

## GRANT, The Township of

From the first day of April, 1864, the County Board ordered all that portion of territory, then part of the town of Linwood on the left bank of the Wisconsin River, to be known as the town of Grant, and the first town meeting was to be held in the school house "near the residence of Ruel Robins."<sup>1</sup> C. H. Halladay, Ruel Robins, and Martin Smith were appointed inspectors of election. Simultaneously, the County Board ordered "that for the more perfect organization of the town of Grant . . . all that territory known as township No. 21 north of Range No. 7 east, except Sections No. 25, 35, and 36, be and the same is hereby annexed to the town of Grant for all purposes whatever. . ."<sup>2</sup> Thus when Grant was constituted it covered everything south of the Wisconsin River in Range 7 to the Waushara County line less three sections in the southeast corner of Town 21 which were a part of Pine Grove. Apparently this met with opposition from Pine Grove, because two months later the board decided to let the latter keep all the three lower tiers of sections of Town 21 in Range 7. But in 1869 these sections were again taken from Pine Grove and attached to Grant. A year later Grant petitioned for a new division of the township and while the nature of this proposal is not explained, the petition was denied.

Under the 1869 order, Grant took in all of two townships, 21 & 22, Range 7, in addition to all or parts of 12 more sections in Range 7 below the Wisconsin River, which made it the largest in the county. In 1870 the final demarcation of Grant was made when the north half of Sec 1 of Town 22, Range 7, and all that

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. II, pp. 420-421.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

part of sections 23, 24, lying south of the Wisconsin River, and all of sections 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36 in Town 23, Range 7, were detached from Grant and attached to Plover. This district covers the stretch along H-54 between Plover and Wood County. Grant has since been an incorporation of two townships, less half a section. As it was organized at the height of fame achieved by General Ulysses S. Grant, it is reasonable to assume the township was named in his honor.

Erskine Stansbury commenced surveying lower Grant (Town 21) on Aug. 29, 1851 and finished Jan. 29, 1852. This was much longer than the time required by most survey teams. In his field notes, Stansbury explains the reason: "My men as well as myself having become poisoned by the Ivy abounding in the swamps, I leave the town until winter."

Three rivers reach all the way across the town of Grant, east to west, and drain into the Wisconsin in Wood County. These are Buena Vista Creek, the northernmost, Duck Creek, the central stream, no doubt named after at least two other Duck Creeks in early Wisconsin, and Ten Mile Creek, so named, allegedly, because the pioneers of Grand Rapids referred to the mouth as being ten miles south of the rapids. In the original subdivision of Grant made in 1851-52 the surveyors refer to Ten Mile as "iron creek," no doubt after the bog iron deposits in the river bed.

A fourth important stream, known as Four Mile Creek, so-named, because it once drained into the Wisconsin four miles below the rapids, originates in the central sections of Town 22 of Grant and today joins Buena Vista Creek above Kellner at Lake Wazeecha, an Indian word allegedly meaning "the land of the pine and cedar." Most of the lake lies across the range line in Wood County. Below Four Mile Creek runs another shorter stream known, at least since 1898, as "Bloody Run" and still referred to by this name, probably after a river near early Detroit.

In addition to the named rivers of Grant, there are at

least ten artificial streams, or ditches, which were created mostly by the Portage County Drainage District in the early decades of this century, and which drain into the above rivers. Ditch No. 3 is often referred to as "Paint Creek" owing to the reddish hue of the bog iron. Duck Creek forms part of Ditch No. 4 and both run together with Ditch No. 8 at the Elmer Timm farm in Sec 27 (Town 22). Trout abound in most of the ditches as well as rivers of Grant.

A number of sections of Portage County were deeded to the State of Wisconsin by the federal government under the Swamp Land Grants approved on Sept. 28, 1850. One of these swamp lands was in Grant township, known as the Buena Vista Marsh, because it lies along Buena Vista Creek, and often referred to merely as "the marsh." In 1898 the state legislature approved the establishment of a drainage district to be known as the Portage County Drainage District which began operations in 1905. The officers of the organization are responsible to the Circuit Court and assessments in the past have been levied among the property owners of the marsh for the purpose of draining and creating the ditches referred to in the above. The biggest private development was undertaken by the Bradley Polytechnic Institute, Inc., of Peoria, Illinois, which purchased several thousands of acres on the marsh most of which was considered worthless. Some idea of the increase in value of this land after it had been drained is reflected in one quarter section (NE $\frac{1}{4}$  - NE $\frac{1}{4}$ ) in Sec 23 (Town 22, Range 8,) which in 1911 was sold to the Bradley Polytechnic Institute for \$1, today held by Harry Isherwood, and which in 1956 had an assessed valuation of \$680.

The surveyor who mapped upper Grant (Town 22) failed to enter the commencement date of survey, only that the job was completed Feb. 10, 1852. Five sections along the north tier of Town 22 were actually mapped under the Indian Survey of 1839-40 by Hathaway who refers to these five sections in his field notes as "no good land . . . mostly sandy. Aspen & pitch Pine barrens, bushy & wet in places."

In the 1852 survey of the other sections of Town 22 the surveyor makes several references to "Yellow Pine." This tree is not indigenous to Wisconsin and it probably refers to Red pine, more commonly known in this part of the state as Norway (*Pinus resinosa Ait.*).

At the first town meeting held in the new township of Grant on April 5, 1864, the following officers were elected: Wales R. Lamberton, chairman; Martin Smith and Wm. Witt, supervisors; Joseph Seamans, clerk; E. B. Clussman, treasurer; Reuel Robbins, assessor; Martin Smith and Wm. Goldbar, justices of the peace; and Cornelius Halladay, constable.

At a meeting held in December 1865 the town board voted \$125 "for fencing burying ground." This was an important consideration in pioneer times for unless the graveyard was located on private property, it was apt to be desecrated by stray cattle.

The town of Grant was divided into three school districts shortly after its organization in 1864. In April 1867 it was voted to hold the next annual town meeting at the school house in District No. 2 "and also the fall election at the half way house." The identity of this "half way house" has not been determined. It was probably a tavern-inn on a stage road and, as the center of population of Grant at this time lay in the northern part of the township — along the left bank of the Wisconsin River — it is reasonable to assume that the election was held at a half-way house located on the road between Plover and Grand Rapids. It may have been the Jockey Tavern which was located northeast of modern Meehan Station on the stage road about 20 rods south of the Wisconsin River.

The early proceedings of the town of Grant end abruptly in some 75 pages of text snipped out of the ledger. Apparently the last part of the book was left unused until 1898 when the minutes of a number of meetings held in connection with several town-supported drainage projects are recorded. While these attempts at community drainage of the marsh appear

insignificant compared to what was to be done later by the Portage County Drainage District, they no doubt served as pilot projects for the more extensive developments later which, had the first surveyors been privileged to see, would probably have revised their estimates of the land.

The first ditch of any length was ordered laid in April 1898 by Supervisors Wm. Gaulke, Chas. Eberhardt and Theo. Steinke. This began near the section corner of 9, 10, 15 and 16 and ran westerly through sections 9, 8 & 7 for a distance of not quite three miles. The swamp through which this ditch passed was commonly known as the "railroad slough," and as it concerned Wood County, two members from Wood participated in the application for the ditch. In fact, owing to the drainage of the three main rivers into Wood County, the town of Grant has usually had to deal with its neighbors across the county line, as well as its neighbors to the east in Pine Grove and Buena Vista where the rivers originate.

Several other ditches were laid down in 1898 and 1899 when this record ends. These descriptions appear to be the only evidence of town-sponsored drainage on a fairly extensive scale. The cost of digging the ditches depended on the circumstance of the terrain, depth and width of the ditch, but it ran from five cents a rod to 40 cents a rod.

The earliest tax roll of Grant, dated 1864, includes these names from Town 21, which, for convenience, may be referred to as Lower Grant: Robt. Stuart, Lucy Long, E. M. Senton, George Knowles, A. D. Aber, H. McCormick, G. Jackson, G. L. Dunning, George Signor, Christian Beaumer, George Lyner, Set Barker, Louisa Johnson, Chancy Barker, and Rufus Barker. In Town 22, Upper Grant, the following names appear: Martin Smith, M. H. Morgan, Obadiah Jones, Almond Stone, J. H. Morgan, John Hoyden, George Osterman, H. Hartwell, John Witterman, E. M. Phillips, Charles Portigal, Christy Timm, Fred Portigal, August Clavene, Wm. Witt, Charles Witt, Wm. Goldbar, James Love, and Wm. Calkins.

In addition, Grant in 1864 took in everything on the left bank of the Wisconsin River in Range 7. The first name in this portion of the 1864 tax roll of Town 23 is Wm. Calkins and a description of his land in Sec 24 includes the word "island." Since there was a large island at this time in the Wisconsin River about four miles west of Plover, it may be that Calkins owned this island. Other taxpayers in this part of Town 23 were Cornelius Halladay, J. R. Halladay, Wm. Ward, James S. Alban (no doubt the estate of), R. W. Walker, Silas Webb, Shubal Simonds, C. H. Simons, E. B. Clusman, J. B. Carpenter, O. W. Mitcheltree, Wm. Watterman, Hampton Stevens, Henderson Winans, J. Wood, Joshua Gray, Homer Drake, J. J. Bachelor, Joseph Seaman, T. W. Mitcheltree, Luther Hanchett (no doubt the estate of), Geo. Knowles, Ruel Robbins, Richard Gillett, Sherman, James Pierce, W. R. Lamberton, B. P. Hough, J. S. Marshall, and J. B. Hough.

The paucity of population is suggested by the fact that only 11 men paid any personal property tax and among these the highest valuation was \$190 which was assessed against both John F. Aber and C. (for Cornelius) Halladay on which the former paid a tax of \$7.33, including collector's fee of \$.35, and the latter paid \$7.03, including collector's fee of \$.33. Just how Aber came to pay 30c more on the same valuation, in addition to two cents more to the collector, may be explained by the fact that his district school tax was \$1.90 and Halladay's \$1.62 and, with the collector's fee being two cents more to Aber, the difference was 30c.

The only community to develop in the extensive territory of Grant is at Kellner, located on the range line between Wood and Portage Counties, but never incorporated. Several buildings are located on the Wood County side off Trunk W which runs north and south through the community. The village developed after the Chicago & North Western Railroad came through the town of Grant in 1901 at which time a passenger depot and a siding for freight cars were located here. Both were discontinued after World War II.

The 1895 plat identifies "J. Timm & Co.," probably a country store, situated in the northeast corner of the intersection at Trunk WW & U, later operated by O. D. Billings and G. H. Monroe. Herbert L. Ward operated a creamery at Kellner after the turn of the century which appears to have burned around 1917. John Boles allegedly operated the first saloon. There is no post office here or anywhere else in the double-township and most of the farmers and part-time farmers — many working in the mills at Wisconsin Rapids — are served by R.F.D.

When the first settlers arrived they found the township moderately forested with jack pine, white pine and tamarack, with jack pine mostly on the high ground. Much of the jack pine has been cut for pulp since 1901 and shipped by railroad to the paper mills in Wood County and the pine has been logged and cut by several small mills, all within a few miles of the railway siding at Kellner.

Many of the grandchildren of the original pioneers of Grant have given up farming and either moved to Wisconsin Rapids, or continue to live on the home place and commute to the paper mills and factories in Wood County. The struggle against nature here has been an uneven one; the great drainage project initiated in 1905 by the Portage County Drainage District failed to provide the amount of reclaimed land expected, as well as quality of land. Special assessments were levied against the farmers in the area to help maintain the drainage system and build new dams, but the last assessment, made in 1934, at the height of the Depression, brought the farmers into open revolt and up to 1958 no new assessment had been made. In the early years of the project, after the main ditches had been dug, the land in many places was supposed to be drained but remained water-logged. It was found necessary to dig lateral ditches to the main ditches, and to build more bridges not to mention smaller bridges, known as "bulkheads," all at considerable expense to the township.

As there is a dearth of rock formation in the township, foundation materials for early barns and houses had to be hauled either from the quarry in Sec 21 Town 21, or Sec 19, Town 22. Most townships of the county were not bothered by this problem.

One of the pioneer amenities of the town of Grant was a public watering trough for horses maintained, at town expense, on what was known in pioneer times as the "Plainfield road" in the southeast corner of Sec 34, Town 21. The family which kept the trough filled with water was allegedly paid \$5 a year for this service and the last to collect before World War II was probably George Palek.

Sand Island Tower, the only fire tower in Portage County, is located in Sec 22 of Grant township (Town 21) on County Trunk F. It takes its name from the slightly higher elevation on the marsh while the tower itself stands 90 feet in the air. Sightings on fires can be taken on any point in Portage County and, on a clear day, as far away as Fremont in Waupaca County and Camp Douglas in Juneau County. This is under the forest protection service of the state conservation department with headquarters in Friendship. Danish-born Rasmus Nielsen has been in charge of this tower since 1943. During the war it was closed to visitors, but today is open although the high climb apparently discourages most.

Serving the town of Grant, with a population of 639, in 1957-58, were Craig C. Corbett, chairman; Edgar J. Auclair and Martin Goldberg, supervisors; Fred Steinke, clerk; Emil Kruger, treasurer; Kenneth Arndt, assessor; Emil Kruger, justice of the peace; Gilbert Timm, constable; and Ralph Anderson, health officer.

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