

NELSONVILLE, The Village of

The village of Nelsonville, like so many in northern Wisconsin, probably owes its location to a beaver dam, in this instance, on the Tomorrow River where pioneer Jerome Nelson, an Englishman, saw an opportunity to build a dam higher than the beavers and create power for a saw mill. The forty on which the mill stood in Sec 5 of Amherst township was purchased by Nelson from the government on Nov. 28, 1854 and on Sept. 10, 1855 he arranged with Charles Stoltenberg and wife Anna, for the sum of \$1, for "the right to erect construct & maintain a mill dam across the Waupaca River at any point where sd river crosses the N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE Sec 5 23-10 to the height of 6 ft. above the surface of the water & the right to flow as much of the E $\frac{1}{2}$ SW & S $\frac{1}{2}$ of SENW in Sec, T & R aforesaid as shall be necessary to keep & maintain sd dam to the height aforesaid." In other words, for the sum of \$1, Nelson arranged with the Stoltenbergs to create a pond on part of their land along the Tomorrow River.

Whether a saw mill was built here in 1855 or 1856 is uncertain, but it was probably the first in the town of Amherst. A flour and grist mill was built later. John Koziczkowski of Amherst Junction recalls a visit he made with his father to Nelsonville in the early 1880s, and also remembers Nelson ("a nice fella, very sociable"). The saw mill stood on the right bank of the river and the flour mill on the left bank where it is still situated. While the saw mill has long since been discontinued, the flour & feed mill was probably built after Nelson returned from service in the Civil War. He volunteered Oct. 15, 1861, rose from NCO to 2nd

¹ *Deeds*, Vol. I, p. 225.

lieutenant and on March 9, 1865 to 1st lieutenant, Company A, 3rd Cavalry.

An advertisement in the *Pinery* of 1870 refers to the "Rising Star Flouring Mills three miles northwest of Amherst, Jerome Nelson, proprietor . . . all work done . . . warranted to give satisfaction."¹ The advertisement also advised that he was prepared to do custom grinding or "exchange with farmers." Actually, there was little custom grinding for cash either here or in any other mill before the turn of the century. Most common was the barter agreement whereby a farmer with wheat or rye gave a percentage of grain to be ground to the miller in exchange for grinding the balance.

In 1893 Nelson, only a few years before he died, arranged to have the dam on the pond raised another three feet, i.e., to nine feet, which suggests that he needed more power either for the saw mill or flour mill or both. The flour mill passed through several hands after his death and is presently owned by John Koziczowski, a grandson of Michael Koziczowski, and operated by son Barney.

When a post office was established here on Apr. 24, 1871, it was called Nelsonville, Edmund Creed served as the first postmaster. Aside from the mill interests of Nelson, at least two other business places were established here before 1876, as the plat carries an advertisement of Nelson & Loberg, who operated a general store, and August Peterson, a "manufacturer and dealer in Boots and Shoes."

Between 1876 and 1895 a number of additional business places and residences were established, in addition to the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1888. In 1913 the community decided to form its own political organization as apart from the township.

In order to incorporate a village, a group of petitioners has to band together to initiate action towards incorporation. This involves considerable spadework. A census of each family has to be taken and a detailed description of the territory to be included has to be

¹ *Pinery*, March 18, 1870.

made with the aid of a professional surveyor. Public notices have to be published and an election held. This rather involved procedure is aptly described in the incorporation of the village of Nelsonville whose petitioners addressed their communications to the Circuit Court in Stevens Point. The petitioners, all of them qualified residents and taxpayers in the territory to be described, were Carl O. Doxrud, O. L. Gordon, L. H. Johnson, M. L. Gordon, George S. Diver, O. S. Swenson, and Dr. Halfdan Raasoch. The petitioners explained that the territory "is not more than one half square mile in area and is not included in any village. And is all lying in the town of Amherst in county of Portage, in the state of Wisconsin, and contains a resident population of not less than one hundred and fifty persons."

These petitioners had caused an accurate survey and map to be made of the territory to be bounded by the village. The census of the people included in the territory had to be taken not more than ten weeks previous to the time of making the application for incorporation, and a detailed report had to be taken of each lot or quarter section of land. An affidavit had to be signed by the person who took this census.

The survey and map, plus the census figures on people and lands, were then left at the State Bank of Nelsonville for five consecutive weeks from the first publication and posting of the notices of application for incorporation. This was done so that any citizen could examine "at all reasonable hours" the survey and census figures if he wished. The actual population of the territory at the time of the census was 177 and actual territory covered 320 acres.

This detailed description of the territory and the census figures were then submitted to Circuit Court to approve the incorporation "if the electors thereof shall assent thereto as provided by law."

In other words, after the Court was satisfied that the incorporation was legal, the people themselves had to vote on it before it became final. This petition was dated Jan. 31, 1913.

When the petitioners forwarded their description and census figures to Circuit Court they also made known that the village would be called *Nelsonville*. The matter came up before Judge Byron B. Park at the Stevens Point Court House on Feb. 3, 1913. The petitioners were represented by Nelson and Murat, their attorneys. After the Court, that is, Judge Park, was satisfied that all the requirements of the statutes had been complied with by the petitioners, that the survey and census figures were correct, that the lands embraced in the territory "ought justly to be included in the proposed village, and that the interest of the inhabitants would be promoted by such incorporation", that the territory to be included in the proposed village contained at the time of the census was taken was in proportion to the population, he ordered the incorporation. This was followed in the village records by still another complete repetition of the description of the territory.

L. L. Loberg, John S. Loberg and Henry Stoltenberg were directed by the Court to perform the duties of inspectors of election to determine whether the electors of the territory described would agree to the incorporation. Notices of the upcoming election were posted in three public places; one on the front of Jacobson and Swenson's Furniture Store; one on the front door of J. S. Loberg Company's Mill, and one on the front door of the Nelsonville Creamery. These notices were posted Feb. 17, 1913, which was at least three weeks before the time specified in the notice for the holding of the election on March 11, 1913. The notice of election again described the territory to be included and explained where the election would take place, in this case at the Johnson Hall situated over the State Bank of Nelsonville.

The whole number of ballots cast at the election was 29, all in favor of incorporation.

With this step accomplished, the next and final step was the election of officers. As there was no newspaper printed in the village of Nelsonville, which on oath Carl O. Doxrud swore to, public notices were posted on

March 17 in the same places listed above, announcing a village election to be held Tuesday, April 8, 1913. The polls were opened at 10 o'clock and closed at 4 o'clock with one hour off for lunch. The following village officers were probably elected: Carl O. Doxrud, president; Ludwig H. Johnson, treasurer; Henry Stoltenberg, clerk; Ole Roe, assessor; Hans Berg, constable; Ole L. Gordon and Gilbert Gullickson, justice of the peace; Theodore T. Loberg, police justice; Dr. Halfdan Raasoch, George Diver, Carl Loberg, L. E. Gordon, Jr., Nils Loberg and Ole Swendson, trustees; and John Loberg, supervisor.¹ The results of the election itself were not recorded except that Doxrud and Stoltenberg signed the ordinance with their new titles.

As soon as a village is incorporated and officers elected, it passes ordinances to police itself. Ordinance No. 1 in Nelsonville banned anyone from bringing any device, wheel, dice, contrivance or thing to the village for purposes of gambling. Violations of this ordinance were liable to imprisonment in the county jail of not more than six months or a fine not exceeding \$100. In Ordinance No. 2, the playing of pool, billiards or bowling on Sunday was banned, and Ordinance No. 3 declared it unlawful for any person or persons to pasture any stock on the streets of the village.

The first assessment roll in the newly-incorporated village of Nelsonville in 1913 included L. L. Loberg, State Bank of Nelsonville, August Peterson, H. H. Waller, L. H. Johnson, William T. Waller Estate, Mrs. J. Nelson Estate, O. L. Gordon, Joseph Diver, N. J. Loberg, Theodore Johnson, Dr. Halfdan Raasoch, G. O. Gullickson, Mrs. C. Loberg, N. Grayson, G. I. Diver, Soren Solie, H. Stoltenberg, Mrs. L. Anderson Estate, C. O. Doxrud, Gullickson Bros., Olaf Swenson, Halvor Nelson, George E. Larson, O. F. Peterson, Carl Loberg, Ole Roe, Nelsonville Creamery Company, C. J. Reton, E. W. Stoltenberg, August Peterson, T. T. Loberg, Ole J. Omodt, L. E. Gordon, Jr., H. A. Wimme, M. L. Gordon, Joe Wevera, John Christenson, Ole Iverson,

¹ *Fra Indianernes Lande*, p. 117.

and Andrew Stoltenberg.

Stock in the State Bank of Nelsonville was held by Hans Johnson, 40 shares; Theodore Johnson, 30 shares; and L. H. Johnson, 30 shares, a par value of \$100 per share, with a total value, as fixed by the assessor for tax purposes of \$8,225. This bank is now closed.

Serving the village of Nelsonville with a population of 188, in 1957-58, were Welton Alm, president; Charles A. Anderson, Louis Loberg and Orbet Waller, trustees; LeRoy W. Gordon, clerk; Walter Leppen, treasurer; Llewelyn Henke, assessor; and Charles A. Anderson, supervisor.

Our Country Our Story Portage County Wisconsin - Link Page

PREVIOUS...LINWOOD, THE TOWNSHIP OF.....326

NEXT.....NEW HOPE, THE TOWNSHIP OF.....341

GO BACK TO THE ELECTRONIC INDEX PAGE...