

AMHERST, The Township of

The land of Amherst township is part of a watershed which drains into the Fox River Valley through the Tomorrow-Waupaca River via the Wolf River, and the township itself is divided roughly east and west by the Tomorrow River which flows out of Sharon and New Hope, through Amherst, across the corner of Lanark, into the county of Waupaca. The river takes its name from an Indian word *Waubuck se-pee*, meaning "Tomorrow River," or, a river of "pale water."¹ Whether this is a Menominee word or not, the Chippewa word for the idea of "tomorrow" is *warbunk*.²

One of the first occasions, if not the first, in which the Indian term *Waubuck*, from which came *Waupaca*, is used in the English translation as "tomorrow" appears in a news dispatch of the *Wisconsin Pinery* which is dated "Tomorrow River, Grover's Farm, January 22, 1853."³ This suggests that the English translation was already well established, although the Indian *Waubuck* or *Waupaca* River was used alternately for the next several decades in both Amherst and Sharon townships. Today, the English term "Tomorrow River" usually applies to that section of the river in Portage County while the lower stream in Waupaca County is called the *Waupaca River*.

More interesting is the legend which tells of Indians canoeing up the *Waupaca* River from the mouth of the *Wolf*, stopping for the night on the banks of the river below the modern village of Amherst, confident that "tomorrow" they would reach the 'father of waters', meaning the

¹ *Collections*, Vol. VIII, p. 487.

² Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, (Cleveland, Ohio, The Arthur H. Clark Company), Vol. II, p. 267.

³ *Pinery*, Jan. 20, 1853.

Mississippi, actually the Wisconsin, but part of the Mississippi River system. If true, it was only natural that this staging area should be associated with the idea of the future and from this may have come "Tomorrow River," one of the most meaningful place names in Wisconsin, symbol of unfilled dreams and expectancy of things to come.

Aside from the main stream of the Tomorrow River, Amherst township is drained in the southern sections by a feeder which originates in Adams Lake of Stockton and enters the Tomorrow below Amherst village. A recent map of the county identifies this as Bear Creek, a name seldom heard along its banks. Locally it has had several names, the most prominent on the upper river called Peterson Creek after A. G. Peterson who once owned land on both banks in Sec 25 (R. 9). A short stretch of the middle river near Fountain Grove School was once known as Een Creek after John ("Jim John") Een, a noted fiddler in his time who, according to Harry Pomeroy of Amherst, "played for an ungodly number of dances." The lower river is called Leary Creek after William ("Billy") P. Leary, and the stream as a whole is more often referred to as Leary Creek than by any other name. A small feeder from Ebert Lake in Sec 30 runs into the Een section of this creek called Makusky Creek after John Makusky, and the lake is named after John Ebert.

The township has several other lakes, the most historic in point of time being Lime Lake in Sec 31, referred to in the town proceedings as early as 1854, no doubt after the lime deposits which were discovered in the lake bed. A lime kiln was established on the north shore of the lake by the Een Brothers who furnished the lime for the construction of the court house built in Stevens Point in 1870.

But the largest natural lake in the county with the longest train of memories, community picnics and summer cottages is Emily. Two years after the Portage County Old Settlers Club was organized in Stevens Point, the members held their annual picnic at Emily on June 20, 1894. In his minutes of the meeting, Sherman records

that the lake was named by Luther Hanchett in honor of Emily Cole, wife of Cyrus Cole who settled near the lake "in an early day."¹ As Hanchett, a Plover lawyer and congressman, died in 1862, the naming of the lake antedates the Civil War.

West of Lake Emily lies Mud Lake, Mud Lily Lake, and Lake Ell, the latter probably after its resemblance at one time to the letter 'L'. A short distance southwest of Emily the 1876 plat identifies Lake Julia, but like the others, is either dried up or now a pot hole.

Northeast of Amherst in Sec 15 lies Myers Lake, a name believed to be a corruption of Moyers, after Monroe Moyers, a pioneer of the township. West of Nelsonville lies a lake which after the turn of the century was known as Stoltenburg Lake (1915 plat) no doubt after Andrew Stoltenburg, and today called Lake Elaine after the wife of Welton Alm who in 1947 established a popular summer camp for boys on the west shore known as Camp Mikquano, a Menominee word meaning "turtle." Half a mile to the west lies a smaller lake which none of the plats identifies but which around the turn of the century may have been known as Gifeski Lake after John Gifeski, and today better known as Ostrowski after a local family of the same name. In the southeast corner of the township in Sec 36 lies Thorn Lake, after Alex Thorn, a local resident around the turn of the century.

While the township boundaries were surveyed earlier in the summer of 1851, the survey or subdivision of section lines was begun Nov. 29 and completed Dec. 9, 1851.

The original town of Amherst covered two townships in Range 10, namely, Town 22 (Lanark) and Town 23, modern Amherst less six sections in Range 9. The first town meetings and elections were held "at the house of Edw. Wright in said town until further ordered."² Neither the town nor County Board proceedings give the date of the first election, nor are the members of the town board listed in available records, although from other bits of evidence it is known that Wright became the first town

¹ *Proceedings*, Old Settlers Club, p. 86.

² *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. I, p. 195.

chairman. And from the sequence of events in the County Board proceedings it appears that the incorporation took place in 1852.

The origin of the name for Amherst township is uncertain, but local legend holds that Gilbert Park, then a young lawyer in Plover, suggested to Adam Urline (who settled first in Plover and later in Lanark) that the new township should be named after Amherst, Nova Scotia, reputedly the native place of Urline before he moved to the county in the mid-1840s. If true, this is the only township in the county which can trace its baptismal record to a former enemy of the American Revolution, namely, General Sir Jeffrey Amherst, British army commander who later become governor of Canada.

In 1856 the town of Lanark was set off from Amherst and for the next two decades or more Amherst remained a township of 36 sections. In the fall of 1875, Amherst got the County Board to go along with the annexation of six eastern sections of Stockton, namely sections 1, 12, 13, 24, 25 and 36 in Town 23, Range 9. In 1885, a petition was presented to the County Board by residents of the towns of Amherst and Stockton asking that these same sections be returned to Stockton. A week later the county clerk read a remonstrance from a number of people against the prayers of the petitioners. But the County Board turned down the petition to return these six sections to Stockton. In 1895, by another turn in local affairs, Stockton got back these six sections while Sharon got 18 sections detached from Stockton.

Meanwhile, in 1897, a movement led by A. G. Cate, O. K. Heath, H. Heath and 157 others sought to have these six sections returned to Amherst. This at once brought forth a petition of protest signed by John, Carl and Anton Loberg and eleven others which begged the County Board to keep these six sections out of Amherst, charging that this move had been brought about by "self-interest of a few persons individually interested. . ."

According to local legend, the reason the petitioners sought to recover these six sections for Amherst was that

¹ *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. VI, p. 485.

the vote was predominantly Polish and "wet" and that by restoring these six sections to Amherst, those interested in keeping Amherst from voting "dry" were more sure of keeping it "wet." Despite the opposition, these six sections were returned to Amherst effective April 1, 1898, at the same time that the south half of Town 24, Range 9, was returned to Sharon. The six sections in dispute have remained a part of Amherst since 1898.

The earliest record available in the Amherst proceedings is a road statement at the beginning of the clerk's book made out June 24, 1854. A second page of this record is mutilated but on the third page it is possible to determine that on July 29, 1854 a road was ordered by E. Wright, chairman, and John L. Phelps and William D. Spurr, supervisors. From the description, this road was laid through the east sections of Amherst in a southwesterly direction to intersect the "Waupaca and Plover Road" and still farther on "to intersect the Lime Lake Road."

Two years later on April 2, 1856, the following entry appears:

"At an annual town meeting held at the house of Peter Grovers on *tuesday* (Tuesday) the first day of April 1856 J. W. Townsend and A. T. Ryerson Supervisors acted as inspectors and Enoch Webster chosen to make the third Being duly sworn the meeting *proseeded* (proceeded) to *buisniss* (business). At the conclusion of said meeting the votes being *canvessed* (canvassed) the following people *receavd* (received) the greatest number of votes and were declared duly elected:

Wm. V. Fleming, chairman of board of supervisors and Peter Grover and Jerome Nelson as associates; for justices of the Peace, A. P. (?) Ryerson and Enoch Webster. For superintendent of schools Wm. V. Fleming. For town clerk J. W. Townsend. For assessor Charles Buck, for town treasurer Jackson Calkins, for constables Robert Wilson and Isaac Grover.

As a vote was taken and carried that a tax of sixty six dollars should be raised to pay *expences* (expenses) of said Town for the year 1855 also a tax of \$75 be raised for school purposes.

One office mentioned for the first time in 1860 in Amherst township is that of "sealer of weights and mea-

sure" which W. V. Fleming was elected to in the spring. It was his duty to see that the scales were balanced and when the clerk at the local store measured a yard of calico by the length of his arm that said arm was at least 36 inches long.

Peter Grover and his wife Celia, nee Loing, may have been the first to settle in what later came to be the village of Amherst. They had first located at Stevens Point and in November 1851¹ pre-empted land on the Tomorrow River at the north end of what is today Main Street. Legend says they built a frame shanty, not a log cabin. A cellar of a residence, probably built later, can still be viewed under the grove of trees where the highway turns west. Grover selected this spot on the bank of the river probably because the teamsters, on the long haul from Weyauwega to Stevens Point, had already made a practice of fording the river at this point, not farther downstream as they were to do later. If nothing else he may have liked the view across the river bottom and he had water close at hand for himself and his draft animals. This was an important consideration when pumps were considered one of the items a man could do without.

On Sunday, Sept. 13, 1858 some 2,000 people gathered under the grove of trees near Grover's house to attend a meeting², apparently a religious revival. This was a phenomenon of the 19th Century, particularly in the new settlements of the Middle West and along the Ohio River when people came from miles around, pitched their tents and spent several days listening to evangelists and preachers, often indulging in rites of rolling, jumping and dancing. Although the figure of 2,000 people may be an exaggeration for the number attending the one-day affair in Amherst, even half that number would represent a remarkable crowd. As far as it is known, this was the only meeting of its kind in the country. Religious meetings were conducted on the Public Square in Stevens Point, but these were not

¹ Obituary, Mrs. Peter Grover, *Stevens Point Journal*, March 27, 1909.

² *Pinery*, Sept. 17, 1858.

camp meetings nor did they attract more than local interest.

The founders of the township in the early 1850s were mostly of Yankee-English stock who had originally settled in or had business interests in the townships of Stevens Point, Eau Pleine, Hull, and Plover and moved to the eastern part of the county to take advantage of the cheap government land after it was surveyed in 1851. But the Scandinavians arrived before them and by 1860 were the dominant ethnic group in the township. They settled chiefly in the east and north of the township and also dominated the east half of the early village of Amherst where a Lutheran church came to be built on "Norwegian Hill" in 1877.

The town of Amherst, with only scattered hardwood, was not noted for saw mills. However, an early mill is referred in 1873 as the "Olive Branch flouring mill"¹ located in Sec 34 and owned by D. R. Clements, later believed converted to a saw mill and known as the "Red Mill." The race which supplied the power for this mill is still visible. In the 1890s, after the mill ceased operations, the dam became a favorite swimming hole. Morris Carey, keen student of things past in Amherst, recalls sunny afternoons when the youths of the village marched down the sandy road, barefooted, swam in the pool, hunted for frogs, and played hide-and-seek in the abandoned mill.

The earliest available tax roll on Amherst township is dated 1863 and these are the taxpayers: Almond Steanson, Ole Oleson, J. P. Micallson (?), G. Abrahamson, Halver Bardson, Andrew Anderson, Andrew Auleson, Hoyan (?) Johnson, John Blaski, David Boe, Nels Oleson, K. Peterson, Amelia Endlich, C. Joseph, Ole Aslocksken, John Hoffman, August Adler, Ole Fredricksen, Storku (?) Erickson, A. Matison, Evan Hendricksen, N. McEthain, M. Matison, C. Stoltenburg, M. Firststocker, Marrilla Nelson, J. W. Townsend, Levi Bishop, Henry Tuphorn (?), Mat Slutz, Oscar Mitcham, Chas. Couch, E. Welty, C. B. Coburn, R. Harrington, Stephan

¹ *Pinery*, April 10, 1873.

Harrington, Gard Harvey, David Sands, Adam Peterson, A. H. Roe, Harriet Willse (?), Knudt Larson, John Nelson, Henry Lysne, Jacob Isaacson, Even Nelson, Claus Peterson, Torston Thorstonson, Lars Isaacson, Knudt Nelson, Nels Jacobson, A. Thomspen, Eric Oleson, Nels Nelson, Ole Iverson, C. Emonson (Amundson?), Chris Anderson, J. R. Grover, Jack Calkins, A. L. Ball, George Bickel, Rufus Crippen, A. L. Bath (?), Casper Bickel, John Bickel, Nick Hahn, C. P. Spianyu (?), Aelain Eliot, Mary Fiest, M. Goldchmidt, Peter Grover, Marian Phillips, Enoch Webster, R. Willson, James Willson, N. B. Vanskiver, Chas E. Buck, Harmon Ellis, Calvin Darling, Ira Stone, Peter Post, Ed Bobba, Chas. Darling, Annie L. Beebee, Wm. Bobbie, Ed Bobbie, James Nelson, Tron Tronson, Evan Johnson, Gulic Gulicson, Torbin Gunderson, Knudt Salverson, R. Hartman, S. D. Wright, Henry Orcult, G. W. Penny, S. G. Welty, W. V. Fleming, Benj. Fleming, S. Brimhall, A. M. Shannon, R. Thompson, A. L. Ryerson, W. C. Holly, G. Gasman, J. F. Hillstrom, David Wilmot, C. E. Gasman, John Hermis (?), Ole Peterson, Chas. Eien, T. O. Eien, Hans Hillstrom, J. W. Wilmot, Ed Scott, Elijah Scott, Samuel Miller, Wm. G. Rice, G. S. Wilmot, E. Wright, P. D. Bangle, Orrin Maybee, Hiram Clinton, Goodman Martinson, Evan Johnson, M. Adams, Eben (?) Penny, Jacob Child, Buck Williamson, A. H. Bancroft, G. W. Cate, E. Foote, and Fleming & Foote.

Taxpayers listed under "village of Amherst" for 1863 were R. Crippen, John Stickert (?), Wm. Williamson, N. E. Gasman, D. J. Ellis, Robert Wilson, Buck Williamson, A. Gorden, Wm. Loing, A. H. Guernsey, Andrew Anderson, John Stontain (?), Wm. Ball, Julius Czeskleba, A. L. Ball, Horace Martin, Nathan Harvey, L. Meeks, M. D. Warnier, A. H. Bancroft, Bancroft & Grover (mill), C. Abrahamson, J. Aldrich, David Allen, P. D. Bangle, John Bickel, Levi Bishop, S. Brimhall, Jack Calkins, G. W. Cate, C. Couch, Horace Comm (?), Amelia Endlich, Harmon Ellis, T. O. Eien, Chas. Eien, Mary Feist, W. V. Fleming, M. Firstocke, Ben Fleming, E. Foote, C. E. Gasman, Peter Grover, Godfried

Gasman, Nathan Harvey, Gard Harvey, John F. Hillstrom, Nick Hahn, R. Hartman, John Hoffman, Nans Hilstrom, J. P. Mickelson, J. M. Moyers, Orrin Maybee, Marrilla Nelson, Claus Peterson, Ole Peterson, Wm. G. Rice, A. M. Shannon, H. P. Simpson, Chas. Stoltenberg, Rufus Fors, George Turner, E. N. Turner, Robert Willson, David Willmot, Enoch Webster, James Willson, Wm. Willson, G. S. Wilmot, Ed Wright, and S. V. Wilmot.

While a few of these taxpayers were probably non-residents, such as Orrin Maybee and Matt Slutts, from what is known of the others there is reason to believe that the vast majority were residents of the township or village. The large number also suggests that Amherst township in 1863 was probably the most heavily populated, per square mile, of any in the county.

Serving the town of Amherst, with a population of 851, in 1957-58, were Henry Swenson, chairman; Martin Glodowski and Ernest Leppen, supervisors; Peter Mrochinski, clerk; William J. Stoltenberg, treasurer; Herbert Allen, assessor; Lawrence Krogwold, justice of the peace; and Frank T. Glodowski, constable.

Our Country Our Story Portage County Wisconsin - Link Page

PREVIOUS...ALMOND, THE VILLAGE OF.....233

NEXT.....AMHERST, THE VILLAGE OF.....248

GO BACK TO THE ELECTRONIC INDEX PAGE...