

DEWEY, The Township of

The town of Dewey is the youngest in Portage County, but in point of contact with the past is heavy with age, its river banks littered with Indian arrowheads and forgotten graves, rusty oxen shoes, abandoned mill sites and old tote roads running to the logging camps farther back. It was here that the Wisconsin River could be forded on foot or by Indian pony across the ripples caused by the under-water ledge which extends across the river. It was here that Louis DuBay, probably the first white man in Portage County, may have spent the winter of 1790 trading with the Indians.

The township was created by the County Board in November 1898 by detaching Town 25, Range 8, from the town of Hull, and all that portion of Town 25, Range 7, of the town of Eau Pleine lying east of the Wisconsin River. The first town meeting was to be held at the school house of District No. 1 near the section lines between 25 and 26, Town 25, Range 7, on April 4, 1899.

Three years after the ordinance constituting the town of Dewey became effective, the town board was finding difficulty in maintaining itself because "the land in said town is of small value and the inhabitants of said town are mostly new settlers who are in debt and own little personal property. . .¹ A petition to the County Board in 1902 requested that Dewey be enlarged to include part of Sharon east of the Plover River or else to abolish Dewey and split it up between Hull and Sharon. While the minutes state that the report was moved and seconded, no action apparently was taken to implement this motion and Dewey carried on

¹ *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. VII, pp. 373-374.

and has continued to this day without change from its original establishment in 1899.

The government survey of Town 25, Range 7, was completed by Hathaway in the Indian Survey, Oct. 18, 1839 to Jan. 20, 1840. He surveyed the left bank of the Wisconsin River first, i.e. part of modern Dewey, but left no general description except to note that despite a great variety of trees, there were few pines in this part of the township.

On a random line south between sections 1 & 2 Hathaway encountered "Girchlahu's Creek," which, from the description, is the Little Eau Claire where he noted there were good mill sites all along the river. In fact, it was on this very random line that Peter Le Meux later built a saw mill, probably after studying these field notes. Thus sometime between 1840 and the early 1850s, "Girchlahu's Creek" became known as the Little Eau Claire probably in contrast to the Big Eau Claire farther north in Marathon County. The name "Girchlahu" fails to appear in any other record associated with this area.

The subdivision of Town 25, Range 8, which takes in most of modern Dewey, was begun March 9, and completed March 20, 1853. It was surveyed by Samuel Hicks, assisted by Murry Smith, compassman, Horatio Hinkley and Peter P. Smith, chainmen, and Nelson Ulderson, axeman. The field notes mention that Ulderson quit work on March 17 and his place was taken by Daniel P. Denine (probably Dineen). Axeman Ulderson, whose name appears to be of Norse origin, may have taken employment with John Week, another Norwegian, who was operating a mill on the Big Eau Pleine.

In his summing up of the township, Hicks writes:

"This Township contains several marshes & some large Tamc (tamarack) swamps. They are all unfit for cultivation. Altho some of the marshes are good for hay. The surface is level, a small part is upland where the soil is 2nd & 3rd rate. The upland in the N(orth) part is timbered with Aspen, W(hite) Birch, W(hite) Pine & Hemlock. In the S(outh) part J(ack) & N(orway) Pines and J(ack) Oak are scattered here & there."

"There are no improvements in this township."

This last statement means that up to March 20, 1853 no one had settled in this township, but it should be borne in mind that the sections surveyed do not lie along the Wisconsin River and at only one point touch on the Plover.

It is not certain who suggested the name Dewey for this township, but there can be little doubt who it was named after. Less than a year earlier, Admiral George Dewey destroyed what there was of a Spanish fleet at Manila Bay and became a national hero overnight. It was the time of America's 'Manifest Destiny' and patriotism ran high — too high in fact for the nature of the victory won, but it suited the tempo of the times as well as the budding newspaper chains like the Hearst enterprises which were trying to build up circulation and create an illusion of glory.

Elected to the first town board of Dewey were Julius Fierek, chairman; John Yach, Jr. and Felix Bruske, supervisors; Stephen Tetzloff, clerk; John Wasnicki, treasurer; and Thomas Dumares, assessor.

The first election attracted a heavy vote and most were Polish voters. Only a year before, the voters were mixed and the town board was still dominated by Yankee and French names. The reason for the change lay in the fact that by adding a part of Hull and taking in only part of the old town of Eau Pleine, the new town of Dewey had inherited the heavy Polish element of part of Hull as well as the Polish people who had settled in old Eau Pleine, east of the river.

The voters who went to the polls in the first election of Dewey in 1899 were: Albert Stanczik, Stanislaus Griszinski, Leo Kutchta, Peter Stanczik, John Rochawiak, Albett Shimanski, Andrew Kuntny, August Literiski, Anton Blashkowski, Thomas Shulfer, Martin Schultz, John Literiski, Stan Polash, Jacob Danchik, Josef Przybylski, August Stoltz, Pavel Danchik, Martin Osniski, Jas Stoltz, Andrew Zaromski, Stephen Burzinski, John Stanchik, Albert Lisewski, Steve Viciniski, Michkel Shivrshakowski, Anton Yach, Valentine Keene, Mike Seeaski, Nick Barzinski, John Simanski, George

Wladarski, Matias Baker, Jos Coback, Wladislaw Vicinski, Andrew Helminak, Andrew Kurzinski, Mike Drewa, Steve Nitka, Ed Burk, Benney Burk, B. F. Meone (?), Frank Richmond, John Ligman, Valentine Helminak, Mike Ostrowski, John Hintz, Steve Petta, S. D. Knows (?), Pavel Biesik, Jos. Skupniewicz, Frank Pavelski, Simon Nitkia, John Ostrowski, John Pawelski, Martin Helminiak, Ed Ostrowski, Mike Stanchik, Ignathis Gardian, Thomas Wlodarski, John Eggen, Math Zaromski, Thomas Negowski, Frank Yach, Thomas Hoffman, Thomas McHugh, Frank Hintz, Anton Dudgit, John Yach, Jr., George Roshat, Jos. Zaromski, Lawrence Keene, Thomas Dumares, Andrew Levandowski, George Trual, Mike Levandowski, Albert Silka, John McHugh, Math McHugh, Jacob Yach, Peter Hintz, Nick Keene, Frank Waldock, Anton Petrowski, Jos. Stanchik, Jos. Yach, Stanislavs Zelinski, August Olbrantz, George Waldock, Ed Shimanski, Jos. Kurczewski, Andrew Dulski, August Yetka, Frank Yaszewski, Valentine Przekurat, John Lakiski, Frank Krayechi, Frank Hoffman, John Kieliszewski, Sebastian Frunchowiak, Valentine Kielszewski, Victor Bella, August Yunski, George Adamiski, D. A. Crocker, Henry Redantz, Ernest Crocker, Teodor Kieliszewski, Felix Baker, John Wladarski, Robert Schuelenburg, Frank Shimanski, Felix Bruski, Ed Sigman, Frank Kieliszewski, Jacob Lake, James McHugh, Julius Fierek, George Wladarski, Jos. Printz, Frank Tetzloff, Anton Printz, Robert Brace, Martin Tetzloff, S. G. H. Crocker, Stephen Tetzloff, John Wosnicki, Jos. Baker, Ed Dunning and Alfanso Phillipp.

Only one voter who cast his ballot in 1870 from this area was at the polls in 1899; namely, S. G. H. ("Vet") Crocker. John Kieliszewski, who voted in 1872 and became the first Polish supervisor in old Eau Pleine township, voted in 1899 in the new town of Dewey, and Martin Tetzloff (spelled Totsloff in early records) who voted in 1874 also voted in 1899.

The town of Dewey displayed a marked apathy toward an election held Sept. 2, 1919 on the "referen-

dum." No identification is made of this referendum, but it was probably concerned with the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution on woman suffrage which was given to the states to vote on after June 1919 and became law Aug. 26, 1920. Only 25 voters turned out as compared to 124 in the general election.

The records suggest, however, that fewer voters were going to the polls in this and other townships as the years advanced. Farms were being evacuated as the progress in modern farming advanced and interest in township politics was not as keen as it was in the early days. Another reason for this lay in the fact that more and more affairs of the townships were being taken over by the county as well as state and federal governments. The nation was maturing.

In August 1957 a petition to the town board was circulated by 15 taxpayers in Dewey to declare an assessment emergency on the grounds that property in the town was not equitably assessed, chiefly in the matter of residential and mercantile property as compared to farm and wild lands. The assessed valuation of the township in 1956 was \$390,805 with an equalized value of \$903,980.

Serving the town of Dewey, with a population of 525, in 1957-58, were Edward Losinski, chairman; Albert Lewandowski and Anton Adamski, supervisors; Felix Danczyk, clerk; Gregory Stroik, treasurer; Jacob Cy-chosz, assessor; Bernice Laskowski, justice of the peace; Ted Adamski, constable; and Stanley Rucinski, health officer.

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