

PLOVER, The Unincorporated Village of

The village of Plover was the first to be platted in the county one year after it was voted the county seat in the election of 1844. In his recollection of the event, George W. Mitchell, believed to be Plover's "first citizen," states that the name Plover was not used in the balloting but instead the voters indicated their preference by naming a "certain 80 acres of a section, town and range. . ."¹ This strongly suggests that while the general area around the elbow of the Wisconsin River was being referred to as Plover Portage up to 1844, there was no established community here, only a few scattered log cabins to the south and southwest of the modern Plover located in a community known as Rushville.

In 1845 George Wyatt, acting as agent and attorney for Moses M. Strong and Frances Dunn, filed an affidavit with Charles Temple, notary public, presumably at Mineral Point, relative to laying out of the Original Town of Plover in the east half of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec 22, Town 23, Range 8. The description states, *inter-alia*, that: "All streets are 60 ft. wide. Alleys 20 ft. wide. Full lots are 66 ft. front by 125 feet depth. The Public Square is 32 rods 14 ft., 2 inches, from North to South and 23 rods 10 feet 6 inches from East to West."²

The Original Town lay east of modern H-51 (platted as First Street) four blocks, and extended north from Union Street eight blocks and a fraction. The GB&W tracks later ran through the middle of this plat, dividing it fairly equal north and south. The Public Square, long since obliterated, lay in the center of the plat be-

¹ *Stevens Point Journal*, Feb. 11, 1905.

² *Deeds*, Vol. A, p. 165.

tween Wisconsin & Main north of Willow Street and covered five acres.

Although the plat is referred to as Plover, when a post office was established here on Jan. 14, 1845 it was called Plover Portage, with George Wyatt serving as postmaster. The name of the post office was changed to Plover on Jan. 14, 1850. In fact the village has had several names, reflecting, if nothing else, a high-spirited citizenry. In 1857 an act to incorporate Plover as the village of Algernon, probably named after Algernon B. Crosby, was approved by the legislature.¹ The following year an act to amend this to the village of Stanton was approved May 4.² It has been commonly assumed that the village was called Stanton during the Civil War to honor Lincoln's secretary of war, but the change was made before Lincoln became president, and up to 1858 Edwin M. Stanton had been known chiefly as a successful lawyer in Washington, D. C., not as a statesman. The village may have wished to honor Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading advocate in the 1840s and '50s of women's rights in New York state where many of the Plover pioneers originated. In 1864 the name Stanton was dropped in favor of the old name "Plover."

Thus the village has been known as Plover since 1864 and while incorporated during the early years, the incorporation was dissolved on or before 1870 and it has since been governed by the town board.

The first buildings in the community appear to have been located below Union Street in what was later known as H. H. Young's Addition. An indenture of Oct. 28, 1846 refers to a "store formally occupied by H. Stow & Co. and the tavern house now occupied by John K. & G. W. Mitchell. . ." both in Sec 27 in the west half of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ which places these properties along the east side of modern H-51 near the intersection of H-54 and Trunk B. The store and tavern-house were sold to Samuel L. Keith and Smith Niles of Belvidere, Illinois,

¹ *Private and Local Laws* (1857), Chap. 278, p. 721.

² *Ibid.*, (1858), Chap. 203, p. 485.

who were "not to sell or allow any alcoholic liquors of any kind to be retailed on said premises" or the contract was null and void.

The indenture referred to earlier uses the term "store" in connection with Stow & Company. There is no record that a license to operate a store was ever issued to this company and apparently it was not required. On the other hand a license to operate a "grocery" in Plover was issued to Olaf E. Dreutzer in 1846. (See *Ethnic Groups of Portage County*.)

Sherman believes that John R. (K in the indenture) Mitchell, referred to earlier, was the first settler in Plover Portage, built the first house — no doubt a log cabin — and was the first man to be married in the present limits of the county. The *Historical Atlas of Wisconsin* (1878) states that Enoch G. Bean performed the ceremony which took place on Christmas day, 1842, when Mitchell married Fannie Luther, both of Plover Portage. (There is no record of this marriage in the office of Register of Deeds.)

While the indenture mentioned above refers to the "tavern house now occupied by John K. & G. W. Mitchell," the latter were probably not in business in Plover in 1846, but an application for a license "to keep a tavern at Plover Portage" made by John R. Mitchell and Thomas H. McDill, was approved by the county commissioners on Sept. 5, 1847.

When Sherman arrived at Plover from Milwaukee in October 1848, a trip by lumber wagon requiring eight days, he stopped in Plover at "Rice's Hotel which was then the most pretentious building in this part of the state, the only one that was plastered, painted or provided with brick chimneys."² This was probably the tavern-house of Charles P. Rice who was issued a license on April 10, 1845 which cost \$25 — the second tavern-house, after Houghton & Batten, in the present limits of the county.

The third licensed tavern-house in Plover was oper-

¹ *Proceedings*, County Commissioners Sessions, Vol. I, p. 115.

² *Note Book* no. 9.

ated by John Curran, father of John and Henry Curran, later of Stevens Point, whose application was approved May 25, 1847. A year earlier on Sept. 14 John Curran paid \$5 for a peddler's license. Jesse Anson, an early river pilot, is said to have operated a tavern-house at Plover in the 1840s called the "Goose Horn"¹ but there is no record of a license ever issued to him, and, as legend associates Curran's place with the Goose Horn, it may be that Anson worked for Curran. According to one account, the Goose Horn was a noted gambling resort "where a sport from Galena named Curran prepared one of the rooms with lattice above the gambling table and a wire leading to his chair below. He had a son who looked through the lattices above and telegraphed important information to his tricky father through the secret wire."² The narrator of this story goes on to say that a gambler from Milwaukee lost \$40,000 to the father and son combination although it is unlikely that any stranger from Milwaukee in the 1840s would be carrying \$40,000. It may be that in the retelling of this story through the years, an extra zero was added.

After the incorporation of Plover township in 1849, the matter of local licensing was left up to the town board, but it is clear from the licenses issued up to 1849 that the most important institution in the county was the tavern-house, while the "grocery" or "store" was of secondary importance. This suggests that traffic along the Wisconsin River was brisk, no doubt frequented mostly by river drivers, mill hands, timber cruisers, and speculators who needed a place to eat, drink and sleep more than they needed a pair of shoes or a tailored suit.

The earliest tax roll available on the incorporated village of Stanton (Plover) is for 1861 when the following paid taxes: J. L. Myers, S. J. More, C. A. Loomis, A. S. McDill, J. E. Bachelor, C. A. Loomis, Jr., Atkins Steel & Co., J. R. Haladay, Rogers & Morison, Mrs. Mosier, O. H. P. Bigalow, E. S. Clark, J. D. Rogers, I. H. Morgan, C. Russell, O. Richmond, Mrs. Maston, J. O. Raymond,

¹ *Stagecoach and Tavern Tales of the Old Northwest*, p. 170.

² *Ibid.*, p. 325.

T. H. McDill, Doctor Wylie, John Stumpf, A. O. Brown, Doc Secoy, James Scott, G. S. Brown, W. H. Packard, L. Hanchett, Truman Rice, Jesse Edwards, John Eckels, Minor Stope, J. D. Farr, P. Jones, C. D. Powers, Loren Crosby, H. G. Ingersoll, J. W. Bidell, James Eckels, R. Dunten, Charles Packard, G. R. Walbridge, D. Derby, G. Burk, Isaac Robins, Charles Beach, Joel Webber, G. W. Smith, Christian England, Homer Drake, M. C. Woodworth, J. T. Brands, Decker, M. Mitchel, O. Han-num, J. R. Burkett, G. P. Hibbard, A. N. Woodbury, S. C. Whiting, James Mullen, Ira Stone, M. H. Munger, L. M. Gregory, G. W. Dunsmore, A. M. Dunton, L. Wakeman, A. Pears, John Whitaker, Shink, J. H. Morgan & Co., S. A. Sherman, J. W. Aplin, Nathan Bumpas, John Beach, L. C. Beach, Smalley, S. D. Sherman, A. Smith, A. W. Bell, and D. Doods.

The *Plover Herald*, a weekly newspaper of four pages, published its first issue Thursday, Aug. 7, 1856. James S. Alban and Jervis W. Carter are listed as publishers and editors with H. G. Ingersoll as printer. Vol. I, No. 1 reserved most of the front page for a "true story" called "Marrying in the Dark," but in the editorial section on page two, the readers are advised that the editors wished to set forth their "avowal of principles", the most important of which hinged on the question of whether or not the institution of slavery was to be extended to the free states. James S. Alban lived and died as he believed, a casualty of the Civil War six years later. He was brought home and buried in Plover Cemetery while others went on to finish the task to which he had dedicated his life. Plover and Stockton appear to have had the highest enlistment record in the county and no doubt much of the credit for this goes to the impassioned stand taken against the slave states by Alban in the *Herald* from 1856 to 1861.

Under a column headed "Business Cards" in the first issue of the *Herald* are a number of brief advertisements which today would be called "classifieds." From these it is learned that James S. Alban, Hanchett & Raymond, and Miner Strobe were local attorneys; E. B. Clark & Charles Stone were merchants dealing in "dry goods,

groceries, hardware &c.”; J. D. Rogers had a dry goods store at the corner of Green & River Streets;¹ Wm. Mosier had a retail grocery store and dry goods and S. L. Carpenter, the postmaster, had his office in Mosier’s building, but later moved to the corner lot where the 1895 plat identifies it; Robert Dunteen was the local “Daugerrean artist”, as he billed himself, with rooms in the village hall which may have stood one lot removed from the northeast corner of Elm and Wisconsin; and Lorian Mitchell was a surveyor and general land agent.

Apparently the leading blacksmiths in the village in 1856 were Messrs. Bigelow (O.H.P.) and Hanum (Q.) who also had an “assortment of plows” on hand.

Brown and Bachelor carried a notice in the Aug. 14 issue of the *Herald* advising that they were dealers in dry goods and groceries and were located “2 doors below the American.” The “American House” appears to have been the the leading hostelry in 1856 and had recently been taken over by Calvin A. Loomis, formerly of Knowlton House.

Under marriages, the Aug. 14 issue of the *Herald* carries this notice:

“On Thursday, August 7, 1856, at the residence of J. S. Brown, Plover, by the Hon. Thos. H. McDill, David P. Bentley to Mary Jane Wiley, daughter of Melanchthon Wiley, Esq., all of Eau *Plaine* (Pleine).”

Divorce was also possible. The case of Harriet Farring vs. Pliny Farring was scheduled for Nov. 25, 1856 before Thos. H. McDill, county judge.³

The same issue carries a small notice of the Plover Lodge I.O.O.F. No. 80 which held regular meetings on Saturday each week. A cordial invitation extended to all members of the fraternity was signed by Thos. H. McDill, N. G., Loron Mitchell, V. G., and M. G. Pratt, R. S. The first lodge in the county was established in

¹ The 1895 plat of Plover carries no River Street, nor is the name mentioned in the plat of 1845. The 1861 tax roll indicates that J. D. Rogers was located on the northwest corner of Green & Wisconsin.

² *Plover Herald*, Aug. 21, 1856.

³ *Ibid.*, Sept. 4, 1856.

Plover and many of the head stones in Plover Cemetery bear the Masonic symbol.

On Saturday Aug. 2, 1856 the citizens of Plover went to the local race track, located southwest of the village above Hayden's Corners, to watch "Pinery Boy," alias Ben Franklin, run against "Duke D"Orleans."

An early business man in Plover who disliked having it said that he overcharged his customers was George W. Kollock, who apparently operated a hotel known as Empire House (formerly a tavern house of Sherman and Rice) and a livery stable in connection with the hotel. In the *Plover Times* of July 11, 1868 appears this notice:

"The man that reported he was charged one dollar for hay for his horse at the Empire House on this place on the 4th day of July, is informed that he either told a wilful lie, or was too drunk to know the difference between a dollar and a Hamburg cheese. . ."

The oldest personal letter written in Portage County of which there is contemporary evidence was penned in 1850 by R. W. McLaughlin and postmarked Plover, June 27. It was made in the form of a V-Mail, that is, the writing paper was folded and sealed with a red wax and a place left on the outside for the address. It was sent to "Mr. Jacob McLaughlin, China, Me." a small village in Maine lying northeast of Augusta where some one, no doubt, once had clipper connections with the China trade. Only a few years ago this letter was returned by an anonymous donor in Maine to the postmaster at Plover where it is now in the collection of George J. Sterling. The letter follows:

Plover, Portage Co Wisconsin, June 23d, 1850.

Dear friend

Sir I thought I would scribble few lines, to you and let you know, that I am kicking, with good health hope this will find you and the rest the same. I am to work in Wisconsin Pinery; here is considerable lumbering done for a small place; well, is good deal of pine here is about forty saws. lumber is the principal trade here; cant run it only when the water is high been verry dry this spring. rather hard times here no money; farmers was afraid that would not be any thing raised. and they liked to starved us out had number showers so I think

vegetation will do well now; I am not to work in a mill do not like them. I am making shingles for a Webber that was raised out there in Clinton (a village located about half way between Augusta and Bangor — M.R.) he worked a good deal on the Penobscot (no doubt a reference to the river in Maine which flows through Bangor into the Atlantic — M.R.). good fellow I guess. work for him eight months. Probaly shall work untill next spring if I dont leave the country. I shall work on my own work. I like the country very well. I dont know much about the farming here but I know they can farm with half the labour here that you can there, those that has farms near market make money by it. They people are coming evry day on the unsurveyed land making Claims all they have to do is to go right plowing and fencing by when the land is surveyed and comes in markt they have a good farm for dollar $\frac{1}{4}$ per acer cheap farm Great many are going from here to California they had good news from there last winter. the (y) go oxen horses and on Jackasses backs and even on foot take there provisions blankets and tents with them. they go over crost the mountains throught the devils hole and over his hill where they have to take a tackle with them let themselves down with. I want you to write soon as you get this if they all went last fall that was talking about it and how they are makein of it ther I dont now (know?) what is going on there in China. I wrote few lines to Constant last fall guess they did not amount to much I did not hear from him. Tell Edgar I should like to hear from him. give my respects to the folks. Write soon as you get this, yours,

R.W. McLaughlin

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