

PLOVER, The Township of

The town of Plover probably takes its English name from the Semipalmated Ring Plover, a shore-bird with long pointed wings and short tail similar to the Kildeer, but unlike the Kildeer, which frequents meadows and fields, prefers mud flats and beaches. According to family accounts handed down even unto the fourth generation, flocks of these birds, in their annual migration north, were attracted to the mouth of the Plover River just above the modern Whiting-Plover Paper Company. This might suggest that before the river was dammed up a short distance above the mouth, a mud flat or delta had formed here where the Plovers found good feeding. While this bird is seldom seen any more in this part of the state, its flight north more than a century ago apparently made a deep impression on the first timber cruisers because the name "Plover" was already being used in reference to an Indian treaty of 1837 and by Hathaway in 1839.

The first mention of the name "Plover Portage," upper case in both instances, appears in a transcript from the Mineral Point records when Enoch G. Bean, justice of the peace (acting), recorded a deed of Harrison K. Fay at "Plover Portage this sixteenth day of February A. D. 1843."¹ It was also used in 1843 when an election precinct was created at "Plover Portage" and the place of election "at the house of Gilbert Conant." When Hathaway surveyed the Indian strip he found Conant & Campbell's mill on the right bank of the Wisconsin River, that is, opposite the modern village of Whiting. This suggests that the property of Conant & Campbell was considered part of Plover Portage which

¹ *Deeds*, Vol. A, p. 65.

appears to confirm hearsay evidence that in the early 1840s the name referred to not only the several blocks of streets around Rushville but to an area which included the Wisconsin River to the north several miles on either bank.

The Indians designated this as *Mush-ko-da-ny*, meaning, in Chippewa, a "prairie." The trail dividing the Chippewa and Menominee lands ran through here and both tribes probably used it as a staging area for portaging canoes between the Wisconsin and the Wolf Rivers via the Tomorrow-Waupaca. The portage was allegedly known to the Chippewas as *Wah-bau-ga O-ning-ah-ming*, meaning "eastern portage."

In the first division of Portage County, made by the County Board on Jan. 9, 1849, three townships were created; namely, Plover, Middletown, and Bull Falls. Plover took in all of Portage County "lying south of a line running east and west through said county one mile south of the north line of Town 23, Range Eight. . ." And the first election of officers for the town of Plover was held at the "House of Geo. Neeves in Grand Rapids. . ."

On March 1, 1850 a new division of townships was made in which the town of Grand Rapids was set off from Plover township and the latter included all of Portage County "north of the town of Grand Rapids and running to a line one and a half miles south of the north line of Town 23 in Ranges Six, Seven, and Eight [with the] seat of government at the Court House in Plover." Apparently an error was made in this description as there is no mention of the townships in Range 9, while the townships in Range 10 were still part of Brown County.

The first change in this arrangement was made in the spring of 1852 when the town of Almond was set

¹ *Collections*, Vol. I, p. 120. (An account, written in 1854, by Hiram Calkins, Esq., of Wausau, states that the portage was "about eight miles" between the rivers, patently a miscalculation, for even the distance between the Wisconsin and Tomorrow River at Amherst would be around 15 miles.)

² *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. I, p. 148.

³ *Loc. Cit.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

off from Plover and which was to include modern Pine Grove and most of the lower part of Grant. In the next several years, Buena Vista, the north half of modern Grant, Stockton, and Linwood were set off from former Plover territory which reduced the township to a little more than 40 sections, all on the left bank of the Wisconsin River.

In 1857 Amos Courtwright and others petitioned the County Board to annex the equivalent of six sections along the south line of Stevens Point township in Range 8 to the town of Plover. This was an extraordinary arrangement as the petitioners prayed that the north half of sections 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 and the south one-half of sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 in the same range be included. In other words, it extended Plover township one mile north from modern Elm Street in Whiting, but left six northern sections of Town 23 cut in two, the north half still a part of the town of Stevens Point. Apparently the board tabled this petition, for a month later Wellington Kollock presented an amendment to the board which returned the south half of sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 to the town of Stevens Point. This arrangement isolated several sections lying within the elbow, i.e., on the right (west) bank of the Wisconsin River from the main part of the township on the left bank. In 1859 sections 1, 2 & 3 of Town 23, Range 8, which had been taken from the town of Stevens Point and annexed to Hull, were taken from Hull and attached to Plover.

Effective Dec. 15, 1869 sections 13 to 18, Town 22, Range 8 were detached from Buena Vista and attached to Plover. And on Nov. 23, 1870 Plover annexed all that part of the county that runs with H-54 west to the Wood County line between the Wisconsin River and town of Grant, plus three sections, 19, 30 and 31 in Town 23, Range 8, about three miles west of Plover village which 11 years earlier had been annexed to Linwood. In addition, it acquired the north one-half of Sec 1 in the northeast corner of Grant. This may have been done at the instigation of someone in Grant itself.

According to hearsay evidence, there was a movement on foot to have this part of Grant attached to the town of Grand Rapids in Wood County, but by attaching half a section to Plover, this township was reduced to less than the constitutional limit of 36 sections and kept Grant in Portage County.

On Nov. 19, 1908 a number of petitioners living in Lot 6, Sec 6, (T. 23, R. 8) and in the south half of Sec 4, (T. 23, R. 8) then part of the city of Stevens Point just north of modern Whiting, asked to be attached to the town of Plover "for the reason that we have got to pay, or are obliged to pay, enormous city tax and derive no benefit therefrom."¹ The County Board agreed. This appears to be the last change made in the boundary lines of the county aside from the creation of new villages within these lines of demarcation.

Most of modern Plover township was subdivided in the Indian Survey of 1839-40. The subdivision of part of Plover in Range 8 not affected by the Indian Survey, mainly in the southeast part of the modern township, was begun Feb. 18 and completed Feb. 19, 1852.

The subdivision of that part of Town 23, Range 8, within three miles of the Wisconsin River was made by Hathaway from June 5 to July 5, 1839. The subdivision of Town 22, Range 8, which today includes Plover in the north half, and western Buena Vista in the south half, was begun Nov. 3, 1851 and completed March 6, 1852. The sumach tree, rarely mentioned in any of the surveys of the county, is referred to in the field notes on this township. Today the sumach is quite common, particularly along neglected roads or clearings which have been abandoned.

The earliest entry in the available proceedings of the town of Plover is dated May 30, 1851 which ordered a road laid along what today appears to be a town road, about a mile southeast of Plover village.

There is reason to believe that the first church congregation in Portage County may have been organized

¹ *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. VIII, p. 361.

in Plover in the mid-1840s by the followers of the Methodist faith, led by a home mission pastor, the Rev. J. Hurbert. Services were probably held in log cabins of the various members and in 1850 in the rooms of the county Court House. The county commissioner's proceedings state that the Court House was being used that year "for public meetings and public worship" but fail to mention the name of the people. It was not until 1861 that this congregation succeeded in building a church in Plover by which time a Presbyterian church had already been completed.

The earliest list of township taxpayers in the county is found in the town of Plover for the year 1854. From this it is possible to establish material evidence of resident owners, most of whom were located in Town 23, Ranges 7, 8 & 9, that is, modern Plover township (less southern Linwood and northern Grant) and southeast into Stockton and Buena Vista. A few are listed in Town 22. Resident owners listed in Town 23, Range 7, are H. H. Young (who also paid taxes in Ranges 8 & 9), James S. Alban (who also paid taxes in Range 8), Joseph L. Cotey (who also paid taxes in Range 8), Alfred Martin, and Wash (?) V. Wood.

Resident owners listed in Town 23, Range 8, which would include the township around Plover village itself, are: Hartwell & Franklin, J. D. Rogers, John W. Bachelor, Bachelor & Brown, Luke V. Spurr, H. & A. Drake, Samuel Drake (who also paid taxes in Range 9), Foster Mitchell, Miner Strope (who also paid in T. 22, R. 8), Hoskins, N. Bumpus, John Eckels, F. Wolbridge, Royal Dimond (?), E. B. Clark, James Eckels, Wm. Albertie, A. M. Dunten, John Philips (who also paid in Range 9), J. Perdy (Purdy?) (whose land description also included "1/4 of Springville Mills", i.e., the grist mill on the Little Plover), D. V. Hubbard, George Sterling, Peck, Mathias Mitchell, Chas. Owen, Hiram Riker (who also paid in Range 9), W. J. Bates, Loyd Wakmen, D. J. Sanders, Joseph Hodgeson, Lenard (?) Wells, H. A. Bean, Johnathan Wyatt, Joseph Dow, S. A. Sher-

¹ *Proceedings*, County Commissioners Sessions, Vol. I, p. 166.

man, A. Hayden, R. F. Rising, Geo. Bramer (who also paid in Range 9), D. H. Harroon, Jeramiah Haley, Lorin Crosby, G. S. Sales, Andrew A. Smawley, Hugh McGreer, Samuel Lawrance, Wm. Lamareux, Mrs. Ruthford, Thos. H. McDill (who also paid in Range 9), B. F. Cooper, J. W. Holland, G. W. Cate (who also paid in Range 9), Ethan Burdick, Jesse Anson (who also paid in Range 7), J. N. Ward, C. S. Ogden (who also paid in Range 9), "Wells at the Point" (meaning, no doubt, a taxpayer who probably lived in Stevens Point although listed under the column of resident owners), M. Strong (almost certainly not a resident), next name illegible, Vandervoort, Almond Maxfield (who also paid in Town 22, Range 8), and J. W. Hale (who also paid in Town 22, Range 8).

Resident owners in Town 23, Range 9, which would include all of modern Stockton south of Custer and all of Buena Vista in Range 9, roughly north of H-54, are O. D. Richmond, Oliver Richmond, S (?) Furgason, Henry Danforth, J. F. Webber, Lois (?) Moor, Heirs of J. L. Moor, Wm. Bramer, J. C. Maxfield, J. E. Litle, Peter Smith, Dayton Gilbert (who also paid in Range 7 & 8), G. W. Morrill, E. H. Buel, J. Gardner, Peter McMillen, James Lambert, Joseph Hewett, George Yorton, John Brinkley, Henry F. Clements, D. R. Clements, Horace Judd, Thos. H. McDill (who also paid on a forty in Sec. 21, Range 8, and several lots unidentified by section or range number), B. Phelps, Sarah Blodgett, John Ogden, Plat (?) N. Davis, Jeramiah Bennett, Louis Clark, Michael Shortell, John Bourcier, and John Shannon.

Others are listed as paying taxes on lots in "V.P." which probably stands for "village of Plover." These are C. B. Bacheller, Hoskins, John Eckels, F. Wolbridge, Heirs of J. L. Moor, James Eckels, Wm. H. Clark, L. M. Gregory, M. G. Pratt, Amos Courtright, Luther Hanchett, A. W. Bell, Wm. R. Ward, Catherin Marten, S. A. Sherman, J. E. Bacheller, D. B. Danforth, James S. Alban, G. W. Mitchell, Lorin Crosby, J. B. Scott, Thos. H. McDill, Mrs. England, J. W. Holland, Joseph

Code (Cotey?), John G. Hibbard, A. V. Glading (?), Wm. Harris, J. W. Harris, Wm. Croscier, E. G. Bean, and Wm. Eckles.

Those who paid taxes on land as resident owners in Town 22, Range 8, are E. W. Bell, A. W. Bell, Lyman Porter, James Aplin, and F. Wilmot. One other name, Michael Shea, appears in the roll with no description, while David Carpenter is listed as a non-resident owner of land in Town 22, Ranges 7 & 9.

On March 30, 1854 John Stumpf, clerk of the County Board, ordered that the following percentage "be and the same is hereby levied upon said assessment to wit: Six mills on the dollar valuation for State Tax, One and one fourth per cent for County purposes and one mill on the dollar valuation for the support of Common Schools, which makes the following Amount to be collected in the town of Plover, to wit: County Tax, \$687.78.07; State Tax, \$330.13.08; School Tax, \$55.02.03; Total Amt. \$1.072.94.8."

The tax roll reveals that G. M. Park was town clerk; Eli B. Clark, town treasurer; and Thomas H. McDill, assessor. Town Clerk Park ordered that the treasurer, after deducting his fees for collecting taxes, pay the treasurer of Portage County on or before the last Monday of May the sum of \$330.13.8 as state tax, to retain and pay out the sum of \$300 for town taxes, while the balance was to go to the county treasurer. It was signed May 16, 1854.

The village of Plover, not yet incorporated, was administered by the town board and hence the village tax roll is included in the same record in which the town assessments are found.

Quite a few of the names listed for both the town and the village of Plover were later to become famous in the history of Portage County, while some of them turn up in other townships in the next few years which suggests that they settled near Plover first, and noting an opportunity to make money elsewhere, moved to a new village or township.

While Plover was developing into a "comely village"

in the 1850s, a small community in the township was also growing around the mouth of the Little Plover known as Springville, a name probably suggested by the river which is fed by springs. In Springville, apparently on the right bank of the river, west of modern H-51, John R. Mitchell built a flour and grist mill, allegedly the first in the Pinery. He purchased the forty from the government on May 3, 1849 and most accounts agree that the mill was in operation some time in 1850. Mitchell at first held only a half interest while the other half was held by Ira Purdy and Theo. Fisher who sold out to Mitchell in 1855. The importance of this mill to the pioneers of the county may be gauged by the fact that Leonidas Lombard, according to his diary, came all the way from Lanark to "Mitchell's Mill" on Jan. 8, 1858, presumably to have flour ground.

The mill property passed to other hands and the 1876 plat lists a grist mill on the site. This burned in the 1880s. In 1899 E. H. Rossier *et al* built a new mill under the name of Springville Milling. A snapshot photo (*ca.* 1920) reveals a mill which, with the turbine section on the ground floor, was four stories high. The overflow from the dam ran a rod or so to the south of the mill race. The property eventually became obsolete and passed to E. A. Oberweiser. While part of the stone foundation may still be viewed, a private swimming pool has since been created in the old mill race.

The Ellis account, in addition to the Mitchell flour mill at Springville in 1857, lists a saw mill, one store, a tavern-house, a blacksmith shop and some 12 dwellings.

The most important community to develop in the township, aside from Plover village, was at the mouth of the big Plover River where Thomas H. and Alexander S. McDill platted a village in 1873 (incorporated as part of the village of Whiting in 1947). The Original Town was laid out in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ -NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec 9 in four blocks intersected by Main Street (today H-51) running south-southeast, and three east-west streets, Pine Street, Washington Avenue, and Broadway. A post office was

established in Block 3 (opposite the modern residence of Ben Redfield) on the east side of Main Street Feb. 9, 1874 called McDill with Lemuel G. Rice serving as postmaster. It was discontinued Feb. 13, 1904.

The G. E. McDill Addition was platted in 1893 to the south of the original town on the west side of Main Street (H-51). This community developed as a result of the saw mill and flour milling interests established on the big Plover by the McDills who continued in business until 1902 when the two dam sites on Broadway passed to the Wisconsin Graphite Company and in 1916 to John Strange of Neenah who established a paper mill here, later known as the "stink mill" because of the sulphur fumes which were released from the stacks, and, according to the prevailing wind, could be sniffed in most parts of Portage County. The mill operated into the 1940s and was finally razed.

In its heyday, McDill boasted a public hall, hotel, and brewery operated for many years before the turn of the century by Andrew Lutz, all located on the crest of the hill northwest of McDill Pond. The stylish residence of the McDills was also located on the hillside with a commanding view of the saw mill and flour mill. There were at least two stores in McDill before the turn of the century, one operated by Truman Rice and one by John Norton.

To the west of McDill another would-be village was platted called Conant Rapids, after the rapids of the same name on the Wisconsin River. While it was divided into 84 blocks, it never developed into a residential area until after it was incorporated into the village of Whiting in 1947 and is still relatively unoccupied.

In his minutes of the Old Settlers Club, Sherman states that Plover Cemetery, lying about half way between the village and the Yellow Banks, is the oldest cemetery for the white man on the Upper Wisconsin River. While no headstones can be found standing which date earlier than 1851, there are a number of flat stones partially overgrown with sod and two of

these may be, according to the cemetery association records, the graves of Stephen Albin, who died Jan. 5, 1842 and lies buried in Block 2, Lot 29, and Melisa Morris, who died Oct. 11, 1845 and lies buried in Block 1, Lot 53. The oldest graves lie along the central entrance where the headstones of James S. Alban and Joseph Baker and wife Ellen may also be found.

Serving the town of Plover, with a population of 1,618 (which includes the unincorporated village of Plover) in 1957-58, were Milvern E. Jacklin, chairman; Carroll Dakins and Edward A. Sankey, supervisors; Cecil E. Allen, clerk; Guy E. Carley, treasurer; Ernest Rogers, assessor; Joseph Worzalla, justice of the peace; and Henry Eiden, constable.

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