

The History of Fairmont, Martin County, Minnesota

Copied with permission from: 'Fairmont, City of Lakes, "Heart of the Midwest", Visitors' Guide for the Martin County Area', published 1997

page 13, "Local History"

"The original citizens of the Fairmont area were the Winnebago Indians, who lived by farming, hunting and fishing. The first recorded white people to visit the area were John C. Fremont and his French associate, Joseph N. Nicollet, in June, 1838. These men established Fort Tchan Hassan near the headwaters of the Des Moines River.

"The first permanent settlers, in what is now the City of Fairmont, were E. Banks Hall and William H. Budd. In June, 1857, these people built their homes on the lakes that still bear their names. Mr. Budd recorded that in January of 1857, twenty men, nine women and twenty-three children lived in the Fairmont area.

"Fairmont was platted in October, 1857, by the Des Moines and Watonwan Land Company, who also named the town for the rolling hills surrounding the adjacent lakes. The original name was Fair Mount, but this was later changed to Fairmont. Fairmont had the first post office in Martin County, dedicated on October 9, 1858, with William Budd as the first postmaster.

"Fort Fairmount was established in 1862, shortly after the start of the Dakota (Sioux) Indian uprising which terrified settlers throughout southern Minnesota. With the end of the Civil War and the subsiding of Indian troubles, Fort Fairmount was abandoned. The site is now marked by a plaque attached to a large native stone near the present courthouse.

"Closely following the inevitable hard times after the Civil War, the "Grasshopper Plague" of 1873-1877 descended on the impoverished farmers and many were forced to abandon their holdings and leave the country. This gloomy picture was brightened by the arrival of English immigrants during the period from 1873-1878. They came to develop new methods of growing beans, spent their money lavishly, built a number of beautiful homes and brightened the hillsides with their scarlet fox hunting attire.

"When railroads came, prosperity followed, and towns sprang up in every direction. The first train came to Fairmont in July, 1878, when the village was only twenty years old.

"As cities go, Fairmont was young, vigorous, alert and busy. It was busy supplying the needs of a little empire right in the middle of North America. Even in the lean years of the 1930's, when drought depleted most sections of the Midwest, Fairmont enjoyed fair-to-good business conditions while other communities were existing on government relief checks.

"With a vast trading area, both wholesale and retail, Fairmont has remained stable. In fact, no economic nose-dive can be remembered by the oldest inhabitant. Fairmont enjoys the enviable distinction of not having had a bank failure during the memorable 1930's when bank failures were so prevalent. The faith of the pioneers, who but three generations ago selected this area as a home, has been justified. Nothing has ever been lost through abiding faith in this area.

"Fairmont's future is as bright and exciting as her past..her potential is unlimited."

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