their supplies. Griggs County, too, needed a courthouse where land filings could be made. True, Hope was the county seat at the time but is was 25 miles away with a river to ford in getting there. During part of the season this was no problem but during the spring or wet weather it was hazardous crossing the Sheyenne.

To promote the building of a town the Cooperstown Townsite Company was formed in 1882. This company immediately platted the town, which was named Cooperstown, and filed its plat on October 26th of that year, only 12 days before the November 7th election which was to determine the location of the county seat.  While the selection and its aftermath is a story in itself, suffice to say Cooperstown won the election and became the County seat.

This accomplished, the town began to boom.  Where only a granary had existed before on the Cooperstown site, soon buildings began to mushroom almost overnight and the building of an early day town was on in earnest. Boom advertising soon reached the east and stories of unexcelled prosperity brought new settlers and business and professional people in by the dozens.

As soon as a building was constructed to feed and house the carpenters, work was started on the Palace Hotel. Standing on the corner of Main or Burrell street, the Palace was rated an elegant hotel for those pioneer days. The year 1883 saw, in addition to the Palace, completion of buildings housing a store, the school, a lumber yard, the printing office and other businesses as well as many dwellings. The carpenters worked all winter in 1882-1883.

According to the original plat, Cooperstown was laid out with its streets running north and south and numbered beginning from the west side. The avenues were east and west and were given names. These included the names of members who composed the Townsite Company. Rollin Avenue (Highway No. 7) was named for R. C. Cooper; Lenham Avenue for Mr. Lenham who had an elevator and lumber yard which was operated by his nephew, Maynard Crane; Burrell Avenue for Mr. Burrell who had banking interests; Roberts Avenue for Mr. Roberts for whom one of the streets in Fargo is so named; The Boulevard - a fine residence avenue; Foster Avenue for Foster who surveyed the town lots; Hobart and Louis Avenues whose authorship is not known; Odegard Avenue for Mr. Odegard, a merchant and Howard Avenue for Howard Oviatt, a big landowner in Griggs.

It was first planned to put the depot on Lenham Avenue, where Mr. Lenham wanted his elevator. The first business places were put on Lenham Avenue, where Mr. Lenham wanted his elevator. The first business places were put on Lenham Avenue, with the idea it would be the most important part of town, and cost of lots were high there. But Mr. Roberts planned to build a mill on the avenue named for him, and wanted the depot there. He was bossing the job of building the railroad, so the depot was put where he wanted it. Then it was that some business men began to build their buildings on Roberts Avenue. But lots were less expensive on Burrell avenue and in the end it became the "Main Street" of Cooperstown, and most of the business places on Lenham and Roberts Avenues were moved to Burrell Avenue. Until the Railroad got to Cooperstown in August 1883, Cooperstown€™s  "mule-freight" hauled most of the lumber and supplies for the business places from Sanborn.

The first family to come to Cooperstown was that of Knud Thompson in January 1883.  Mrs. Thompson was the first woman, and Theodore and Adolph Thompson were the first children - both under six years of age. Their sister, Grace, was the first girl born in Cooperstown and Otto Marquardt was the first boy born in Cooperstown - both in 1883. Grace and Oscar Thomson were born in the living quarters in the back part of the first store in town. It was then called the Thompson and Odegard Store. This building still stands, facing east as part of the Lende building just south of the Syverson Block. Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. John Syverson were twin sisters and Mr. Odegard was their brother. Mr. Syverson bought out Thompson and Odegard. He built the Syverson Block in 1892-1893 and was in business until 1929.

The Palace Hotel stood on the site of the Main Motors. It was taken down in 1922 when the Palace Motors was built there.

The first paper was the "Courier" of January 26, 1883, printed less than three months after the plat of Cooperstown was filed. The building housing the paper has been remodeled into the Anton Oien house. The first editor was a young man by name of Ed. Stair, a graduate of University of Michigan.

The first schoolhouse was started in January 1883, and was located where the High School is now. It was 40 x 40 feet square, two stories high with a 4 x 4 bell tower on top that was 18 feet high. could be seen for miles. It burned in 1904. There were no children of school age in town at the time but by June the building was finished and enough children of school had come to town to start a school. The first teacher was Z. A. Clough. He too was a graduate of the University of Michigan.

The Townsite Company had planned to have the Court House built on the hill where the Water Tower stands. That block had not been surveyed into lots, and it was marked "Public Square" on some early maps, and "Court House" on others. But there was some disagreement among the County Commissioners when the Court House was to be built. The Cooper Brothers then platted the "Cooper Addition" south of the first plat, and then offered the County commissioners any block of it they chose - free - plus one thousand dollars in cash after the building was completed, if they would build the Court House there. They accepted. This building cost less than $30,000 and has been in use ever since. Many county officers had built homes near the 'Public Square". Now they found they had a half mile to walk to go to work every day when the Court House finally was built. Their resentment is reflected in the Couriers of the early 80's, when they dubbed it "Vinegar Hill" a name which still persists.

*Ron's note: People yet today refer to the area around the water tower and on the Cherokee Court Street north of the water tower as "where the rich people live". Proximity to the golf course now has a lot to do with it.*

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.

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.