



The Pinery

PUBLISHED NOW & THEN BY THE PORTAGE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
October 1977 Stevens Point, Wi. 54481 New Series Volume 1, No. 2

FOR THE RECORD

IN MEMORIAM

The Portage County Historical Society lost a friend when Miss Winifred Harvey of Amherst died on September 7, 1977. Miss Harvey was a charter member of the Society and at the time of her death was serving on the Board of Directors. She will be remembered fondly for her services to the Portage County community, her interest in local history and her personal warmth.

SPECIAL NOTICE--MONTHLY PUBLIC MEETINGS

With the October meeting we are beginning our "meeting-a-month" schedule. For these meetings we are trying to plan a variety of programs to meet the varied interests of our members. Please set aside the third Wednesday in each month as Portage County Historical Society meeting night. Programs will be announced in each issue of The Pinery and in the Stevens Point Daily Journal.

Upcoming programs are as follows:

- Oct. 19 -- 7:30 p.m. -- County-City Building (Conference Room in basement), Stevens Point -- Thurman Fox from the State Historical Society in Madison will speak on "Why a Museum?"
- Nov. 16 -- 7:30 p.m. -- County-City Building (Conference Room in basement), Stevens Point -- Ray Specht will give a program on railroad history.
- Dec. 6 -- 7:30 p.m. -- County-City Building (Conference Room in basement), Stevens Point -- Christmas Party with Amherst Historical Society members as our guests. For this meeting, please bring one batch of

your favorite holiday cookies-- hopefully from an old family recipe from Portage County! If you do have an early Portage County recipe that you would like to share, please bring a copy along with a little background information about it, and we will give it to the Portage County Cookbook Committee. If you are not a "cookie-maker," please bring \$1.00 to put into the coffee fund. At the end of the meeting, any extra cookies will be sold, and the money put into the Museum Fund.

Jan. 18 -- 7:30 p.m. -- (Place to be announced) David Wrone will discuss Richard Current's History of Wisconsin.

There is a possibility that the County may need the room that we have reserved for our meetings. If so, we will announce any changes in the Stevens Point Daily Journal.

We are very eager to have our meetings at different places throughout the county. If you would like to schedule a meeting in your community, please contact--Ellen Johnson, 3238 Minnesota Ave., Stevens Point (341-2129 after 4:00 p.m.). Any suggestions will also be appreciated.

SOCIETY MUSEUM

A new activism permeates the Portage County Historical Society. The cause of this activism is the purchase of "the old Methodist Church" in Plover.

Following restoration and reconstruction the Church will house the first Museum in Portage County. Long the fond hope of members of the PCHS, the Museum will provide a permanent home for displays and artifacts of Portage County history.

In addition, a variety of Society sponsored public activities centering about the Church/Museum are under consideration by the Board of Directors. Such activities include pot-luck suppers, ice cream socials, and craft fairs. Programs of more historic interest such as lectures will also find a place in the Museum's future.

The Church is an example of Greek Revival architecture and has stood on the same site in Plover for at least the past 119 years. The land upon which the Church stands was transferred to the first Presbyterian Society of Plover and Stevens Point by John Stumpf on March 28, 1856. Sometime between March 1856 and June 1858 the Church was raised and consecrated. Within two decades the Church had lost its flock. In January 1887 the building became the spiritual home for a congregation of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Methodists continued to use the building, adding a new basement in 1932, until the completion of the new Methodist Church in 1965. Thereafter, the building suffered from disuse. The building is structurally sound but considerable restoration work is needed to return the Church to a useful condition.

HELP US.....JOIN A COMMITTEE

At present, the PCHS is forming committees to work on a myriad of new projects such as fund raising projects; a Portage County Cook Book; a Heritage Bazaar; a military history of Portage County; oral history interviews; Museum restoration; and other areas of interest. These are worthwhile projects. Please get involved. The Society is going to need many things during the next year, but most of all, it is going to need YOU. The Society can be only as strong as the members who support it. We have a wonderful opportunity to create a "spot of history" in Central Wisconsin. By working together, we can preserve our county's past for the future. NOTE: We wish to thank those members who have returned project questionnaires. Committees are being formed

and if you signed up for a project you will be contacted soon.

For readers who would like to participate or simply wish more information please contact Ellen Johnson, 3238 Minnesota Ave., Stevens Point (341-2129 after 4:00 p.m.).

ROTHMAN AWARD WINNERS

John Stastny and Ellen Johnson were the co-winners of the first annual Win Rothman Local History Award. Mr. Stastny (formerly employed in the UW-SP Archives) wrote a masters thesis on the history of the Stevens Point Brewery. Mrs. Johnson (a teacher in the Stevens Point School District) re-wrote the history of Portage County for school-aged children. Honorable mention went to Don Isherwood for a research project on Indians of Wisconsin.

THANK YOU

John Stastny will no longer be the Assistant Editor of The Pinery. His employment by the UW-SP has been terminated due to budgetary cutbacks. John deserves considerable credit for researching and writing articles for Clio's Corner and for his overall assistance in preparing The Pinery for publication.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Readers are encouraged to submit articles (or historical tid-bits) to The Pinery for possible publication; or to just write to the Editor expressing their feelings about the newsletter. Articles submitted will not be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed. Please send all correspondence to:

William G. Paul
c/o Portage County Historical Society
P.O. Box 672
Stevens Point, WI 54481

We look forward to hearing from you.

CLIO'S CORNER

PORTAGE COUNTY CREAMERIES

Many people today are discouraged by the lack of really good, locally made butter. Much of the stuff passed off to the public is tasteless by comparison with the fine products made by local creameries in the years gone by. Portage County had many fine creameries, among them were the creameries at Blaine, Buena Vista, Stockton, Sharon, Nelsonville, Custer, Arnott, Bancroft, Ellis, Plover and other areas of Portage County.

Through the years there has been a serious declination of these small creameries, first built to capitalize on the dairying that was so important to the state. Buena Vista was an extremely popular area for creameries. In 1897 the Lone Star Creamery, one of the first creameries in Portage County, was organized and built. The original building burned in 1903, and was soon rebuilt, remaining in operation until 1929.

Competition was keen in the early creamery days. In 1900 the Buena Vista Creamery was organized. It began operations on July 1st of that year, vying for the cream and milk business of the Buena Vista area with the Lone Star Creamery.

In 1904 further competition arrived in the form of the Union Creamery. This foundation had an up-and-down history, opening on July 1, 1904 and closing in 1913, reopening as a cheese factory in 1918 to close again in 1923. It was again re-opened for a time as a cheese factory in 1934, but conditions were against the project. It soon closed again.

So it was that creameries were important to the development of the Buena Vista area of Portage County. Like many other things in the "good old days," the creameries and their fine butter and cream products have vanished from the landscape leaving only empty hulls of buildings and memories of locally made delicious butter.

/Editor's note: Much of the information for the above article was gleaned from research done by Scott McCormick. Mr. McCormick, now a resident of Princeton, Wisconsin, was a Portage County resident in the early years of this century. His family was involved in the creameries of Portage County, especially those at Maynard's Corners, Buena Vista, Almond, Sharon and Plover. I

"SHERLOCK HOLMES" IN POINT

Basil Rathbone, the classical actor best known, perhaps, for his film portrayals of Sherlock Holmes in the late 1930's and mid-'40's, visited Stevens Point on Thursday, 15th March, 1962.

At that time, Rathbone was touring the country with his one-man show called "An Evening With Basil Rathbone." The /UW-SP / Pointer of 8th March, 1962 notes some of the readings Rathbone was slated to deliver that night, which included works from Shakespeare, Shelley, Poe, and Conan Doyle among others.

It is most interesting to note that a preview article in The Stevens Point Daily Journal for 13th March, 1962 does not make mention of Sherlock Holmes whatsoever. The Pointer's article, moreover, alludes to Sherlock Holmes only in passing.

One wonders whether this "slight" may have been intentional on the part of Rathbone or his agent(s). In the latter years of his life, Rathbone came to feel that he had been unfairly type-cast as the Great Detective, and lamented on several occasions that his career as a classical actor had been adversely affected by his identification with Sherlock Holmes.

Whatever Rathbone may have thought about Holmes the fact remains that to this day, for a great many people, Rathbone is Sherlock Holmes.

Contributed by Bruce R. Beaman
Stevens Point

Editor's note: Mr. Beaman is a Sherlock Holmes buff and compiler of SHERLOCKIAN QUOTATIONS (Pontine Press, 1977) /

GARDEN OF EDEN, 1886

Among the curiosities that men and women have considered for years is: if the Biblical account of creation is true, where was the Garden of Eden? Many answers were put forth in the past. One minister, the Reverend D.O. Van Slyke, who settled in Galesville, Trempealeau County, Wisconsin, determined that he had found Eden.

In the course of thirty years, the Reverend Van Slyke compared the landforms and waterways around Galesville with the description of the Garden in Genesis. He found many parallels. First, Eden was located on a river, with the Garden East of the river. The Galesville area is East of the Mississippi River.

The river running through the Garden split into four rivers that later merged to flow out of the Garden as one river. The LaCrosse - Trempealeau County area is a valley formed by the Mississippi, LaCrosse, Black and Trempealeau Rivers.

The Biblical River, the Euphrates, meant "long river," and, Van Slyke reasoned, this could describe the Mississippi River system. From the standpoint of waterways, Van Slyke was satisfied.

Next, he considered landforms. He described

the soil of the Valley as "...higher, drier, and more habitable, easily cultivated, and adapted to gardening." He found a hanging garden--a bluff near the settlement of Trempealeau.

The story of the Garden of Eden would be incomplete without the serpent. Van Slyke records that when white settlers first came to the Valley, it was "literally alive with rattle snakes." He adds: "But as Christians have taken possession of the hanging garden, the serpents have been destroyed or are disappearing."

Van Slyke goes on to describe the beauty of the countryside and the bluffs forming the walls around the Valley he found to be the Garden of Eden. Then he mentions the prosperity of the area and its cities, towns and villages. Finally, he describes the comparative freedom of the area from severe weather.

The book that Van Slyke wrote in 1886, Garden of Eden, served as a guide and promotional instrument much like The Handbook of Stevens Point and the Upper Wisconsin by Albert G. Ellis did for our area in 1857.

A reprinted copy of Reverend Van Slyke's little book has been placed in the Portage County Historical Society Collection. Now in its fifth printing, the book is available to the public at the bank in Galesville at the cost of 25¢ per copy.

LOST HOUSES OF PORTAGE COUNTY
by Wendell Nelson

The P.N. Peterson House in Amherst .

Its wrap-around veranda making it look like a ship in full sail, the P.N. Peterson house was the showpiece of the east side of South Main Street in Amherst for over seventy-five years. Also, it and the people who lived in it were an intimate part of the life of the village. But the house has a history of its own as well, a history that lives on, though the house itself is gone.

Before Peter Nicholas Peterson had the original house built, he and his family lived in a little house across Main Street, where the Skelly gas station is now, at the southwest corner of Main and Cross streets. The house was built in 1875; the "Amherst" column of the Stevens Point Journal (then a weekly) of July 31, 1875, says that "Mrs. Een is preparing to build a small house on Main street. . . ." And on February 26 of the next year, the Journal's Amherst reporter notes that "Peterson moves into Mrs. Een's new house next week, she having moved to Amherst Junction." (P.N. was so well-known in Amherst that many references to him in newspapers use only his last name; references to other Petersons use either first names or first two initials as well.)

Maybelle Peterson Lawrie, a granddaughter of P.N., in a family memoir that she recently wrote, confirms the second Journal news item. "The house across from the Methodist church on the southeast corner of Laconia and Cross streets was the home of the Petersons before they moved into their large new house. I know that their son Raymond . . . was born in this house, as he was my father, and at one time when the house was for rent and no one was living there he was able to show me through it."

As the two locations for the house imply, Peterson apparently turned it around to face Laconia Street. Later he rented it out, as Mrs. Lawrie says, and built new

buildings on its original site. Mrs. Lawrie describes the later structures: "There were an office building of two rooms, and a large building for the farm machinery, wagons . . . various materials for silos, and other things that they sold, besides potatoes and coal."

Mrs. Lawrie also writes that "behind the small house was a barn that was there until recent years. . . ." This is confirmed by an article from the Amherst Advocate of October 25, 1893: "Mr. P.N. Peterson is erecting a new barn on the place now occupied by Dr. Dusenbury." And an earlier Advocate "Local Item" (August 9, 1893) states that "Dr. Dusenbury is now comfortably located in the P.N. Peterson house on Church Laconia street, where he awaits your night calls." (This house is now occupied by the Fred Jastromski family.)

Construction on the big house was begun in 1889, and finished the following year. Mrs. Lawrie says that "The land on which the Petersons built their house was a gift from Annice's Mrs. P.N.'s mother, Zilphia Moyers Een. . . This statement appears to be true; a Warranty Deed in the office of the Portage County Register of Deeds (Volume 42, page 543), dated May 24, 1886, tells of "Zelphia" Een's selling to Annice Peterson this piece of land for "one dollar and other valuable considerations." This is the equivalent of an outright gift, because the "other valuable considerations" frequently meant nothing more than family affection.

The tax rolls provide some clues about when the house was built. The land was valued at \$180 in 1887, the first year when P.N. Peterson is listed as the owner, and at \$250 in 1889. But in 1890, the value rises to \$600, which suggests

that something significant was done to the land, and this suggestion is borne out by articles from the old newspapers.

The earliest report about the construction of the house appears in the "Amherst" notices from the April 27, 1889, Stevens Point Journal: "Mr. Moss has commenced work on Mr. Peterson's dwelling house." This is followed by three more from the 1889 Journals: on May 25: "Mr. Peterson's new dwelling is being pushed rapidly under the supervision of I.M. Moss of your city [Stevens Point]"; July 27: "G.H. Worden is doing the plastering on Mr. Peterson's house"; and October 26: "Mr. Peterson will not be able to move into his new house this fall, as it will be late before it is finished." But the longest and most informative description of the house appears in the Portage County Gazette of May 8, 1889, which is not surprising, because the Gazette often gives more details about new buildings than the Journal does. The article is entitled, "An Elegant Residence."

"P.N. Peterson's new residence in Amherst, which is now in [the] course of construction, will be a decided ornament to our neighboring village. The main or middle part is 16 x 28 feet, with additions or wings in the front and rear, 16 x 16 and 16 x 28 respectively. The whole structure is to be 20 feet high. A two [-] story bay window will adorn the south side and a projecting window the west [front] side. The first floor will contain a parlor, dining room, sitting room, kitchen, pantry and bath room [sic], and the second story, which can be reached by an elegant winding stairway either from the front or rear part of the house, is to contain five large sleeping rooms and four closets. I.M. Moss of this city [Stevens Point] drew the plans, and has general supervision of the construction, while the work is in charge of his brother, E. Moss. It will cost about \$2,000, and is expected to be ready for occupancy in August or September." (This description, it should

be emphasized, is of the house as it was projected; the finished structure may have varied somewhat in details.)

As we have seen, the prediction of an August or September completion did not come true, as the Gazette itself proves in three more short articles from its "Amherst" column. On March 19, 1890, the village reporter says that "P.N. Peterson will move into his new residence as soon as the weather becomes warm and settled. Mr. P. has one of the very best houses in this part of the country." Then, oddly for a new house, the reporter says on April 30 of the same year, "P.N. Peterson is making some needed improvements on his new place," and, finally, on May 28, "P.N. Peterson has moved into his new house." So the house took over a year to build, and, judging from the April 30 notice, the delay may have been due to some sort of mistakes or complications in the construction.

The architect and contractor for the house are of interest to Portage County Historical Society members. As the Gazette's long article says, I.M. and E. (Elisha) Moss were brothers. I.M. (his first name is never given in the old newspapers) seems to have been more advanced in his profession than his brother, because he not only contracted to build structures, but also, as we have seen with the Peterson house, designed some himself.

The first article that I have found to mention him appears in the Gazette of June 18, 1884, when he and his "crew of workmen" did the carpenter work on W.W. Spraggon's house on Ellis Street in Stevens Point (near where the Episcopal rectory is today). From that time until 1901, when the July 17 Daily Journal says that he recently moved to Zion City, Illinois, he designed and built many buildings around Portage County, among them J.D. Shafer's house on Clark Street in Stevens Point (now

Mrs. E.R. Razner's house at 1716) in 1885-86 (Gazette, February 17, 1886), and August Goerke's house, which sat where William Hoppen's house is today, at 1901 Clark, in 1886 (Gazette, November 6, 1886).

His brother had numerous connections in the Amherst area. He was born in New York State in 1841, his obituary in the December 23, 1926, Amherst Advocate says, and came to the Town of Buena Vista, Portage County, Wisconsin, when he was twelve. He followed the carpenter trade "at Stevens Point, Neenah, La Crosse, Amherst /, / and throughout the surrounding country," according to his obituary. Among the buildings he worked on besides the Peterson house was probably St. Patrick's Church in the Town of Lanark; the Gazette of April 23, 1890, tells of his meeting "with a serious accident" while working on "the Catholic church" in Lanark.

In 1899, the Peterson house became the structure that most people in the county remember. The Amherst Advocate, which began publication in 1893, should be a good source of information on the remodelling, but the issues from late 1895 through 1902 are missing from the micro-filmed collections in the Charles M. White Memorial Public Library in Stevens Point and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, and from both the microfilmed and loose copies in the Amherst Public Library. The Amherst library recently received a collection of bound Advocates, but the 1899 volume is incomplete, so whatever the paper may have reported on the remodelling is apparently lost.

But the Gazette reported it in one brief notice in the July 26, 1899, issue, reporting that "/t The improvements on P.N. Peterson's residence are nearly completed."

The Daily Journal, by contrast, gave five notices on the remodelling-- three from its Amherst reporter, and two in its local columns. The first article, from the

May 27, 1899, issue, says that "P.N. Peterson of Amherst, is having his home extensively remodeled along modern lines after plans prepared by J.H. Jeffers & Co. The front will be adorned by a handsome circular porch." Almost a month later, in the June 24 issue, the Amherst reporter gives nearly the same information: "Hon. P.N. Peterson is putting a circular veranda to his residence. I.M. Moss of Stevens Point is doing the work."

Another month later, on July 28, the local reporter of the Daily Journal notes that "I.M. Moss returned this morning from Amherst, where he has been at work on P.N. Peterson's improvements to his residence. He left for Almond at once to do some work for F.J. Frost." And in the same issue, the Amherst reporter gives some more details on the changes. "P.N. Peterson has completed a fine addition to his residence in a large circular porch and bay window. He has also put in an Acetyline / sic / gas machine and will light his house through /out / with that gas."

One final notice appears in the "Amherst" column of the Daily Journal of a week later, August 4, 1899: "Hon. P.N. Peterson has his acetylene gas machine installed, and the light is satisfactory."

(The title of "Hon."--Honorable--was added to Peterson's name after he had served one term in the Wisconsin State Assembly, but sometimes both "Hon." and "Esq."--Esquire--seem to have been added to men's names only because they were rich or well-known ("prominent"), in a kind of American imitation of European titles, J.J. Nelson, for example, was often called "Hon." though the only public offices he held were appointive positions on two state boards, and John Week was called "Esq." apparently only because he was one of the richest lumbermen in the Wisconsin River Valley.)

Besides the obvious porch that all the early articles mention, there are two items of interest in the remodelling notices. One is the "bay-window." This apparently is the two-story bay on the north side of the house. What is apparently the only extant picture of the original house clearly shows that the half-timbered bay on the south side was part of the 1889-90 structure. Also, the north bay is not connected with the roof, but is simply attached to the wall of the north wing.

The other interesting feature is the gas-light system that was added. This was obviously one for the individual house only, not a system using gas piped in from outside. But what is curious about it is that, by 1899, electricity was being installed in some new houses. Readers of the previous issue of The Pinery may recall that the house built for Mrs. A.E. Bosworth in 1895 in Stevens Point was "wired throughout for incandescent lighting and call bells," according to the Stevens Point Journal of January 11, 1896. So, while gas lighting was probably the older and more common of the two lighting systems at the time, one would expect a man as well-to-do as Peterson apparently was, to be able to afford--and to want--the latest conveniences and fixtures available, assuming that he was as enthusiastic about progress as most 19th-century Americans were.

On the other hand, Amherst may not have had electricity for home use yet; Malcolm Rosholt, in Our County Our Story, says that "The electric lighting came to Amherst village around 1900. . . ." Also, while some houses had their own generators for electric lighting, the system was probably not as dependable as gas.

With the remodelling completed, the house became a fine example of a Victorian gingerbread house--the "gingerbread" being all the fancy wood trim. Another, more accurate name for the style is "Victorian Eclectic," which means a collection of many different styles in one late-19th century house.

The basic structure was fairly simple: a main gabled upright, with wings on both sides forming a cross pattern, and with each wing having a two-story bay window. But it was the many different kinds of trim that made the house distinctive. This trim included turned cross-braces, fish-scale shingles, and narrow bargeboards on the main gables, simulated half-timbering on the south bay with a wooden fanlight under the gable, and leaded panes in the upper-center window on the second story of the north bay.

The circular porch was supported by Tuscan columns (smooth ones with plain capitals) and many small turned posts, and had a sunburst pattern in the pediment (triangle) over the front steps. These columns suggest that the porch was a later addition from the Neo-Classical Revival period of architecture, which flourished in Wisconsin from about 1895-1915.

Some of the same fancy woodwork was used inside the house, including ornate scrollwork along the ceiling in the south bay on the first floor, and an etched, red-tinted window in the north front door. (One of P.N.'s granddaughters, Zilphia Webster Krembs, took these last two items with her before the house was destroyed.)

The contractor for the remodelling has already been discussed, but the architect deserves some mention here. It is not clear whether J.H. Jeffers was a Portage County native (his last name was a common one in early Amherst and Lanark townships), but he was practicing his profession in Stevens Point as early as 1898. The Gazette of January 11, 1899, contains a long notice announcing that the firm of J.H. Jeffers & Co. is now permanently established in this city" (Stevens Point), and invites people who are thinking of building houses to "address us or call at our office in the Atwell Building [southeast corner of Strongs and Main]. . . ." (The "& Co." included W.L. Alban, the notice says.)

However, Jeffers' establishment in Portage County was not to be permanent, after all; by 1901, the July 11 Daily Journal of that year reported, he was back in Stevens Point, preparing to move "his family to Wausau." But he designed many local buildings before and after his move, among them the J.L. Jensen house at 1100 Brawley Street (Daily Journal, May 10, 1901), the A.G. Green house at 1501 Main Street (Daily Journal, June 13, 1903), and the E.A. Arenberg house remodelling--now the Portage House at 1514 Strongs Avenue (Gazette, November 21, 1906), all in Stevens Point.

Among the buildings that he designed elsewhere in Wisconsin were the Tomahawk City Hall in 1900 (Gazette, May 23, 1900), the Langlade County Court House in Antigo in 1903 (Gazette, November 18, 1903), and the "business men's club" (the Wausau Club?) in Wausau in 1901 (Daily Journal, July 11, 1901). He also received second prize for his design of a "Wisconsin building" at the 1903 St. Louis World's Fair (Gazette, July 29, 1903), so he was obviously successful in his profession.

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TO BE CONTINUED:
Part II--The Peterson Family and their life in the house.

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The Pinery is the official newsletter of the Portage County Historical Society, Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

William G. Paul, Editor
John Stastny, Assistant to the Editor

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