

CHAPTER I

TOWNSHIP OF BELMONT

PORTAGE COUNTY

WISCONSIN

TOWN OF BELMONT, PORTAGE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

Town 21 North-Range 10 East (Belmont Township), as it is today in 1984, had the beginning of its inception on November 12, 1856, when the County Board ordered that the Township of Lanark be set off from the Township of Belmont, thereby constituting the Township of Lanark (Town 22 North-Range 10 East), as it is known today, 1984.

It was only sixteen days later, on November 28, 1856, that Town 21 North-Range 10 East (Town of Belmont), was set off from the Township of Almond, to constitute the newly formed Township of Belmont. It was now a congressional township of thirty-six equal sections of one square mile each.

The first town meeting was to be held the first Monday in October, in 1856. This was held at the tavern house of Alexander Gray, but this location was not actually located in the Town of Belmont as it is today, but was located in the southern part of Lanark, that was detached from the Town of Belmont, November 12, 1856.

The Township of Belmont is bound on the east by the Township of Dayton, Waupaca County, on the south by the Township of Rose, Waushara County, on the west by the Township of Almond and on the north by Lanark, both being in Portage County.

Most of the first pioneers obtained their land through United States Government land grants, signed by President Pierce, the fourteenth President of the United States from 1853 to 1857.

Anyone living between the Wolf and the Wisconsin Rivers before June 1, 1852, were squatters according to the Treaty of 1848, which gave this land to the Menominee Indians, and was not open to the white settlers until June 1, 1852. The big crossing at Fremont started at midnight May 31, 1852.

As each new township organized and more and more of its early settlers had erected some type of a home or shelter for their families, they began to think of a place to worship and of a school where their children could learn their three "R's." This was an opportunity that so many of the parents had failed to receive.

These were God-fearing people. They brought with them besides their love for the land, a love for God and their fellow man.

Prayers and services were held in their homes until the first school houses were built. The school house often served a dual purpose. It served as a classroom for the children and also as a church for all of the families.

The Town of Belmont was no different than any other township that had been organized before them; they wanted to grow.

By 1875, when the first church in the Town of Belmont was built in Blaine, all eight school districts had already been organized and each had its own schoolhouse.

A new townhouse was built in 1868, so the town meetings no longer had to be held in a schoolhouse.

This was only the beginning, the Town of Belmont had started to take shape and grow.

On June 1, 1852, Henry Dopp along with his wife, the former Ellen Lane, and their little family arrived at their destination, which later became the town of Belmont, Portage County, Wisconsin. At the time of their arrival on June 1, 1852, there were only two other families in the area. The Peter Dunegan and the H. W. Robinson families had settled just north of the Dopp family, just west of the Waupaca County

line in 1851. At this point in time Waupaca County had been surveyed, but not as yet had the Town of Belmont in Portage County been surveyed. This was still Indian Land.

In this history of the town of Belmont you will find some of your ancestors who came here to carve out a home and make new lives for themselves in the Indian Lands of Wisconsin.

Several of the early pioneers came to the Town of Belmont in the 1850's to stake out their claim and to build some type of a shelter for their families who would follow later. They also had to clear some land so that they could plant a few crops to provide food for that family when they came.

Most had very little money in their pockets when they arrived in the wilderness. They were fortunate in that game and fish were plentiful to supplement their living needs.

Often the husband returned to their original home and family in the winter months where they could find employment to earn enough money to plant the next year's crops. For many years some of these pioneers later took jobs in the logging woods during the winter to earn enough money for the family to live on.

The roads were only trails at first; travel was slow. Often they met up with wild animals on the trail. Often it was great distances between neighbors but they worked and pulled together. They prayed and played together. There was a great feeling of neighborliness between them.

Today, these same old pioneers would miss the close family and neighborly ties with one another such as: the quilting bees, the old-fashioned corn husking bees, when if you were lucky enough to find a red ear of corn you could kiss your lady fair. Then there were the hop dances, the barn raisings, changing help with your neighbor at threshing and silo filling time, the programs and the small country schools and churches where everyone participated. There were the community club picnics, the card parties in the winter time, or even the old time house dance in someone's home where they would take out the furniture, roll up the rug, sprinkle some corn meal on the floor, and the fiddler would call out, grab your pardner for a circle two step, and they would dance until the wee hours of the morning.

These are the days gone by, only the memory remains. It's like the song, "Another Story, Another Time, Another Place." The husking of the corn from the shocks in the fields has been replaced by modern corn pickers and shellers. The grain is combined by large combines. No more changing of help between one another or those wonderful noon and supper meals.

The land in the Township of Belmont is generally rolling and some hilly, while the soil is of varying degrees of fertility. It varies from a rich sandy loam to some lighter sandy loam suited better for Christmas trees. However, now with modern irrigation and better farming technology, this land is also very productive. Some of the heavier soil around Blaine is stoney.

When the first pioneers came to this area it was not heavily wooded but was quite small and scattering. For the most part it was fairly easy to clear and break.

It has been reported that the pigeons were so plentiful that the sound made by their wings as they flew sounded like thunder and that they destroyed more than one field of grain which had to be sown over.

The Indians roamed in bands through the area, often trading with the white settlers or asking for food. The Menominee Indians were

peaceful Indians and generally accepted the white settlers who had invaded their domain.

The first crops grown were mostly wheat, which provided food, but according to the 1860 Federal Agricultural Census much wheat, corn and potatoes were grown as well as some rye and oats. Most of the settlers had two cows for their own milk and homemade butter and a hog or two to raise.

THE FIRST SETTLERS

The first pioneer settlers to the Town of Belmont were all Eastern Yankees with their birthplace being in one or another of our eastern states, or from Canada, or one of the British Isles.

It was not until in the 1870 Federal Census that it showed six names as being born in Denmark.

1860 Federal Census for the Town of Belmont

The places of birth are listed as: 23 being born in New Brunswick; 2 being born in Nova Scotia; 11 as just being born in Canada, for a total of 36 from the Canadian Provinces. Presumably they all were born in either New Brunswick or Nova Scotia.

In the following order as being born in the British Isles: 15 being born in Ireland; 10 in England and 8 in Scotland.

The states in order in which the births occurred are: New York with 108 persons; Maine 92, Vermont 13; Connecticut and New Hampshire with 7 each; New Jersey 5; Massachusetts 6; Illinois 3; Pennsylvania and Michigan with 2 each and Rhode Island and Indiana with only 1 each.

There were 118 children listed as being born in the State of Wisconsin.

This summary gives you a fast look at where all of the people listed in the first Federal Census ever taken in the Town of Belmont were born.

The first Federal Census was taken in 1790 and has been taken at 10-year intervals ever since.

The 1790 Census was very brief. It listed only the name of the head of the family; the number of the free white males 16 years and up, including the head of the family; free white males under 16; free white females including head of the family; all other persons and slaves.

The 1800 and 1810 Federal Census listed the name of the head of the family; free white males under 10, 10-16, 16-26, 26-45, and 45 and over; free white females under 10, 10-16, 16-26, 26-45, and 45 and over; all others and slaves.

The 1820 Federal Census lists the name of the head of the family; free white males under 10, 10-16, 16-18, 18-26, 26-45, 45 and over; free white females under 10, 10-16, 16-26, 26-45, 45 and over; foreigners not naturalized; agriculture; manufacture; free colored; slaves.

The 1830 and 1840 Federal Census lists the head of the family; free white males under 5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, 60-70, 70-80, 80-90, 90-100, over 100; free white females following the same order; slaves; free colored; foreigners not naturalized.

The 1850 Federal Census is the first to list the names of all persons in the household, their age, sex, color, occupation, value of their real estate, birthplace, dwelling, and family number.

In the 1860 Federal Census the value of the personal property was added.

The information on the Federal Census records may or may not be of any interest to you. It simply states what you might expect to find in Federal Census records.

The State Census is much the same as the Federal Census up to 1905 when they first listed all members of the family by name.

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