

EAU PLEINE, The Township of

No township in the county has had its face lifted as many times, yet none brings sharper memories of the Wisconsin Pinery with its legends and stories of *voyageurs*, Indian traders and lumbermen than the town of Eau Pleine. Even the name has a hint of romance in it for it has been written "Aux Pleines" in some texts, although all town records refer to it as Eau Pleine (correctly *plein*,) meaning "full water."¹ It takes its name after the Little Eau Pleine which the Indians, presumably Chippewas, allegedly referred to as "*Ma-nomin-a-kung-a-kuay-se-be*, meaning 'Rice Stalks River,'"²

The township is intimately connected with the epoch of river rafting and log running, for in the early period it was not a corner township as it is now, but one that straddled the Wisconsin River, 54 sections all told, with slightly fewer on the right bank than on the left. Both the Little Eau Pleine and the Little Eau Claire flow into the Wisconsin just below the county line where the Wisconsin once began a big lazy "S" curve. It was a natural place to create a dam too and many years after the last Indian had camped in the bend of the river it was made into a lake and power site named after John B. DuBay who once operated a trading post nearby.

The subdivision of modern Eau Pleine in Range 6 was begun Sept. 24 and completed Oct. 18, 1852.

Most of the eastern sections of modern Eau Pleine, i.e., in Range 7, were mapped in the Indian Survey which Hathaway completed in 1840. In his survey of the exterior lines, Hathaway refers to the "lower Aux

¹ *Collections*, Vol. I, p. 120.

² *Loc. cit.*

Pleines" and at one point to the "east bank of Bayou connected with little Aux Pleines. . ." Thus some time between 1840 and 1852, the name had changed from the Little Aux Pleines to the Little Eau Pleine.

As most of Town 25 in Range 7 was included in the Indian Survey, what was left to survey lay in Sec 31 and this was begun Sept. 25 and completed the same day in 1852. Here the surveyors encountered "a cabin & shingled shanty on the N.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of the N.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec 31."

The 1863 tax roll for Eau Pleine gives the following names: O. C. Wheelock, R. B. Whitehouse, Peter Le Meux, Peter Le Meux's Mill, Edward Pollard, A. H. Hutchinson, M. Wylie, Alexander Young Mill, Louis Blow, James McEnanny, Wm. Wheaton, D. S. Bullock, McIndoe, Ellis & Co., A. G. Ellis, Mrs. Ann Mead, R. B. Whitehouse Mill, Alfred Savy, Patrick McGuire, Bozil Dubay, R. Dawney, Henry Sergeant, Bozil Mauric, F. M. Wylie, M. Wylie Tavern, Joseph Paupon, D. C. Hall, Jas Scott, Thomas Lyons, Danl Waterman, Martha Helms, Edward McHugh, W. Wood, W. Paul, F. H. Taber, Wm. Taber, Robert Elcock, J. G. Clements, Patrick Sullivan, John Driscoll, Elisha Fowler, W. W. Hutchinson, H. O. Leary, John Altenburgh, Jas McEnanny & Paupon, C. Creed, Edward Nolan, John B. Cook, Michael Shannon, Dennis Dayley, Wm. Welch, Dennis Welch, Timothy Sullivan, John Cordon, and Wing.

A closer look of the actual residents of the township appears in the poll list of 1870 when the following, in the order of their voting, attended the spring election: John B. DuBay, Perry Philips, Oley Hanson, Frank Wylie, Louis Duranso, Maxmilion Batty, Frank Cotchey, Eluzer Hibbard, Douglas Dinwoodie, A. K. Ryant, Medrick Beaudreau, Smith Lewis, S. (?) P. Green, W. D. Tucker, D. C. Hall, Edward McHughs, Wm. Hall, Sylvivster Crocker, James Hall, Cyris Hutchinson, Sam Welland, Boziel DuBay, Deris Giles, Augustis Tusch, George Powel, Robert Wheaton, James Beesley, Charles Colston, Henry Weed, E. A. Redford, Robert Sheels, M. Wylie, Joseph Welland, and Ed Shurman.

Many of the town board meetings and elections through the 1860s and '70s were held "at the house of M. Wylie," who operated the tavern-house on the stage road between Stevens Point and Wausau.

Sylvester Crocker, mentioned in the poll list, served in the Union Army and after mustering out settled on a piece of land about a mile or so south of Wylie's on the left bank of the Wisconsin River in Sec 11. This came to be called "Crocker's Landing" and where a sign welcomed travelers with the legend "Crocker's Landing — Make It Yours." The 1876 plat shows that two buildings were located on the east side of the Stevens Point-Wausau Road, one of which was a blacksmith shop; an unidentified building also stood to the west of the road, that is, between the road and the river bank. When H-51 was rerouted in 1956, the road at this point was moved east about 100 feet. A wayside with tables is located about 100 yards to the south of this pioneer site which, owing to changes made in the road, has completely vanished. Crocker's was the only so-called "landing" in Portage County, meaning a place to land passengers from a river boat. A post office was established here on April 17, 1882 called Crocker's Landing with "Vet" Crocker serving as postmaster. It was finally discontinued in 1907. Crocker, blacksmith and miller by profession, doubled as a local veterinarian and from this became known as "Vet." He was also a strong temperance man and refused to have anyone use indecent language in his establishment and once clobbered a customer with an iron bar for singing a lewd song.

Before the post office at Crocker's was established, people in the northern part of the township got their mail at the DuBay Trading Post at a post office called Eau Pleine established April 1, 1851 with John DuBay serving as postmaster. It was discontinued in 1875.

About a mile and a half south of Crocker's in Sec 23 stood a saw mill on or near the bank of the Wisconsin River operated in the 1870s by William Hall. A tavern-house may also have stood here called Eau Pleine House which was operated by one of the Hall

family. Don Carlos Hall, who was born here, the son of William Hall, became a noted showman around the turn of the century and traveled in a private railroad car with his stock company. Both he and his wife are buried in Union Cemetery and the headstone bears a cameo-sized photograph of the couple, the only one of its kind in the county — showmen to the last.

Not listed in the first tax roll is Andrew Mullarky who, with his brother Henry, may have operated a trading post in the early 1840s located in Sec 5 (T. 25, R. 7) about half a mile west of the ford on the Wisconsin River on the left (north) bank of the Little Eau Pleine. The indenture on this tract of land is not clear, but it appears that both Andrew Dunn and Andrew Mullarky had made entries on portions of this quarter section, and, after a complicated series of transfers, it became the property of Henry Clinton and Mathias Mitchell on Nov. 11, 1846 which the indenture refers to as a "saw mill site. . ." The saw mill, however, according to the Sherman account, was actually built by Mullarky and Mitchell.²

The mill appears to have been operated only a few months by the firm of Mitchell & Clinton as the indentures on this property carry transfers in 1847 to 1849 to Mitchell & Daniel Brown, and to Mitchell & James Bloomer, and in 1849 apparently passed to Abraham & Richard Whitehouse. It was located immediately east of the iron bridge in Sec 5 where a dam was built across the Little Eau Pleine to create water power and a pond to the west on the river.

Some idea of the crew employed at this mill is provided in the 1847 census of DuBay precinct which lists "Mitchell & Brown" as heads of a household of 35 of which five were females. This was a large crew at the time and probably included loggers.

Some time before 1872 this mill passed to the brothers M. W. & A. H. Hutchinson. In the late 1870s

¹ *Deeds*, Vol. A, p. 195.

² *Note Book*, no. 13.

A. H. Hutchinson was joined in partnership by A. D. Daniels, and in the 1880s the mill was taken over by George Altenburg, later joined by Augustus ("Gus") Stoddard. The mill was destroyed by fire in 1889 and rebuilt and probably discontinued in 1910-11. Some time after the Wisconsin Valley Railroad came through from the south, a spur was built from Dancy which came directly up to the lumber yard north of the mill. A sizeable community developed here which included a planing mill, two stores, a dance hall, a boarding house, horse barns and more than 20 residences for permanent personnel. Most of the houses were located east along the left bank of the river on the road known as the "Wicks (Week) Road." This same road continued east to the ferry operated by John DuBay in the 1870s on the Wisconsin River. Northwest of the Altenburg mill it ran on to the Big Eau Pleine to the John Week Lumber Company in Marathon County.

Several relics of the mill site and boarding house are still visible near the river bank. The Juleson post office established here on Feb. 25, 1875, Samuel H. Hutchinson serving as postmaster, was located in one of the stores which stood near the mill. It was later moved to Dancy.

E. A. Redford, mentioned in the poll list of 1870, was the partner of Robert G. Wallace in a saw mill located on the left bank of the Little Eau Claire immediately west of the bridge where H-51 today crosses the DuBay flowage near the Antlers Restaurant. This mill was founded by Alexander Young, probably in the late 1850s, and in the beginning was operated by water power. It was later converted to a steam mill, probably the first of its kind in the northern part of the county. The date of this conversion is uncertain, but an old account book, apparently kept by Young, records the total amount of logs "got in and delivered at the Steam Mill on the Little Eauclair (Eau Claire) in winter of 1862-63 by Mr. Lewis Blow for Mr. Alexander Young."¹

¹ In collection of Alex Wallace, Stevens Point, Wis.

Another entry records the date in 1866 when Robert G. Wallace went to work for Young. An immigrant from County Armagh, Ireland, Wallace was given a difficult job in the mill by Young and because he accomplished a task in which others had failed, he became a favorite of Young and a warm friendship developed between the older man and the newcomer from Ireland. Later, when Wallace married Ann Elizabeth, daughter of George Whitney across the county line, he honored his old friend by naming his first-born Alexander, known in years to come to his many friends and readers of "Stevens Point Through the Years" as Alex Wallace.

The exact date when Robert Wallace took over the mill from Young, and when the partnership between Wallace and Redford materialized, is uncertain, but an account kept of merchandise purchased by the firm of Wallace & Redford at the store of Hoeffler & Andrae of Stevens Point opens on Sept. 21, 1870. The partnership of E. (for Erwin) A. Redford and Wallace continued down to the turn of the century when the mill became obsolete and the machinery was disposed of. This represents, probably, the longest partnership of any saw mill firm in the county and in strong contrast to the frequent dissolutions of partnerships elsewhere.

Another early mill owner on the Little Eau Claire was Peter La Meux who was located about two miles east of Wallace & Redford, also on the left bank. In 1863 this mill had an evaluation of \$1,200, and in 1864 the mill, house and barn burned.¹ Although reference is made to it in the town proceedings of 1876, which means it was rebuilt, the 1895 plat does not identify a mill any longer on this site.

The 1876 plat identifies "Brickley & Reed" saw mill at the south end of the bridge where the Milwaukee Road crosses the Little Eau Pleine in Sec 1, T. 25, R. 6. A road survey of 1878 took a bearing on this mill and referred to it as the "Brickley & Otto Mills," which appears to have been taken over that same year

¹ *Pinery*, June 2, 1864.

by Segelke, Petty & Co. who in 1888 were asking the board of review to reduce their assessment from \$4,000 to \$3,000. Sec 1, where this mill stood, in addition to Sec 12 in Range 6, were never detached from the town of Eau Pleine in the several changes made by the County Board and it is reasonable to assume that the main reason for this was the desire of the town board to keep this assessment property within the township. The mill was still in operation under Segelke & Petty in 1896 when the assessment was lowered from \$3,500 to \$3,000, which suggests that the end of an era in saw milling on the Little Eau Pleine was approaching.

John Marion, several times town chairman in the 1870s and '80s, operated a store during this period which was located half way between Wylie's and DuBay's trading post on the opposite (right bank) side of the Wisconsin River. He presented several bills to the town board for groceries furnished town paupers.

In 1875 the County Board detached all of Town 25 in Range 6 from the town of Eau Pleine and annexed it to the town of Stevens Point. The town of Eau Pleine was manifestly displeased and Frank Wylie was appointed "to go to *Warsaw* (Wausau) to get legal opinion on the action of the County Board *deviding* (dividing) the town and the board agreed to pay the *expences* (expenses)." But this mission to "Warsaw" failed.

A bridge across the Little Eau Claire where H-51 crosses the DuBay flowage today was patently built long before 1870, but it appears to have been rebuilt shortly after 1870. The town clerk writes that in 1873, without identifying which bridge, that the board "*excepted* (accepted) the bridge and paid George Whitney two hundred and *ninty* (ninety) five Doll(ars) for Said bridge and pier. . ." Wallace & Redford furnished 1728 feet of plank at a cost of \$13.82 which suggests that this was a bridge across the Little Eau Claire near their mill.

An idea of wages of the period is given in an order allowed by the town board March 12, 1877:

Wallace & Redford, to team and <i>waggon</i>	
(wagon) $3\frac{1}{2}$ days	\$12.25
Four men $3\frac{1}{2}$ days	21.00
Frank Wylie nine days on the road	13.50
four days with team	8.00

Apparently some of the bridges were in need of repair long before this. In 1879 the town board allowed D. D. Wilmott \$10 "for damage to himself and team for falling through a bridge."

The first attempt in 1857 to organize a township to be called Eau Pleine in Town 25, Range 6, i.e., in the northwest corner of the county, was tabled by the County Board. The question came up again in 1858 when the committee on town organization recommended that Eau Pleine be set off from the town of Stevens Point to be composed of Towns 25 in Ranges 6 & 7, and the west one half of Town 25 in Range 8. In other words, it ran along the county line on the north boundary east and west from Wood County to the town of Hull, with the Wisconsin River dividing it somewhat in the middle. The first town meeting was to be held at the house of M. (for Melanchthon) Wylie on the first Tuesday in March 1859.

Effective April 1, 1876, Town 25, Range 6, of Eau Pleine in the northwest corner of the county was annexed to the town of Stevens Point. Before the year ended, Eau Pleine won back the north one half of Town 25, and three years later sections 31, 32, 33, 34 and that part of Sec 35 west of the Wisconsin River in Town 25, Range 7, were annexed to the town of Stevens Point. Eau Pleine attempted to retrieve this lost territory in 1886 when a petition was signed by Carl Thomander and 29 others. but the board denied the petition on the grounds that only one of the signers was a resident of the sections described and the law requires "at least one-third of the signers to be residents or freeholders on said lands."

In 1887-88, a determined effort was made among Eau Pleine, Carson and Stevens Point townships either

¹ *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. V, p. 123.

to keep territory already in hand, or to annex territory from the other two. The debate apparently became so spirited it was taken out of committee and discussed by the County Board as a committee of the whole. Finally on Nov. 27, 1888 the board agreed that sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 in Town 25, Range 6, that is, the northwest corner of the county, be detached from Eau Pleine and made part of Carson. This left sections 1 & 12 in Range 6, still part of Eau Pleine. In November 1898 Eau Pleine gave up all that portion of Town 25, Range 7, lying east of the Wisconsin River to the newly-constituted town of Dewey, while Town 25, Range 6, excepting sections 1 & 12 were detached from the town of Carson and attached to the town of Eau Pleine. In addition, sections 31, 32, 33, 34 and that part of Sec 35 lying west of the Wisconsin River in Town 25, Range 7, were detached from the town of Stevens Point and attached to the town of Eau Pleine. These actions all became effective April 1, 1899 and there have been no changes in the township since that time.

In 1893 the towns of Eau Pleine and Carson became alive with rumors of hidden minerals. According to legendary accounts, Mrs. John Kneic, living on a farm in Sec 36, had found a mineral in her cellar which she used to blacken or polish her stove. Word of this got around. It was analysed as graphite which has many uses, but is especially sought after for foundry facing, pipe joint paste and structural iron paints. Frank E. Taggart, who apparently had the assay made, took the lead in 1896 in organizing the Portage County Graphite and Mineral Paint Manufacturing Company. This first venture failed, but in 1898-99, Taggart, one of the principal stockholders, organized a new company known as Wisconsin Graphite. By 1900 the company was turning out several tons of the finished paint and paste product per day. But control of the stock had passed to a Pittsburg syndicate which operated the old plant for a year and then installed a new plant on the site of the McDill mill dam where the graphite was processed. On Jan. 31, 1900 the company suffered a

severe loss in a fire that destroyed the Masonic Hall Block in Stevens Point. Another company, known as Pioneer Graphite Company, was then incorporated Dec. 20, 1902 by John R. McDonald, F. E. Taggart, R. K. McDonald and Herman Vetter, all of Stevens Point. By the end of 1903, a crushing mill had been established in Sec 34 of Eau Pleine, about a mile northwest of Junction City, where the mineral was pulverized and processed for paste and paint. Stock was sold in Pioneer Graphite throughout the state, and as far west as the West Coast. A photograph of operations at the Pioneer Mine located in Sec 34 reveals a derrick operated on a windlass, hoisting a bucket from the main mine shaft. The miners used the same bucket to reach the entrance of the latter shafts below. William Holbrook of the town of Eau Pleine recalls a visit (*ca.* 1908) he made into the Pioneer Mine. The main shaft was around 70 feet deep, while latterals, high enough for men to work with picks and shovels, had been extended east and west some 35 to 40 feet.

In 1908 a cyclone swept through the area which badly damaged the crushing mill. The mill was rebuilt but the following year it burned. These two catastrophes coming on the heels of one another, apparently were too much for the stockholders to bear and operations were discontinued. On Feb. 19, 1921 the Pioneer Graphite Company was dissolved.¹

Serving the town of Eau Pleine, with a population of 891, in 1957-58, were Frank Beck, chairman; Carl Grestad and Wm. F. Schultz, supervisors; Otto Paetsch, clerk; Catherine Marchel, treasurer; Clarence Bernhagen, assessor; Edwin Kawlewski, constable; and Otto Paetsch, health officer.

¹ Documents in collection of Webster Taggart, Stevens Point, Wis.

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