

ASHTON, SPINK CO. DAKOTA

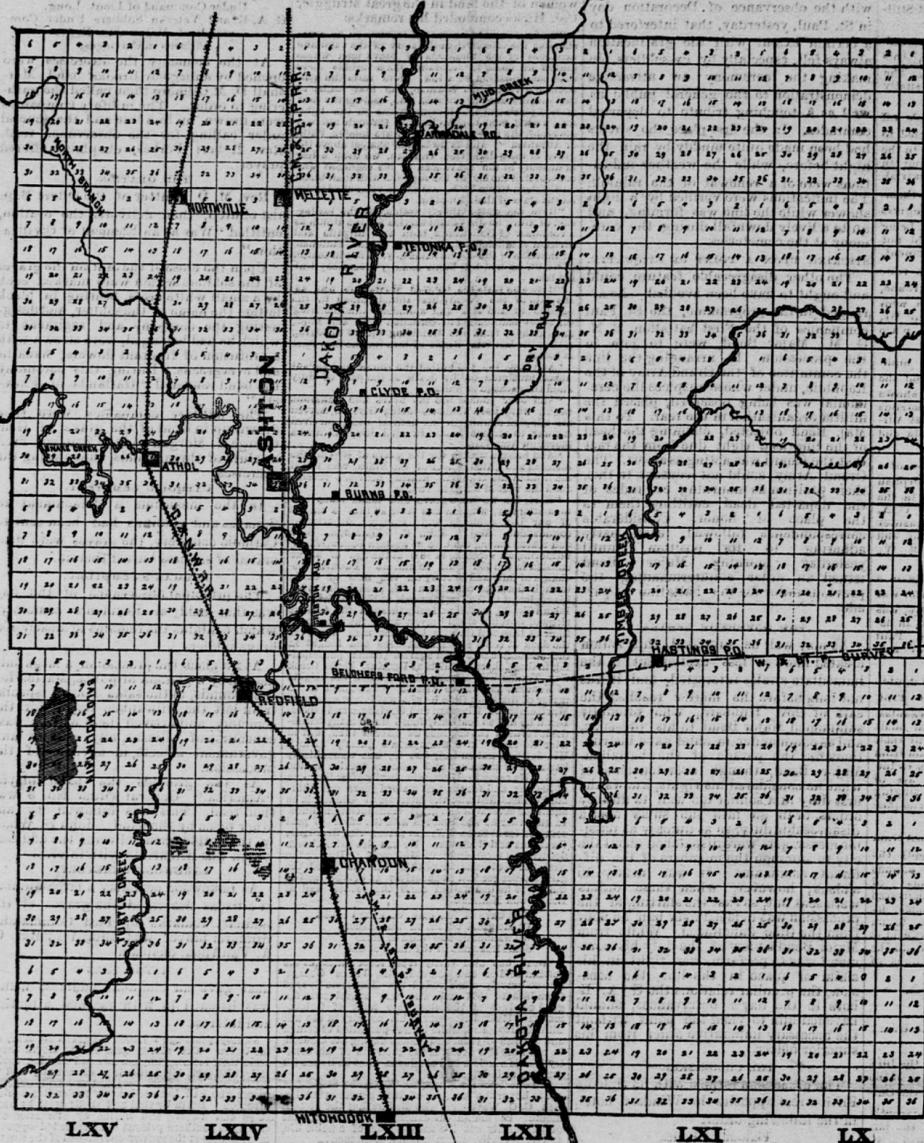
SPINK COUNTY. THE GARDEN OF THE JIM RIVER VALLEY.

The Best Stock Country In this Latitude.

A Rich Soil, Delightful Climate, and a Thrifty People.

NO FLOODS, NO DROUGHTS, AND NO FAILURE OF CROPS.

Homes for the Homeless, AND WEALTH FOR THE POOR.



ASHTON, THE LIVE TOWN IN THE JIM RIVER VALLEY,

AND THE FUTURE METROPOLIS OF ITS LOCALITY.

A Rushing, Wrestling, Pushing, Go-ahead Place.

More & Better Buildings For its Age, than any Town in the Territory.

Receiving More Emigrant Freights than any Town on the Hastings & Dakota R. R.

Just 300 Miles West of St. Paul, ON THE SAME PARALLEL.

THE COMING CAPITAL OF THE COUNTY!

ASHTON. In writing the history of this city and county I am induced first to analyze somewhat the topography of the eastern half of the great territory of Dakota. Much has been written and said about the Red river valley, the Jim river valley and the Sioux valley without adequately locating their geography. In Eastern Dakota there are four principal valleys which give the name to the section of country adjacent to them, and in fact embrace the entire scope of country east of the Missouri, which river enters Dakota near the northwest corner and by a very tortuous though nearly easterly course, reaches the center of the territory at a point north of the forty-seventh parallel and thence by a southerly course divides it into two nearly equal parts, till when near the forty-fourth parallel it inclines to the southeast and forms for a distance the southern boundary. East of and parallel with it, finding its headwaters near the forty-eighth degree and its mouth at its confluence with the Missouri just east of Yankton is the James or Dakota river. On the boundary line between Dakota and the state of Minnesota and finding its source in Lake Traverse just south of 46 deg. is the famous Red River of the North, which finds its outlet in Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba. South of this lake (Traverse) and separated from it by a range of hills called the eastern Coteaus which begin a few miles west of the southern end of the lake, the Sioux river finds its source and its outlet in the Missouri at or near Sioux City, Iowa. We have then, the territory divided into these four valleys. The western boundary of the Red river valley being the Pembina mountains, the western boundary of the Sioux valley being the eastern coteaus, which, finding their origin near the head of Lake Traverse, extend in a southwesterly direction until they reach the James river. These, and the Pembina mountains, which originate north of 46°, and extend into Manitoba, form the eastern boundary of the Jim river valley, while the Missouri coteaus which separate it from the river that name, and its valley form the western. The eastward tendency of the Missouri with its parallel range of coteaus, and the western or southwestern tendency of the eastern range of coteaus before described, form a wedge-shaped valley out of the Jim, with the sharp end at a point a little way above its confluence with the Missouri. At the upper end of the valley, or at the point where the Northern Pacific railroad crosses it, the valleys of the Red and the Missouri at Fargo and at Bismarck have about the same altitude as it does, but lower down the depression of the Jim river valley becomes marked indeed. At Haron, where the Dakota Central crosses the Jim river, it is 700 feet lower than the Missouri at Fort Pierre and 450 feet lower than the Sioux at the crossing of that stream. On either side of the valley of

the Jim these coteaus rise up like a solid wall and mark the bank of the once great river, which in this latter day has divided into the stream scarce 100 yards wide that now bears the euphonic name mentioned. That the entire space between the ranges of hills mentioned was once a vast sheet water, abundant evidence exists from the surface formation to the deposit of 100 feet below. Float coal, shale rock, shells and other petrifications are found all over the valley, and the soil from the depth of eighty feet in its nature and formation indicates the presence of decomposed vegetable matter, long years ago, buried at this extreme depth. SPINK COUNTY LOCATION. At the extreme lower end of the valley, or at least so far down that there is scarcely room enough for its southern end between the hills on either side, is Spink county, D. T. It is thirty-six miles wide east and west by forty-two miles north and south, and extends on its southern border from the foot hills on the east into the Missouri coteaus on the west, which line of hills cut off a small part of the southwest corner. STREAMS. Through the center of the county flows the famous Jim river, while Turtle creek, Timber Creek, Snake creek and other small streams feed by numerous springs and furnishing the purest water, drain and supply the entire county. The surface is delightfully level, a broad expanse of prairie with now and then a rise or slight depression, like the waves of a vast ocean at rest, save as the grand swell of the earth's motion or its own current causes it to rise and fall in smooth and regular undulations. Unbroken by hill or stone save where in the extreme southwest the valley was too narrow to quite fit in the county. Spink is as perfect in form and surface as could well be imagined. SOIL. The soil of this county is a vegetable deposit or black loam from 15 inches to 4 or 5 feet in depth. Walled in as the vast body of water which once covered this valley was by the converging lines of hills or coteaus, its sediment, here, at the point where they so nearly approach each other, became deposited to an unusual extent, the force of the current, which might else have swept this accumulated richness on southward to be stranded on the famed alluvial bottom lands of the lower Mississippi or carried into the gulf, being thus broken. To this very natural cause does this extremely rich district owe its wonderful fertility and depth of soil. The subsoil of this section differs more than a passing notice. It consists of a light yellow and quite porous clay, entirely free from gravel. It absorbs and retains moisture like a sponge, and under extreme and continued surface rains would permit the surplus moisture, like the water poured upon an already well filled sponge, to pass off into the earth. Into this open subsoil even, do grass or grain roots penetrate to draw up the needed moisture, and in a time of drouth, if such a time ever come, will it be found to draw, in turn, from deep in the earth a store of water which, in times of its

abundance, it has suffered to become stored there for future use. Thus it will be seen that, unlike those sections of the Red river valley or other regions underlain with a subsoil of hard, blue clay, through which, in times of wet, the surplus cannot percolate, and through which, in times of drouth, the deep earth moisture strives in vain to reach the surface, Spink county possesses a subsoil infinitely superior and vastly better adapted for agricultural needs. CLIMATE. The climate of the Jim river valley is a subject of great interest as being of a much milder character than the open prairie regions of this latitude generally are. In the first place, located as it is, especially the southern portion of it, so much lower than the surrounding country, it is not subject to those rapid transitions from heat to cold which a more elevated section experiences. The heavy banks of hills which form its boundaries effectually screen it from the severity of those tremendous blizzards to which the mind reverts with terror, and which are common to the more elevated districts. Neither does malaria affect this section. The perfect system of natural drainage insures the absence of stagnant water, and the uniform, though not too severe, wind currents prevent effectually the accumulation of miasma. The atmosphere is dry and clear, and during the winter months of a much higher temperature than any place in the west of the same latitude. Pulmonary diseases, ague and fevers of all kinds are unknown, and under the stimulus of its health-giving atmosphere the dyspeptic and invalids in general take a new lease of life, and bless the happy inspiration which sent them into the valley of the Jim. WATER. As has been already shown, Spink county is well watered. Besides the beautiful streams and natural springs of the purest of pure water good wells are attainable at twenty feet. PRODUCTIONS. Spink county, while favorably circumstanced as regards soil and climate for the production of wheat and all other cereals, is especially adapted to a system of mixed farming and the raising of horses, cattle, sheep and hogs, and for dairying. Along the streams the meadow lands produce from one and a half to two tons of native blue joint grass to the acre, which contains as much nutriment when converted into hay as the best tame grass or clover; while the buffalo or bunch grass of the uplands, which frost does not in the least affect, furnishes the best pasturage in the world, not alone while green and succulent, but when it has ceased to grow, and even when the snows have disappeared in the spring cattle feed on it, with avidity, and gain flesh perceptibly. It is estimated to contain as much nutriment per pound, when cured, as thrashed oats. The entire surface of the county, except the blue joint meadows, is covered with this valuable grass, and until the valley becomes thoroughly settled and cultivated will prove invaluable for grazing. The native sod is covered everywhere with wild flowers strewn

about with reckless profusion and whose beautiful colors, delightful aroma and rich abundance from early spring until late in the fall delight the eye of the lover of beauty and intoxicate the senses with their rich perfume. The protection afforded by the hills on either side from the extreme severity of the winter blasts which has been before alluded to, and again the mild temperature much higher in fact than that of the higher ground, makes another reason for its being a good stock country, but still another and better reason perhaps lies in the fact that roots and corn attain such a degree of perfection and excellence. Potatoes and all root crops yield enormously and are of the finest quality imaginable, and as for corn, it was surprised beyond measure at the samples I saw. One piece of ten acres of sod produced last year over forty bushels of shelled corn per acre, and every ear of it fit for seed. The variety was twelve-rowed white dent and was as perfect corn as I ever saw. Last year Spink county produced 30,000 bushels of wheat, which, judging by the acreage sown this year, will be increased ten fold. Oats, barley, rye and flax also good crops and amber cane, which has been raised a little already with the most satisfactory results, will in the future be sure to become a very profitable crop. Taking then, a system of diversified farming and stock raising into Spink county, and to the natural advantages already enumerated add a home market for all stock, hogs, horses, sheep and dairy products, which can ever be raised or produced, and you are certain to come to the same conclusion I arrived at, which is, that it is the most desirable location in the territory for general farming. SETTLEMENT. As early as March, 1879, settlers began to turn their attention to this valley, and particularly to the county of Spink. At that time there were no settlements between Jamestown, on the Northern Pacific, and Mitchell, (then called Fire State) 60 miles north of Yankton. At that time there was no definite certainty of a railroad in the valley, as only one line—the extension of the Winona & St. Peter—had even been surveyed and that was not located. But the indomitable spirit of the class of men who inhabit the west and are always on the lookout for some choice location, and who are ever bringing them to the efforts of civilization did not expect so fine a spot as Spink county, and before the Indians had vacated the pioneers began to arrive and settle on the choice lands of this part of the valley to await the arrival of the iron horse and less venturesome neighbors. The class of early settlers were well-to-do farmers from the older settled part of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and other states, who in the main came prepared to stay, and who were attracted by the extreme beauty and desirability of the valley, well aware so fine a country could not long remain unknown to the great lines of road which were then reaching out towards southern Dakota. In July, 1881, the Dakota Central (Chicago and Northwestern) entered the valley of the James and built northward of the west bank of the river through the

entire length of Spink county and to Ordway, near the center of Brown county. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul also entered the valley both north and south of Spink county, building north from Mitchell, where their Iowa and Dakota division reached the river, and south from Aberdeen on the Hastings & Dakota division, also traversing the entire length of the county parallel to the other road. RAPIDITY OF SETTLEMENT. Spink county was organized as such in 1880, and in July last had a population of 470 souls, but from the moment of the arrival of the cars settlement shot forward with a rapidity unknown anywhere. Towns began to spring up as if by magic, and at present it is a very safe estimate that puts the population at 5,000. As an instance which will show how great the rush for these splendid lands has been, a man located in February last three and a half miles beyond any other settler, and built his cabin where none other was in sight. Returning with his family just four weeks later he stood in his cabin door and counted eighty-two claim shanties in sight. In 1881 the assessed valuation of Spink county was \$36,000—1882 places it at \$500,000. In addition to the natural advantages of soil and climate the fact that no settler can be located further off from a railroad built or building than twenty miles, insures a near and even competitive market. The class of people thus far locating are nearly all Americans of the better sort, as is manifested by the fact of their having already twenty-one organized school districts in the county, twelve of which have either built or are building school houses and also that the county is well officered by competent and honest men whose administration of county matters has been such as to render county securities desirable and taken at once by its citizens. NO RAILROAD LANDS. Another desirable feature about this county is that not one acre of railroad land exists in the county, and all but the two sections in each township set apart for school endowment is open for settlement or taken under the homestead, pre-emption or timber-culture acts. Although there is a large amount thus located, any settler who prefers a location near the line of road, claims improved or otherwise can be purchased at from \$4 to \$7 per acre, much less than railroad lands elsewhere, and on every quarter section in the county one is sure of a good well of water at an average depth of 20 feet. From the many points of superiority named, I am certain that Spink county is sure to become in the future one of the most wealthy and populous counties in Dakota, and I now turn from the consideration of the county to that of its principal town and future county seat. ASHTON. This, the chief point of interest and the only place of moment in the county occupies a beautiful spot of ground on the west bank of the Jim river, at about the geographical center of the county, and exactly on the same parallel (45 degrees) as St. Paul, just 300 miles west of that metropolis. It is 140 miles south of Jamestown and 150

north of Yankton, and is at the present time the terminus of the Jim river branch of the Hastings & Dakota division of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railway. Passenger trains leaving St. Paul each week day at 8 a. m., arrive at Ashton the following morning at 3:25 a. m. WAS PLATTED. It was platted as a town by Charles H. Prior, of Minneapolis, and contains in the original site, forty acres, exclusive of what was set apart for railroad purposes. M. F. Schofield is the resident agent for the town site proper. The town is laid out at right angles to the road which has a nearly due north and south course here. Main street, the center of the town, crosses the track north of the depot and runs due east and west. In addition to the original town site, 160 acres west and south of town have just been platted and placed in the hands of Rogers and Atwood, and is known as Fowler's addition to Ashton. Trains arrived at Ashton for the first time October 1st last, and found one frame building of very small dimensions as the only indications of a town. Today, as I stand upon Main street and look about me, I can count over 100 buildings, business and residences, which contains a population of not less than 400 people. I find the town to contain a school house, two good hotels, the Allen house and Bowman house, a bank, two good newspapers, five general stores, two feed stores, one grocery store, one furniture store, one millinery store, one restaurant, three lumber yards, three machineries, three livery, sale and feed stables, one saloon, one harness shop, one shoe shop, one butcher shop, one blacksmith shop, two wagon shops, two law, land and loan agencies, three lawyers, three doctors and two preachers. Nearly all of the business buildings and residences have been erected since March 1st last, and both are of a very fine class, the residences being of a much better character than any town of its age in Dakota. The class of business men who have taken up their abode at Ashton are such as guarantee a brilliant future for the town apart from the grand natural advantages which it possesses. They have formed a business men's association for the purpose of advancing the business interests of the town. One of the first steps will be to have the town incorporated, and also to take such other measures as will be conducive of general public good. LOCAL PAPERS. The Ashton Bee, George L. Shoals editor and proprietor, a neat five-column quarto, and the Spink County Herald, a six-column quarto, A. E. Rising editor and proprietor, are both of them live, wide awake local papers, and united in their efforts to build up a model city in this garden of the valley. BUILDING. A school house costing \$3,000, to augment the limited capacity of the one already built, will be erected the coming season, and two churches, a Methodist and a Congregationalist, are both under way. So it will be seen at a glance that to come to this young city, as yet hardly aware of its own existence or importance, is like

going to some old settled community where society, religious and civil, is well established, and where the fascination of frontier life is never realized by the new comer, who finds himself in an old settled country where he expected to find a wilderness. THE COUNTY SEAT. While as yet the county seat remains where it was first located when such a place as the now thriving city of Ashton was as yet unknown, and where a man might drive back and forward and pass and repass a thousand times without being aware of having passed it, yet it will be seen at a glance that Ashton must eventually be selected as the permanent location, for besides being the most available and central town, more easily accessible than any other point, it is destined not only to be the most important town in Spink county, but of this part of the valley. Besides its railroad facilities it has the best natural communication with all parts of the valley by means of wagon roads, all converging to a common center here, and from their location easily made available at any season of the year. Already the postal department recognized its availability by locating mail routes to all outlying points, with their headquarters here. It is also the only town in the county located on the river and will be the most satisfactory location for nine-tenths of the people of the county. Ashton is also located on the best line of railroad in the world, whose connecting lines give communication with all sections of the country and has received at their station here 176 cars of emigrant goods alone since March 1st last, which fact of itself indicates its central location. ASHTON WANTS, a flouring mill, a flax fiber mill, broom factory and additional business houses for all the different lines as nothing is as yet overdone. The railroad company are at once looking for an artesian well, and will do everything in their power to secure the welfare and prosperity of the town, and with a class of stirring business men, such as Ashton possesses, there need be no fear for the success of the town, it is well assured. Good business and residence lots can be obtained at the most reasonable prices for as yet speculation has not received a big boom like some towns in Dakota. Yet when one comes to consider the many advantages this county and city possess which other localities lack, it is no wonder that emigration is beginning to turn toward this fertile and delightful region, and that people begin to talk of Ashton as the coming city of the valley. Let any one who loves the west visit Spink county and take in its ravishing beauty, and if he has ever dreamt of a perfect land he will find his ideal here, where the thoughts revert to the beautiful poem of Lovjoy: I love the west, and my home shall be On its prairies broad and fair, My heart is light and my thoughts are free, When I breathe its bracing air. The west, the beautiful west, I have seen thee in my dreams, When a foreign soil my feet have trod, I have heard thy laughing streams.