

## AMHERST, The Village of

The village of Amherst was not incorporated until some 50 years after the first pioneers arrived. From the original proceedings of the village board it is learned that the petition for incorporation was to be presented in Circuit Court on Nov. 20, 1899 at the request of Carl Haertel, C. J. Iverson, A. H. Guernsey, Geo. W. Smith and A. J. Smith. The resident population was said to be 556 persons and the entire incorporation area was to be 640 acres or one section, more or less.

The first election was held in the village Jan. 25, 1900 when the following were elected: A. J. Smith, president; Carl Haertel, S. J. Foxen, George W. Smith, F. E. Webster, C. H. Vancott, and C. N. Fenton, trustees; and C. J. Iverson, clerk. From the oaths of office in the village records it is revealed that Foxen was named supervisor, John Webster, assessor, and T. B. Fryar and M. S. Murat, justices of the peace. No mention is made of the treasurer.

At a later meeting the village board met with the Amherst town board and straightened out mutual problems. One of these was the matter of joint property which was inventoried as follows: shovels, picks and small tools, \$15; wheel scrapers (old and worn) \$16; other scrapers, \$24; road machine, \$100; plows, \$15; safe in clerk's office, \$25; and stove in town hall, \$5, for a total of \$200.

The people of the village, now that they had incorporated a political organization of their own, could no longer expect help in road upkeep from the town board, but, as taxpayers who had helped to pay for the equipment, were reimbursed for their proportional share, or about \$40.56. This pattern was followed throughout the county in the new villages, all of which, with the ex-

ception of Plover, were incorporated shortly after the turn of century. In reaching an agreement between Amherst village and township, the two entities even agreed to divide the chairs in the town hall, one-fifth going to the village and four-fifths to the township.

In June 1900 the village board heard a petition "to sprinkle streets" and another petition "remonstrating against sprinkling streets." However, those remonstrating were not opposed in principle to sprinkling the streets but wanted to know first how much it was going to cost. These are the delicate matters a village board faces and no slight to the intelligence of the American electorate can ever be tolerated.

The first attempt at a newspaper in Amherst was made by Henry Nelson on March 22, 1884. Called the *Pioneer*, it measured less than six inches by five and in the "locals" column admitted it was "undoubtedly the smallest printed." Two years later on Saturday, Dec. 25, the sixth number appeared although enlarged to a four-page paper. Among the advertisers were R. R. Fryar who sold "Fine Groceries, glassware, perfumes, Holiday Goods, Pickles in bottles and bulk, Confectionary, Nuts, Crackers and cakes, Fruits, and Oysters"; N. Rollefson, who had a "Well Selected Stock of Gents' Ladies' and Childrens' boots and shoes;" John Severtson was a general blacksmith; C. W. Westley, a dealer in furniture; G. F. Rinehart, a photographer with "reduced prices for family groups;" Mrs. D. Gawthrop, owner of the Commercial House where "suppers [were] gotten up on short notice for dances and parties;" A. P. Anderson, a boot and shoe store on Mill Street; Jerome Nelson, operator of Excelsior & Rising Star Flouring Mills (the latter in Nelsonville); John Mallison, a sale and livery stable with "good horses, comfortable rigs and careful drivers and where horses could be boarded by the day or week;" Mrs. A. Ervin, a millinery with a "full line kept constantly on hand;" O. H. Bakke, a tailoring establishment; M. Kent, a carriage and wagon shop; Hartman & Czeskleba, a hard-

<sup>1</sup> In collection of village clerk.

ware store; Benson & Johnson, a meat market; J. A. Salscheider, the Central Hotel with "bus to all trains and a bar in connection;" Issac Olson, a "liveryman with good rigs;" W. C. Madson, a blacksmith; and Ole Iverson, a contractor and builder selling sash, doors, blinds, mouldings, lumber and iron.

Under a "professional" column appear the names of A. J. Smith, attorney-at-law; A. H. Guernsey, physician & surgeon; G. E. Dusenburg, physician & surgeon; and A. H. Guernsey, dealer in drugs & medicines, toilet articles and wall paper. Mrs. Z. A. Een was the owner of a Summit House in Amherst Junction where "excellent accommodations for the traveling public" were provided; Coleman, Jaskson & Co. operated the Amherst Flouring Mill; W. C. Holly was a dealer in "household furniture, mattresses, picture frames and undertaking a specialty;" A. Thum was a specialist in teas and assured customers that he advertised "only what I mean [and] no humbug;" Moberg's harness shop advertised "Merry Christmas Bells! chime bells, string bells, shaft bells, team bells and Norway bells;" Isaac Simcock dealt in hardware, stoves and did repairing; John Iverson dealt in general merchandise and agricultural implements; and P. L. Thorson, an agent for the Thingvalla steamship line between the U.S. and Scandinavian countries, was ready to sell tickets to and from the "Old Country at lowest rates."

The *Pioneer* was shortly discontinued. On Feb. 22, 1893 the first issue of the *Amherst Advocate* appeared under the joint editorship of Mrs. Harriet ("Hattie") Bumpus, nee Moberg, and Spencer Haven, a local school teacher. The weekly was taken over in July 1903 by J. L. Moberg, a brother of Mrs. Bumpus, who has an unbroken record of 55 years of news reporting and service to the community, the longest of any in the county.

At the annual meeting of the Amherst town board held in 1859 "at the house of Peter Grover" the town board found the place inconvenient and the meeting was adjourned "to the store near Bencrafts and Grover's

Mill where the chairman stated the order of business and the polls were duly opened. . .” This store is not identified, while reference to “Bencraft’s and Grover’s Mill” is the first mention of the grist mill which Asa H. Bencraft (later spelled Bancroft) and Peter Grover built on the left bank of the Tomorrow River where the shell of the original building is still standing a hundred years later, and, with new additions, machinery and dam, still operating at full capacity under the firm name of Johnson Feed Mill & Elevator. The mill was actually under construction in the fall of 1858 and is referred to in a news report as a “four story building.”

As often happened in pioneer days, men who were first to claim land in a district where a village appeared in the making were anxious to plat streets on their own land for the purpose of selling lots. The Flemings controlled considerable land in Secs 27 & 20 and, noting that most of the new arrivals were building further upstream, made an effort to attract settlers to the village in “lower town,” also called “Lower Amherst.” John Endlick (*ca.* 1860) built a store and house near the B. Fleming place as well as a warehouse to deal in wheat. Nils Gasman had a store on the section line between Secs 27 & 28, at least as early as 1859 when a bearing was taken on “Gasman’s store” for a road survey.

The first dam of which there is evidence was built on the Tomorrow River in Sec 28 below modern Amherst village. The land along the river was purchased by Alexander M. Shannon on July 3, 1858 from Seth Thompson and wife Dina and the transaction stipulated that the river could overflow both banks “by building a dam to raise eight head. . .” meaning, no doubt, a head of eight feet. It was on the site of this dam that Thompson and Shannon appear to have built or intended to build a grist mill. This led to trouble. The Bancroft & Grover dam was probably under construction earlier the same year, and the partners allegedly brought civil action on the grounds that the lower dam

<sup>1</sup> *Pinery*, Sept. 17, 1858.

was backing water and reducing power facilities. Whatever the outcome, it appears that the lower dam was forced to discontinue. Later a second mill and dam was built in "lower town" farther downstream at a place later known as the "Red Mill."

Probably the earliest reference to the "village of Amherst" appears in the *Pinery* which on Jan. 24, 1860 heard this report from a stringer correspondent:

Dear Pinery:

Having promised to write respecting the new and enterprising village of Amherst, I now proceed to redeem my pledge.

A new store has been opened near Bancroft's & Grover's mill under the supervision of Rev. Crawford. A new school house has been built where the young may be taught and where also the worship of God is performed by different denominations. We have in town two flouring mills, three blacksmith shops, one shoe shop, one harness making shop, two stores and expect soon to have a new hotel. But we regret the fact that one appendage to western villages called a "saloon" is in prospect. Yet it remains to be seen whether the town supervisors will license such a nuisance.

In the late 1860s the business men of the village took steps to launch a fair. An act to legalize the returns of the "Portage County Agricultural Society" was approved by the legislature on March 21, 1871.<sup>1</sup> Mention of the "fair grounds," located west of the village, appears in a road statement of 1872, but the first fair, most likely a picnic, was held in the summer of 1869, two years before incorporation. Two fair receipts which survive this period show that Thomas Pipe served as president in 1878 and 1879. Later known as the Portage County Fair, it continued for the next several decades to attract wide interest. Finally, in 1918, owing to the exigencies of World War I, it was decided to postpone the fair a year and as a result state aids in 1919 were withdrawn, which killed it. In 1949 the Amherst Lions Club revived the idea and helped organize the new Portage County Fair and, up to 1958, had succeeded in maintaining it.

<sup>1</sup> *Private & Local Laws*, (1871), Chap. 383, p. 872.

The Wisconsin Central came into the village in the summer of 1871, and the Green Bay line passed about a mile to the north of the village in 1872. A railway spur, known as "Virgin Spur," was located a few miles northeast of the village on the Green Bay line to accommodate the potato growers.

As a result of the two railways, Amherst in the 1880s and 1890s and even after the turn of the century, became an important center in the potato buying and shipping business. Old settlers in both Alban and New Hope townships have mentioned hauling potatoes by wagon or sleigh to Amherst before the railway came to Rosholt. It usually meant leaving the home farm early in the morning and returning late at night.

The International Bank of Amherst was established in 1893 with a capitalization of \$25,000 and the first board of directors, elected Feb. 23, were Benjamin Burr, president; A. M. Nelson, vice-president; Emmons Burr, F. B. Lamoreux, G. W. Fleming, and J. O. Foxen. The latter also served as cashier. At the close of business on Dec. 31, 1957, the International Bank had total deposits of \$915,189.56, with a capital structure of \$132,367.44. Directors of the bank were Harry B. Pomeroy, president; Otto L. Dusel, vice president; Louis A. Pomeroy, secretary & cashier; and Alden Hanes, Roman Jungers, Felix Sroda, and Leslie Borgen.

The International Bank of Amherst was entered by burglars on the night of March 10, 1899 and robbed of a little more than \$5,000. One thousand dollars in silver was not taken and there were ten to 15 dollars in change scattered about the floor which the burglars left behind. The safe had been blown up with nitroglycerin. The directors of the bank, led by Harry Pomeroy, cashier, promptly offered a \$500 reward for the arrest and conviction of the burglars. A few days later two of the men were apprehended in Wausau with \$1,801.25 in bills pinned to their undershirts, and coins in nearly every pocket; and about three weeks later two others, nabbed in Schofield, had around \$400 on their persons. Later in the summer two bonds worth \$2000 or more were found in a woods near Wausau.

Electric lighting came to Amherst village around 1900 when Bertram Dwinnell and Frederick C. Schidel established the Amherst Electric Service Company and installed a dynamo which operated off the water power of the Red Mill in lower Amherst.

A form of telephone service may have been established in Amherst and Nelsonville in 1892 when Jerome Nelson ran a line between the flour & feed mills he operated in both villages. Community-wide telephone service was begun in 1903 with the incorporation on July 3 of the Amherst Telephone Company. There were 62 stockholders, mostly merchants and farmers. The original officers were Charles J. Iverson, president; Casper A. Smith, vice-president; J. O. Foxen, treasurer; H. N. Nelson, secretary; and H. H. Hoffman, T. Tronson, Thomas Anderson, T. Riley, and George B. Allen, directors. The present officers of the company include Charles O. Iverson, president, a son of the first president; Inez M. Iverson, vice-president, widow of founding president; Ruth Bohman, secretary-treasurer, daughter of the founding president; in addition to directors Charles O. Iverson Jr., and A. H. Bowden of Almond.

Serving the village of Amherst, with a population of 604, in 1957-58, were Chester V. Lepak, president; Florian Fleming, Gerald Guyant, Henry Zimmerman, Elmer Benson, Welton Johnson, and Gerald Yokers, trustees; Alfred S. Smith, clerk; Roman M. Jungers, treasurer; Walter Konkol, assessor; Otis Toftum, justice of the peace; Pat W. Riley, constable; and Thomas A. Guyant, supervisor.

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