

## STOCKTON, The Township of

Across the south half of Stockton into the north of Buena Vista runs the biggest prairie in Portage County. This has been known since pioneer times as "the Prairie" or as the "little Prairie," probably in contrast to the "big Prairie" around Plainfield. It has also been known as "Whig Prairie," a name mentioned for the first time in the subdivision of the town of Hull in 1853 when the surveyor refers to a "road from Whig Prairie to McGreer's Mill" (probably the north-south road east of Whiting Country Club). The appellation "Whig" to this prairie probably grew out of a legend about E. H. Metcalf and John Finch, pioneer settlers to the south of modern Arnott. Both had moved to the county from the New England states and were known to be strong supporters of the Whig movement. Metcalf was also an early river driver on the Wisconsin.

The Prairie covers, roughly, that part of Stockton which lies between two ranges of hills known as the "east bluffs" and the "west bluffs," actually parallel ranges of the terminal moraine. The bluffs are not particularly noticeable today because car travel and improved grades have diminished their former significance, but to a man driving a horse and buggy on a sandy road it was quite another matter.

The eastern fringe of the Prairie begins near the range line between Amherst township and Stockton; in the west it terminates at the "west bluffs" or the range of hills on County Trunk JJ (short-cut from Trunk J to Moore Barn corner). Driving in the opposite direction on this short-cut, that is, eastward, one may gaze from the top of the bluff in a straight line across the entire Prairie in one majestic sweep of color and country charm. A strange sensation is added by the tree line on

both sides of the road, cutting off the view to the south and north, which makes the horizon in the east seem farther away than it really is, like looking into the reverse end of a telescope.

The township, covered mostly by prairie and the watershed of the terminal moraine, has no important rivers, but the glacier left three lakes in the southeast, namely, Lake Thomas in Sec 15, probably named after Thomas Clements who owned land in Sec 10 (1895 plat); Bear Lake on the line between sections 27 & 34; and Adams Lake, probably after J. C. Adams (1895 plat) whose land took in the lake, although in the 1876 plat it is referred to as "Second Lake."

The derivation of the name Stockton is uncertain. Several men in American history bear this name, one of whom signed the Declaration of Independence. Sherman believes it was named after "Com. Stockton," presumably Robert F. Stockton, an American naval officer before the Civil War. It is more likely that the township was named after the city in Durham County, north England.

The subdivision of Stockton in Town 23 was begun Nov. 17 and completed Nov. 28, 1851. Numerous references are made to the Prairie where the surveyors were often forced to build mounds of earth around the corner posts in the absence of trees or stones for witnesses.

The subdivision of Town 24, Range 9, the lower half of which lies in modern Stockton, the upper one half in what later came to be part of Sharon, was begun Jan. 31 and completed Feb. 6, 1852. The field notes mention only one farm of about 40 acres which was situated about a mile northwest of modern Custer. In Town 23, the surveyors of 1851 came upon several farms and "improvements" west of Lombard Cemetery and around Prairie School to the south of Arnott.

Stockton, earlier a part of the town of Plover, was organized in 1855 as one township of 36 sections (T.23, R.9) and was ordered to hold its first meeting on Monday, May 28, at the house of John Shannon.

<sup>1</sup> *Note Book* no. 9.

Effective April 1, 1870 the south one half of Town 24, Range 9, was detached from Sharon and attached to Stockton. Five years later Amherst township annexed six sections off the east boundary of Stockton. In 1894 Sharon attempted to get back not only part of its own township from Stockton, but also to have six sections previously annexed by Amherst restored to Stockton on the plea that "this part of the town is never or seldom given a voice in the town board and in consequence are not justly dealt with."<sup>1</sup> Two days later a petition from 270 residents was read to the County Board remonstrating any division of the town of Stockton "as we deem any such division wholly unnecessary and would be more expensive to the taxpayers of said town."<sup>2</sup>

By 1895 another change of heart had taken place. Stockton submitted a petition to have sections 19 to 36 lying in its own territory in Town 24, Range 9, restored to Sharon "where it once belonged, and also restore to the town of Stockton the six sections that the town of Amherst has which originally belonged to Stockton."<sup>3</sup> This petition was approved and the six sections were again attached to Stockton and the south one-half of Town 24 to Sharon. A year and a half later in 1898 this action was rescinded and the old boundary lines were restored which have since remained unchanged.

At the first town meeting held in 1855 the whole number of votes cast was 56 with O. H. Lamoreux being elected town chairman against no opposition. Evelon (?) Crosby and Wm. Bremmer were elected side supervisors against no opposition, and Geo. W. Morrill defeated Wm. B. Wadsworth for town clerk. Morrill was also elected town superintendent of schools. Peter McMillan defeated Daniel Baker for assessor. O. H. Lamoreux, J. C. Maxfield, Wm. H. Richmond, and Wm. H. Nobles were elected justices of the peace. James Lytle was elected treasurer, Nelson Blodgett, Calvin Richmond and Henry Benson, constables, and O. D. Richmond, sealer

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. VI, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

of weights and measures. These officers held their posts until the spring election of 1856 when a new town board was elected at which time Joel F. Webber was named town chairman.

Down to 1900 the Stockton town board continued to be dominated by Irishmen, but after 1900 by Polish settlers. In 1901, for the first time, Alex Kluck, descendant of one of the first Polish families in the county, was elected town chairman, together with M. W. Welch and August Lorebecki, side supervisors.

After the railroad from Green Bay came through Stockton in the early 1870s, a community developed around the junction of the railroad and the main north-south highway (Trunk J). In 1882 a railway station was established here called Arnott, no doubt after William L. Arnot, a former town chairman. The town records consistently spell this name with one 't' but when the post office was established here on Nov. 2, 1882 it was called Arnott. Joseph A. Bremmer served as postmaster.

Before the 1930s Arnott had a resident doctor, a bank, railway depot, potato warehouses and several stores and saloons. The bank closed in the Depression and the railway depot has since been discontinued. On Good Friday 1912 the east side of the business district south of the railway tracks was largely destroyed by fire. It was gradually rebuilt and today Arnott caters to a farming community with groceries, garage repairs, feed supplies and liquid refreshments. It was never incorporated.

The Custer post office, established on Dec. 12, 1876, Leonard Van Hecke postmaster, was probably named after Lt.-Col. George Armstrong Custer who, on June 25, 1876, was defeated at the battle of Little Big Horn and who in death became immortal in the folk lore of the American West not to mention in O. Besker's bar-room painting called "Custer's Last Stand" which shows him surrounded by the dead and dying of his command, pistol in one hand, sword upraised in the other, apparently unruffled by his impending doom.

A small community known as Stockton appears to have been the first in the county to develop east of Plover in sections 19, 30 and 31 which lie in the southwest cor-

ner of the township in the vicinity of Morrill Cemetery. The 1876 plat identifies a post office here, actually established Feb. 17, 1858, situated on the south side of the Air Line Road which ran southeast at this point in Sec 31. Nelson Blodgett served as the postmaster and the post office was probably located in his tavern-house known as "Stockton House." The 1876 plat also identifies a cheese factory about a mile to the north of the post office, also on the Air Line Road, not far from the farm of J. H. Morgan (1876 plat) who Sherman says was the first farmer in the town of Stockton (today part of the Leo Buza place).

Meanwhile, another post office called Grant was established Dec. 14, 1864 apparently in Sec 31, Town 24, of Stockton, near what is today called Stockton on the Soo Line Railroad. As this post office was established at the height of Ulysses S. Grant's fame, it is reasonable to assume that it was named after the general of the Army of the Potomac. Samuel Brown served as postmaster. The post office was discontinued in 1866, re-established a few weeks later, when Algernon Crosby was named postmaster, and was discontinued Aug. 7, 1874 when, there is reason to believe, the post office calling itself Stockton, east of Plover, was moved to the new location on the Wisconsin Central (Soo Line) east of Stevens Point. This post office was discontinued in 1886, re-established that same year, discontinued in 1905, re-established in 1911 and closed in the halcyon days of the New Deal. After the Stockton post office was moved over to the railroad, the former location around Morrill Cemetery was known until past the century as "Old Stockton."

"New Stockton" was created by the coming of the Wisconsin Central Railroad in 1871 and eventually a siding was provided on the south side of the tracks to accommodate the growing production of grain and potatoes in the area. In the early 1900s the main track was raised for several miles along this stretch of the line to bring it closer to the Custer hill grade at which time the siding was relocated on the north side of the track. The local depot was discontinued in 1957.

In the early 1900s, in addition to potato warehouses and post office, the village of Stockton probably had a grocery store, a blacksmith shop, a feed mill and three saloons, all on the south side of the tracks, all since discontinued. Two potato warehouses, in use up to early 1950s, were closed "since Truman," according to Stanley Finnessy who was referring to the termination of subsidies on potatoes inaugurated in World War II. A feed mill operated by George P. Breitenstein in 1958, north of the tracks, and a tavern-store on the south side of the viaduct, are all that remain, aside from several residences.

The smallest community in the town of Stockton lies in a valley to the southeast, once known as Fancher after the family of the same name, but more recently as "Smokie Spur." The community was created by the Green Bay & Western which, acceding to requests by farmers in the area, built a "Y" on the south side of the track. Two potato warehouses were built along the "Y" and at least one saloon and a blacksmith shop, later converted to a garage. The "Y" was removed in the early 1950s and since then Smokie Spur has reverted to a one-tavern, one-garage town with John Korlesky buying pickles in season. Korlesky, a Polish farmer in the neighborhood who grew up in a settlement of Welshmen east of Wild Rose, speaks with an unaffected Yankee accent. The fact that he has lived since youth in a predominantly Polish neighborhood without being influenced by his linguistic environment makes his case unique.

But none can suggest with certainty where the name Smokie Spur originated. To begin with it is a misnomer as there was no spur here, but a "Y", and there was no depot, only a flagstop. One veteran of the area, standing in the pickle shed on Sept. 5, 1957, said he had heard that it was called Smokie Spur because a man who lived near the track "smoked so much." Whatever the origin, when a post office was established here on Aug. 11, 1891, Orson Fancher postmaster, it was called Fancher. But the Fancher families on the male line have all died or moved away and the post office was discontinued in 1913. Thus as long as the Fanchers were living here,

and as long as mail was being addressed to Fancher, there was no reason to call it by any other name. But since the demise or departure of the Fanchers and the closing of the post office, the memory of the name has become less sharp with the passing of each year. Whether the legend of the man with the pipe who "smoked so much" is true or not, a local tavern has a beer sign on the road a short distance to the north with an arrow pointed south which refers to "Smokie Spur, 1/2 mile." A school about a quarter of a mile to the east (discontinued) was known as the Smokie Spur School and in 1958 people were even beginning to refer to St. Mary of Mt. Carmel Church, which overlooks the valley to the south, as the "Smokie Spur Church" instead of the more common "Fancher Church."

A business venture, organized mostly by farmers in the southern part of the county after the turn of the century, was called the Stockton Insurance Company. From documents issued in 1906-1909 the average assessment was \$4 per member. The company continued in business until the late 1920s when it failed.

Appearing in the 1858 tax roll of Stockton are these names: C. H. Allen, Gilbert Allen, J. C. Adams, Nelson Andrews, John Allen, J. Aldrich, W. K. Bartlett, E. D. Benson, Henry Benson, George Bickle, Gilbert Burns, Wm. Bush, W. N. Burrington, John Buckley, D. P. Bentley, Thomas Parker, Sarah Blodget, John Bousier, John Bachelor, Charles Barrows, Henry Betsinger, Daniel Baker, Wm. Bremmer, George Bremmer, Jeremiah Bennett, E. Burke, Joseph Boisely, J. G. Cummings, Joseph Crawford, John Crawford, A. B. Crosby, (?) Clark, Charles Coats, Charles Creed, Mathew Connough, Abner Coffin, E. H. Crosby, George W. Cate, Henry Clements, Norman Danforth, J. R. Danforth, Daniel Dean, John Dolan, Lidia Dawley, J. N. Davis, Samuel Drake, Davis Danforth, L. H. Dwinnell, J. W. Dwinnell, P. N. Davis, Alfred Earl, A. Felch, B. F. Felch, A. N. Fancher, Jacob Fancher, J. H. Fancher, John Finnisee, Dayton Gilbert, Nelson Gee, Joseph Hewit, Thomas Hunter, Thomas Higgins, Hiram Higgins, Jane Harkness, Thomas Harkness, Jr., S. B. Hulce, J. S. Howard, Luther Hunter,

Charles Huistit (?), Benjamin Hags (?), Hinds, Thomas Iverson, Mrs. Jackson, Horace Judd, John Kimball, Joel King, Patric O'Keefe (no land but personal property of \$120,) O. H. Lamoreaux, J. E. Lytle, G. H. Lombard, Washington Lombard, James Lombard, J. R. Lombart (probably Lambert,) Edward Moyer, Samuel Merrill, Louis Morre, Sarah J. Moore, E. H. Metcalf, Elias Maslett (or Marlett,) Herman Mitchels, McCapes, Peter McMellon, J. C. Maxfield, Geo. W. Morrell, W. P. McCormick, Owen McHugh, James McHugh, Joseph McHugh, James McCormick (personal property only,) Andrew Mathewson, Asa E. Mathewson, H. Morrison, Sally Morrison, W. H. Nobles, Freeman, Nelson, Henry Norris, Ira M. Norris (or Morris), John Ogden, Mr. Orbison, John Philips, J. C. Perkins, Belle Perkins, Wm. G. Packer (probably Packard,) E. B. Patterson, Oliver Richmond, C. D. Richmond, Mr. Roberts, H. M. Richmond, Hiram Riker, M. A. Rousseau, George Sterling, D. J. Sanders, Michael Shortell, Samuel Seaman, Nathaniel Shannon, John Shannon, H. C. Shervin, W. H. Sherwin, S. R. Sherwin, Joseph Seamen, B. S. Sharpstien, M. C. Slutts, Stafford Spalding, J. Sweet, T. Tompkins, J. Hooker, G. E. Upton, Benj. Vanvalkenburgh, Andrew Warren, Jr., Herbert Ward, James Woodbury, Wm. Walton, M. L. Winslow, J. B. Winslow, W. D. Worden, Stephen Worden, A. Worden, J. F. Webber, Mr. Wells, A. M. Woodbury, J. Nellen (or Kellen) Estate, George Yorton and James Young.

Serving the town of Stockton, with a population of 1,371, in 1957-58, were Stanley Kirchling, chairman; John Adamski and Frank Somers, supervisors; Leonard A. Groshek, clerk; Joseph Pliska, treasurer; Adolph Somers, assessor; Anton Kruzicki, justice of the peace; Ben Gladowski, constable; and Joseph Gosh, health officer.

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