

## PINE GROVE, The Township of

The town of Pine Grove, organized in 1856, was originally composed of all of Town 21, Range 7 (lower Grant) and the four lower tiers of sections in Town 21, Range 8, or the lower two-thirds of modern Pine Grove. This suggests at once that the sections nearest the Waushara County line, not far from Plainfield, were the first to be settled. The first town meeting was to be held on the first Monday in October "at Nelson Beckwith's Mill."<sup>1</sup> Apparently the boundaries decided on by the County Board were not satisfactory to the freeholders of Pine Grove for a petition was presented that same year to change the boundaries, which was denied. In 1858 a new petition was entered to include all of Town 21 in Range 8, but Buena Vista protested and a compromise was reached whereby Buena Vista kept sections 1 to 6 and Pine Grove got sections 7 to 12. On April 1, 1862 sections 1 to 6 were detached from Buena Vista and annexed to Pine Grove, making it a full-sized township, in addition to Town 21, Range 7, in the southeast corner of the county which Pine Grove still administered. This was changed in 1865 after the town of Grant was organized which gave Town 21, Range 7, less three sections (34, 35 & 36) to Grant. A short time later the entire south half of Town 21, Range 7, was returned to Pine Grove, but in 1869 all these sections were annexed to Grant where they have remained to this day.

The subdivision of Pine Grove in Town 21, Range 8, was begun Oct. 23 and completed Nov. 1, 1851.

The township appears to have taken its name after a prominent pine grove located in the central sections.

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. I, p. 261.

Aside from this, a small timber belt was located in the southwest corner where it is believed that the firm of Patterson & Hover (or Haven) had a saw mill in Sec 31. The location of Beckwith's mill, the place of the first election, is also uncertain. From a description of a road ordered laid in 1869 in the southwest corner of the township it appears that the cream of the timber already had been harvested.

The first book of proceedings of Pine Grove was apparently damaged, as the town clerk has made a series of entries from it in a new ledger dated 1861. In the first entry, dated May 28, 1861, he certifies that the record of a meeting held Oct. 5, 1856 is a correct copy of those "entered in the old Town Book on pp. 1 & 2." The transcript he made for the town of Pine Grove is headed: "Those elected Oct. 6th, 1856 and failed to qualify." As this is not the usual time for a town election, it appears to have been a special meeting to name the first town board but, like the difficulty which arose over the first election in New Hope, some irregularity may have occurred which nullified the first election and a second one was held. On page 1 of the new book the clerk certified the following:

"At a special town meeting held at the store of Robert Webb on Monday, Nov. 24, 1856, the following persons were elected: For chairman: N. F. Beckwith in place of A. M. Harris. Supervisors: A. M. Harris & Wm. L. Freeland in place of Caleb Seely & Wm. L. Freeland.

Town clerk: Robert Webb in place of Wm. Hover (or Haven).

Assessor: Wm. Hover in place of A. M. Harris.

Town superintendent: Chas Foss in place of Chas Foss.

Treasurer: Thomas Baker in place of Thomas Baker.

Constables: Thomas Baker & Jefferson Ellis in place of Thomas Baker & Jefferson Ellis.

Sealer of Weights and measures: E. Patterson."

From this it is learned that while some new officers were elected in November, several who were named to posts in the first election managed to be reinstated.

Pine Grove was orientated towards Almond in this early period both by historical association and by the fact that a village was developing in Almond township.

On the other hand, Pine Grove, lying next to Waushara County, was also influenced by economic and cultural circumstances which had their origin in the town of Oasis and village of Plainfield. Many of the first settlers in Pine Grove were people who originally settled in or near Plainfield, or whose sons had moved from the "Big Prairie" into the township.

Most of the township is flat, bordering on lowland with some actual marsh land in the northern sections which have since been improved by the Portage County Drainage District established in 1905. The township has one outstanding physical feature in the east known as "the Bluff," or as "Mosquito Bluffs," a huge mound of earth which rises abruptly out of the plain with no attachments, ridges or spurs, allegedly the highest point in Portage County. It may be seen for several miles in all directions, and is referred to as the "Bluff" for the first time in a road order dated at Almond in July 1856. It is still called the Bluff, although an older generation seems to prefer the name "Mosquito Bluffs" because it once attracted swarms of mosquitoes.

One of the early saw mill operators in Pine Grove probably was T. A. Jewett, who, through his attorney, Thomas H. Walker, asked the board of equalizers in 1862 for a "reduction on the amount assessed on their manufactured lumber from \$3 per thousand to \$1.50 to which the board agreed."

In later years, Addie B. Else, included in the 1884 tax roll, operated a saw mill a short distance west of the Wisconsin Central depot where he owned a plot of 36 acres of land, part of which fronted on the railway right-of-way. Ezekiel ("Zeke") Bancroft, included in the 1857 tax roll but not the 1884 roll, allegedly operated a "pony" (slang for small) mill on the "ledge" south of Bancroft village where the Chicago & North Western tracks were later laid. The ledge is an outcropping of stone which the railway engineers had to blast through.

Another saw mill in Pine Grove may have been operated by the firm of B. & H. Radcliffe who paid taxes in 1884 on two forties in Sec 14, about two miles south

of Bancroft. John Lowe, a long-time resident of the township, believes that John Radcliff operated a mill in the 1890s about three-quarters of a mile south of Schenek School near the geographical center of the township, apparently logging off the stand of pine after which Pine Grove was named.

The only village in the township, Bancroft, has never been incorporated. It was named after the Rev. Warren Gamaliel Bancroft, a pioneer Methodist pastor after the Civil War, and after whom Warren Gamaliel Harding, later President of the United States, was named. The village grew chiefly as a result of the railroad, often referred to by the older generation as the "Pee Line" after "P" for Portage. In 1901 the Chicago & North Western passed half a mile to the south where the village of "New Bancroft" was platted. A depot, two potato warehouses and a stockyard were located on the north side of the tracks. All this is now farm and grazing land and the depot has been removed.

A post office called Bancroft was established May 17, 1876. Edwin L. Rich served as postmaster.

The Wisconsin Central depot once stood on the east side of the tracks above Main Street. The first hotel, located at the corner of Main & Klondyke Streets, was probably built by Henry Kellogg. The *Portage County Directory* of 1896 however, carries the name of Hill's Hotel, operated by Smith Hill, and the name of Ed Mc-Intee, a merchant in the village. The first general store was probably built by Ralph Waterman. In 1908 a newspaper called the *Bancroft News* was published but probably ceased publication in 1909.

An interesting aspect of life in Bancroft around the turn of the century, not observed elsewhere in the county, was the visit of a religious chapel car, known as "Glad Tidings," in the autumn of 1902. This was a mobile railway chapel which made a circuit of Baptist congregations where no church had been built. Mr. C. H. Rush, apparently a lay preacher, was in charge of this home mission work. Meetings were held over a period of several weeks while the chapel car remained

on the siding, and contests were arranged for the children to participate in various religious activities. Mrs. Bertha C. Valentine, nee Hutchinson, treasures a Bible which was presented to her by Rush in November 1902 for correctly memorizing the names of all the books of the Bible.

Although only a small village, Bancroft, like others in the county around the turn of the century, was able to support a concert band as well as a ball team. A postcard photo of 1905 reveals that the Bancroft Concert Band had 19 musicians. On the reverse side of the card for address and message is a small engraving of an automobile and a legend which reads: "Run Down to Bancroft 'That Growing Town' Some Thursday night to the free concert."

Another postcard (*ca.* 1905) carries the picture of the local ball team which the legend identifies as Ben McIntee, center field; Paul Summers, manager; Fred ("Guy") Hutchinson, third base; Robert Lowe, left field; Will Felch, first base; Chas. Manley, umpire; Orange Culver, right field; Frank Felch, catcher; Frank Springer, pitcher; Clarence Hutchinson, second base; and Carl Hutchinson, short stop.

Between 1890 and 1935 Bancroft became a big potato center with several warehouses catering to local growers, but the Depression as well as depletion of virgin land both worked to defeat small-scale operations. Since World War II potato growing has been revived in Pine Grove by larger producers using irrigation and commercial fertilizers. Most of the crop is hauled out by private and commercial truckers.

John Lowe, son of William Lowe who bought Myron Hinckley's pioneer farm in sections 1 & 2 (*ca.* 1882), began attending Limerick School when his family settled in the township. Among the teachers he recalls in this pioneer school, located a short distance east of Bancroft, were Lizzie Nugent, Stella Luce of Stevens Point, Charles Hamilton of Plainfield, Nelson Beggs of Almond township, and Eva Strong of Pine Grove. Of Eva Strong he said: "One time a band of Indians — on

a big binge — came hollerin' and whoopin' it up past the school house. Eva was small and wiry, but she wasn't scared, and she got the kids inside and went to her desk and pulled out a revolver. 'Don't be alarmed now,' she said, and held up that gun, 'if one of them redskins sticks his head through that door I'll shoot him!'"

The Lowes immigrated from England. Asked if he had ever heard his father mention why he emigrated to America, John Lowe said: "No, but I know why grandpa came. They were having some sort of a church doings where we came from in England and the crowd was waiting outside for the bishop who was to be the guest that day. No one could go inside until he had gone in first, you know. So everyone was standing there waiting. But my grandpa, yes, I've heard my aunt tell the story a dozen times — my grandpa always liked to sit down whenever he had the opportunity, and so he sat down there on the curb and got to talking with a neighbor. But he didn't notice the bishop coming and when the bishop saw him sitting there with his hat on, he swung at the hat with his cane. Instead of knocking grandpa's hat off, he creased his skull. Grandpa jumped up and knocked the bishop into the street and of course got himself arrested. Then the judge said, 'If you'll get out of this country in 24 hours, I'll drop the charges,' and grandpa left for America in 12 hours and never went back. And me," Old John chuckled, "I've been a deputy sheriff in Portage County for 30 years."

Apparently the first assessor of Pine Grove was under some misapprehension about the tax rate as the first half of the assessment roll has been entered with all the names of the taxpayers and scratched, and a completely new entry made of the same people in the second half of the ledger with a new set of valuations. The names of these first taxpayers in the corrected version are: Wm. Rice, John Downing, Hicks & Bell, Pratt, Wiggington & Collick (probably Kollock), McGlaflin, George Swallow, James Sample, Knulan Abbot, Blen (?) Clark & Frost, Ephram Beaumont, Mathew Beaumont, Jacob

Ingerham, John Pierce, Nelson Havens, Wiley Fuller, Hamilton Dalyrample, Asa Tarbox, Gamelia Bancroft, Manan Bancroft, Ezeckial Bancroft, J. M. Roseberry, James Poetter, Wm. Sample, Bela Tarbox, James Beggs, Henry Davison, Shuble Patchon, Jesse Bentley, Abel Harris, Samuel Carrele (probably Carroll), White, Anthony Ostrander, A. A. Goodwin, Orrin Perry, Rufus Dutton, Lewis, Edward Smith, Wm. (?)iathman (probably Trotman), Caleb Sealey, John Ellis, Parks, E. Hill, Patterson & Hover, Asa Coles, Gernsey, Charles Foss, John Blake, Merrick Anderson, B. W. Gardner, George Kellogg, Wm. Smith, Lewis Carrele (?), Thomas Baker, Stillman Ellis, James Corzett, Estus Barker, G. W. Dutton, Oscar Dutton, John Youngman, Isah Berry, Samuel Dale, Ely Ostrander, Henry Dale, Wm. Studley, Dorman & Fields & Co., Benjamin Wiggins, and Lord.

Serving the business and farming community of Pine Grove is the Bancroft State Bank, founded Oct. 5, 1912 with a capitalization of \$10,000. The original stockholders were Albert W. Manley, Chas. A. Walker, Harold Ostrum, Eugene H. Strong, B. B. Baker, Buchanan Johnson, Elsie Meddaugh, Robert I. Roseberry, and Ed. J. Pfiffner. The first officers were A. W. Manley, president; Buchanan Johnson, vice-president; and Harold Ostrum, cashier. The bank has since increased its capitalization to \$25,000. At the close of business in 1957 the bank's total deposits were \$561,463.65 with a capital structure of \$60,647.33. Officers of the bank in 1957 were Jesse L. Judd, president; C. R. George, vice president; Alice Polley, cashier; and Jenney Hansen, assistant cashier.

The Bancroft State Bank has been the target of three robberies and/or holdups since it opened. The last was a hold-up when a man walked into the bank on Tuesday morning, Aug. 6, 1958 — the twelfth anniversary of the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima — and pretending that he was carrying a gun hidden in a piece of cloth — actually a mechanical pencil — demanded that the cashiers turn over the money. He took \$2,450 and drove away. Road blocks were established by the

sheriff's departments in the several counties and the bandit was captured less than two hours later by Wood County authorities south of Marshfield, the money still in his possession.

On Tuesday, April 3, 1956, the village of Bancroft was struck by a tornado which wrecked or damaged several buildings, killed and injured a number of people in private homes, while the school building, bulging with children, miraculously escaped the wrath of the winds. It came and went in less than 60 seconds and tore a path eastward through the countryside some 50 miles long.

Serving the town of Pine Grove, with a population of 667, in 1957-58, were William Petrusky, chairman; Rodney McIntee and Irl Dittburner, supervisors; Earnest Swiontek, clerk; Cecil R. Bender, treasurer; Lloyd Bovee, assessor; and Cecil Bender, health officer.

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