



# The Pinery

PUBLISHED NOW & THEN BY THE PORTAGE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## CALL TO THE ANNUAL MEETING --

Wednesday, April 21, 1971 is the date of our society's annual meeting. It will be held in the new Fine Arts Center building on the WSU campus; room 106, which is directly behind the Edna Carlsten Art Gallery. This gallery is on the second floor at the head of the stairs at the west end of the building's inner courtyard.

Raymond E. Specht, Associate Professor of Geography and WSU Campus Planner will present an illustrated talk on Wisconsin railroads. Professor Specht is an authority on railroad development, rooting his studies in historic development and has through that acquired great interest in antiquarian and artifact aspects of railroading. He is the author of several books and articles, chief among them, Geographical Analysis of Wisconsin Railroads (co-authored with Maurice E. Perret); The Green Bay & Western Railway, a History; and Milwaukee and Northern and the Milwaukee, Lake Shore and Western Lines.

Professor Specht, a native of Manitowoc has lived and taught in Stevens Point since 1947. He is a prime mover in Portage County town, regional and recreational planning.

We are asking local railway men, particularly those who have recollections of the old Wisconsin Central Railway to come to the meeting for general conversations on experiences in railroading in Wisconsin.

## VOTES IN STOCKTON...

Appropos this election day (April 6, 1971) some socio-political historical writings on file in the Portage County Historical

Society material are worth reading as footnotes to 19th century Portage County ferment.

These studies (The History of the Town of Stockton, 51 pp.; The Custer Incident, Religion, Race and Roads, 8 pp.; The Lost Village in Stockton Township, 3 pp.; Once Upon a Time, 3 pp.) were written in 1958 by a WSU student, Donald Whiteside, who, residing in Stockton town at the time searched out voting data, enquired and interviewed for information and background.

In the 1860's, 70's and 80's, the city of Stevens Point had consistently voted Democratic in national politics, the city of Plover had just as consistently voted Republican. Until 1874 Stockton had voted Republican but this year was marked by a switch to the Democratic ticket. The Irish had teamed with the rising Polish population to take county political control from the Yankees in the Arnott vicinity. This state of affairs was again soon to change. As the Polish increased in numbers during the 1880's, not only the Yankee Protestants succumbed but also the Roman Catholic Irish. By 1889 the Polish had won control of the county elective offices. Every political contest was a source of vigorous physical conflict. "The saloon and street brawls are still remembered by the old timers."

Perhaps a more critical factor was present in the change. In The Custer Incident we read "This political upheaval was linked with a struggle over transportation. As has been true in the cosmos of American history, a primary factor in the continuation and prosperity of a village has been

the development of transportation. The nation has seen multitudes of violent contests over the routing of roads and rails. When roads were the spoils of victory, control of the town and county boards and the state legislature became the immediate objective of the battles. In the Custer incident the fight was for control of the town board. The village which secured the main east-west road could expect the valuation of the surrounding land to be increased and the storekeepers could be assured of more trade.

"During the early history of the Town of Stockton, there had been a main stage coach route that passed through the southwest corner of the town to Plover and then to Stevens Point. When the village of Amherst, which is located east of the town of Stockton became larger the main stage coach route was changed to include it. The new route came from Waupaca to Amherst, then due west to Stevens Point, passing directly south of Custer and through the village of Stockton. This eliminated Arnott and Plover from the main route. Stevens Point gained considerably from this new change as she was competing with Plover for the title of the leading city in Portage County.

"The actual difference in length between the Amherst-Arnott-Plover-Stevens Point route and the Amherst-Custer-Stockton-Stevens Point route was one quarter of a mile. The latter route was shorter, but harder to build a road through as the land was swampy and hilly. Following this road change, another took place; a new highway was built that completely isolated the village of Stockton leaving only Custer on the main route. So by the early 1890's the Polish Roman Catholics centering at Custer had not only the political control, but also the much cherished road."

Incident to all this, on August 19, 1876 the Wisconsin Central Railroad announced that a new station was to be erected along its route through the Town of Stockton, that the name of the new station was to be Custer. The Stevens Point Journal,

August 26, 1876, stated "The strife between the two localities for securing of the depot on the WCRR is forever put at rest by the company locating it on land owned by Michael Dawson." This land was donated by Michael Dawson and is the present site of the village of Custer.

#### WISCONSIN CENTRAL RAILROAD CENTENNIAL YEAR

Wednesday, Nov. 15, 1871 was a great day for Stevens Point. This day was the occasion of the arrival of the first train of cars on the Wisconsin Central Railroad. The coming of a railroad to the community was serious business and when the day finally arrived, it was a time of ceremony and jubilation.

All through the fifties and sixties rumors of railway extension were heard and community and business deals were common. As one writer comments "railroad projects were sprung upon people and some of them were caught and seriously handled before they could extricate themselves." (History of N. Wisconsin, 1881).

The Wisconsin Pineries, especially in 1857 and 1858, (when "General" Albert Gallatin Ellis was most active) looked to plans for extension of the Milwaukee and Horicon Railroad. Planning and dealing was prevalent. "The iron is secured to lay the tracks to the village of Jefferson. That road, it is said, pointed to Stevens Point" (June 18, 1857). "Continuation of road west from Berlin is pointed to Stevens Point" May 14, 1858).

Other modes of transportation were having problems with the railways. Lumbermen complained of the "rascality" of the M & M RR which built its bridges so low over the Wisconsin, boats and logging rafts found difficulty in passage.

But it was not until 1871 that marked the great coming, from another direction, the WCRR via Neenah and Waupaca. The WCRR opened its first stretch of track from Menasha to Waupaca in 1871 under the direction of Judge George Reed, Manitowoc lawyer and promoter of "numerous embryonic railroads" in this period, and Gardner Colby, a Boston

financier. The original land grant offered by the federal and state governments was approximately 2,000,000 acres, offered as inducement to build north to unpopulated areas. Within a turbulent decade the line did extend to Ashland from Stevens Point and south to Portage. Charles Colby, president of the line and son of Gardner Colby, in his report of 1878 noted "Eight years ago, there was not a house within fifteen miles from where now stand the thriving villages of Junction City, Auburndale, Milladore, Marshfield, Spencer, Unity, Colby, Medford, Ogema, Phillips, Fifield... There were practically no inhabitants in that part of the state, but it is estimated that there are now over 20,000 people within carrying distance... 35 manufacturing establishments have been built."

Conflict was rampant. By 1880 the great inducement of land had dwindled. President Colby continues "it is now apparent that no attempt was made by the government to protect any of the lands given for this road. Pine hunters and speculators for three years and a half after the grant, were allowed to enter and select large bodies of pine... it was found that for a distance of 20 miles on each side of the road many of the best lands had been selected and timbered." The original grant was cut to 40%.

The company operated under the WCRR name for only 38 years. In 1909 it came under lease to the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie RR; the line became better known as the "Old Soo". The Soo Line operates on the same right-of-way as did the Wisconsin Central, the only major portions abandoned being the Stevens Point to Portage stretch.

The fortunes of the WCRR fluctuated with the economy. One of the bleakest periods was at the turn of the century when capital expenditures for equipment and physical improvements were almost non-existent.

Lumber, iron ore and a thriving passenger business had provided the greatest share of the revenues. Now, iron ore mines closed and lumber moved in moderate proportion. Commodities changed.

Wisconsin Central heritage is still very much a part of the Soo Line, at Manitowoc, Schiller Park, Fond du Lac, Chippewa Falls, Neenah-Menasha, Stevens Point. Stevens Point, once a focal point of early WCRR dispatch, is now Eastern Division headquarters for the Soo Line.

Much of the above information was gained from the Stevens Point Daily Journal and from Roy L. Martin's History of the Wisconsin Central. (1941).

#### STEVENS POINT - GATEWAY TO THE PINERIES

This Pioneer Park marker sponsored by Mr. & Mrs. Win. Rothman to be placed on the bank of the Wisconsin River at the foot of Main Street was officially nominated by the Wisconsin Registered Landmarks Committee and subsequently formally approved by the Advisory Committee of the Wisconsin Council for Local History at its Spring meeting held at Mauston on April 3, 1971. The marker has been assigned Register No. 85 in this official series.

The committee reviewed sixteen marker requests at this meeting, ten of these being accepted for nomination, including the Rothman marker, which will be entitled STEVENS POINT--GATEWAY TO THE PINERIES. The text is as follows:

"This plaque commemorates pioneers who established Stevens Point during the 1840's, 50's and 60's. Community life centered here at the foot of Main Street where suppliers were trans-shipped from wagon to boat for the trip north to lumber camps. Piers and booms held logs for local sawmills, and lumber rafts were outfitted for the trip down the Wisconsin. Stage coaches stopped at nearby inns and freight wagons unloaded wares at the village stores. Here sawmill whine and scent of fresh cut pine were ever present, for lumber was the lifeblood of this pioneer town."

#### JORDAN DAM & POWER PLANT

This marker, approved last year by the Registered Marker Committee, as No. 81 in the series, has now been forwarded to the manufacturer. The legend for the marker is as follows:

"In 1840 at the site of the power plant across the Plover River, Bloomer & Harper built one of the earliest and most important sawmills in northern Wisconsin. During the following fifty years, over 700 million feet of lumber, most of which was sawed here, were floated down stream to the Wisconsin. From 1904 to 1965, the power plant built by the Stevens Point Power Co., pioneering the water diversion principle, produced auxiliary electricity for the Stevens Point area. When the land east of the river was platted in 1856, the settlement, known as Jordan, contained 40 buildings and 165 persons."

#### THE MAUSTON MEETING --

The April 3d session of the Wisconsin Council for Local History set the regional convention dates for this coming year. Next summer's convention will be held at Marshfield under the auspices of the North Woods County Historical Society. The summer 1972 convention will be held in Stevens Point with our society as host. During this current year, your president takes the post of regional vice-chairman and becomes a member of the council's advisory committee.

#### CARL JACOBS LETTERS & OTHER GIFTS--

Our society is the holder now, through the generosity of Mr. Jacobs, of a series of letters of Sergeant Carl N. Jacobs, Ordnance Detachment, AEF, writing home to his folks, chiefly from France, dated May 18, 1918 to June 28, 1919. They are good full letters of over-seas World War 1 experience, remarkable for the background of the problems of ordnance supply and repair at the front, as well as the warm-hearted letters of a son of Stevens Point. The gift includes the

original letters. The letters have been typed, these copies beautifully bound and the whole accompanied with documents, manuals and memorabilia of this year in the great conflict. One of the unusual items is a detachment serial, which ran for the duration entitled Jolliers Weekly, O.B.Merry, editor, published spasmodically by the Laffangrin Publishing Company. Read the last carefully.

The Society is also fortunate in other gifts. If space allowed (5 pages takes 12¢ postage) they should be detailed and will in future issues. From Ellen (Mrs. Raymond) Specht: three books, an 1896 Christmas gift from Mrs. Bradford to Gladys Parks; two devotional books inscribed 1855 and 1856 as gift to Mary Cadman which may have belonged to Druggist John Cadman's family, who came to Stevens Point in 1856.

From Ray Wienholt, Plover: five journal account ledgers for Benjamin Franklin Parker, dating from 1872 - 1902 (these were brought to us through the courtesy of Leo Thomasgard and Ralph Yorton). Mrs. Eva Pierce, Plover: four docket and trial books, Town of Plover, 1856-1878, found stored in the Pierce Grocery building, which being public records will be deposited with the State Historical Society Area Research Center at WSU. Mrs. James M. Pfiffner: several choice photographs and snap-shots of Portage County scenes including an 1870 tintype of the Old Mehan mill, an 1880 print of a photo looking south from the Court House, and a superb 1890 panorama looking north.

We are most grateful for this memorabilia.

It would give us pleasure to have all who are interested, come to look at and read these. They could well be used as the basis for stories for future Pineries.

THE PINERY is issued by the PORTAGE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Members of the Board are:

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REMEMBER THE GENERAL MEETING -- Wednesday, April 21, 1971, 7:30 p.m.