

HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF METOMEN

Metomen Township lies on the west edge of Fond du Lac County. In the early days it was considered the richest town in the county with the cities not included. It is Township 15 north, of Range 14 east and contains 36 full sections of arable land. When first settled in 1844 and 1845, it was rich and had undulating prairies, openings, marshes and originally groves of heavy forest but scarcely one twentieth of area in timber. On the uneven portions there was a sandy loam with subsoil of gravel and an occasional amount of limestone. In the lowlands there was found vegetable mold which was the choice alluvium of marshy meadows. Actually, when drained became a mine of agricultural wealth. "Round Prairie" which comprised several thousand acres northwest of Brandon was celebrated for its beauty and its fertility. It sometimes was called the "Eden of the West". The East branch of the Rock River rises in the township as well as the Grand River in the southwest corner and also Silver Creek in Section 2. The Township has these remarkable springs and streams. The largest spring in the county is the principal source of Silver Creek. The Caraboo Spring on the old Col. Mansfield farm was twenty – five feet across and discharged an astonishing volume of water, at the head of the Grand River. For general purposes Metomen excelled by few in the state. Because of these streams early mills were founded in the Fairwater area by 1850.

The first farmers were from New England and adapted farming practices from the East. Methods changed as time progressed. Dairying and cheese making were very important in early years.

ORGANIZATION AND PRODUCTION

Township is a surveyor's measurement, but terms town and township are often interchanged to describe a unit of government not part of a village or city. Metomen is one of twenty-one in the county. It was organized at a meeting of citizens April 7, 1846. At that time, the town of Waupun and Alto were part of the town of Metomen. Both Brandon and Fairwater villages were part of the township. The first resolution which was passed established the pay of all town officers at 75 cents per day unless otherwise fixed by law. In 1846 the taxes levied were \$161.32 of which \$100.87 were actually collected. By 1859 there were 15,010 improved acres; wheat 130,469 bushels raised; 4,165 lbs. of wool; potatoes 6,716 lbs harvested; orchard products with a value of \$126; 42,595 lbs. of butter; livestock value of \$58,967; slaughtered animal value at \$12,250. There was a population of 1,952 people. By 1870 the population had dropped to 1,898. 1930 the farmland was valued at \$36.00 per acre, half of the value of ten years earlier. Farmers were hit hard by the Depression. One half of it was mortgaged. By 1990 there was 21,137 acres of farmland which was about 87% with 1.9% forests and 9.4% wetlands. By 1997 the farmland was down to 20, 558 acres.

HISTORIC NAME AND SETTLERS

"Metomen", comes from the Menominee language. It means "a grain of corn;" It was christened by F.D. Bowman at whose home the township was organized. The first "white man's cabin" was built by Col. Mansfield in 1844 just north of Fairwater in Section 19. His family didn't arrive until several other homes were established. The first entry of

land in Metomen was made by C.D. Higley of 160 acres of Government land. It was a half mile west of Reed's Corners. The founding of the first home and settler was due to Daniel Eggleston who brought his family to a log cabin in June of 1845. He farmed 400 acres and was a town supervisor and held several local offices. Jacob Carter and family came one week later. He came from Massachusetts and at first worked with his brother in three counties thrashing grain. He was said to have built the best dwelling in the township. He held five improved farms of 460 acres and was a postmaster, assessor and town chairman. William Plocker was an immigrant from the Netherlands and came in 1847 settling south of Fairwater on a farm where he ran a stagecoach inn. He became Fairwater's first postmaster, a partner in the flour mill and legal counsel to many of the village's settlers. He also served as a town supervisor, chairman of the FDL County Board, town clerk and a member of the Assembly in 1875. Shortly that year other settlers were F. Newland who settled on Section 20 as a prominent sheep raiser and trustee of the Free-Will Baptist Church. Josiah Batson settled in 1862 in Section 29 where he farmed raising alot of sheep and a few cows. There was Almon Osborn in Section 2 in 1845 S.H. French, E.F. Mansfield, Adelbert M. Bly farmer in Section 14, Deacon George Bly a farmer in Section 16 who only held one local office but resulted in improved and straighted highways. In just two years all the Government land was claimed by actual settlers as the settlement was prosperous and rapidly increasing. The first birth was Franklin French in October of 1845 in the unfinished cabin of Jacob Carter. The first fire was in the French hay-thatched cabin the month prior. A Baptist minister named Jeremiah Murphy preached the first sermon in the spring of 1846 in the cabin of Daniel Eggleston. A Rev. W.G. Miller was the first preacher whose charge was the town of Metomen. At Reeds Corners in 1847, a Wesleyan society was organized by Elder Marcellus Barnum. It later was merged into a Congregational church located at Reed's Corners. There was a burial but not a death that first year. A wedding took place in April of 1846 and the first public school was established that same year. Then a post office was begun named "Grand River," with Jacob Carter as the first Postmaster. About that same time another post office was established called "Mansfield" with Daniel Eggleston as Postmaster. They were so close that only "Mansfield" survived. Stanton built a saw mill in 1846 and Dakin & Lathrop built a flouring mill in 1847 on the Grand River branch within the town limits and near Fairwater. Religious services were held in the cabins of settlers or schoolhouses. However, in the summer of 1858 the Free Will Baptists of Fairwater erected the first church in Metomen.

REED'S CORNERS AND METOMEN

The northern portion of Metomen was settled as early as the western area. It was called Reeds Corners and was once of local importance. It had stores, shops, depot, post office and more. In 1873 the post office and the depot were removed a half a mile south and the station named Metomen. The location of two churches there gave Reeds Corners notoriety named after Warren Reed who identified with the locality. Metomen and Brandon were the two railroad stations. There were two cheese factories. The farmhouses were spacious and there were large barns. The statement was made that no town in Wisconsin could show such a large percentage of first-class barns as Metomen and a few surrounding townships. They had a Protective Association with seventy

members. There were eleven schoolhouse and nine churches in the town with the settlers coming largely from New England .

FAIRWATER

Because of it's favorable site, the village on the Grand River flourished with the flouring-mill built by Dakin and Lathrop. It rapidly grew and for ten years it was the commercial center of a large tract of developing land. The railroad , built in 1856 left Fairwater "out in the cold". It began to decline.

The first church in Metomen was built at Fairwater with the name of First Free-Will Baptist Church of Fairwater dedicated in July of 1856 at a cost of \$1600. In 1863 the congregation built a parsonage at a cost of \$1000. The original membership was 8. A second Baptist Church of Metomen was organized in 1851 at Fairwater, but didn't continue to flourish and later became a temporary lodge of the Good Templars. The Lodge was organized in 1876. The first Evangelical Lutheran Church of East Fairwater was organized in June 1872 and the church was built that first year. There were 47 families.

The leading businesses of Fairwater was the flouring mill, the post office, two general stores a blacksmith shop, a shoe shop, two carpenter shops, one stone mason, a secret society, two ministers, three churches and one saloon.

In 1912 Jess Laper began a power company along the Grand River at the site of the village's landmark flour mill which was established in 1847. It was called the Laper Electric Company and was a generating plant for nearly 30 years. A 29 ton water wheel towering nearly 50 ft above the landscape was built and housed in a wooden structure. There was a block building that housed generators driven by a pair of diesel engines, a refurbished Cadillac engine, and steam from the Badger Hemp plant across the river.

BRANDON

On the southeastern part of Metomen was the prosperous village called Brandon. The first building in the village limits was built by R.W. Pride in 1849. There were various important people such as John Abercrombie who was a lumber merchant; Lyman Marsh was a successful farmer and a good mechanic; H.G. Mathews, a miller and farmer owning the Brandon Flouring Mills; John L. Moore, a general hardware merchant as "Dealer in Hardware ,Stoves, Tinware, Farm Tools, etc."; C.W. Ferguson & Bro., a mercantile business; Henry Gleason, a farmer and grain-buyer with T. Watson; Levi J. Hall who was a druggist, grocer, dealer in coal and salt and J.I. Case & Co tharashers; George Russell who was a man surpassed in wealth by few with many investments in real estate throughout the county; Zenas Scott a hardware merchant which developed into an exclusive hardware trade; Martin C. Short editor of the "Brandon Times" and postmaster in Brandon; Samuel Weinstock established a general merchandise store called Weinstock & Bro., being in business longer than any other merchant. Thus with all these ambitious settlers, the village became a hub in the township.

PRESENT YEARS

As the Town of Metomen has entered the 21st Century agriculture remains very important in its makeup. There are few but bigger dairies. The small dairy farm and flocks of sheep are extremely few. Fewer farmers work their own small farms. Many

farms are large with rented as well as owned land . There are irrigation systems on some of the larger farms. There are those who raise young stock for the large dairies. Quite a few people work off the farms at various jobs as well as their wives. There are the hobby farms with a variety of stock. The main crops seem to be corn, wheat, alfalfa, soybeans, peas and sweet corn. Preparing the fields, planting and harvesting of the crops is done with very large and expensive equipment. Sprays and herbicides eliminate the cultivation that was needed a half century ago. Even the stonepiles are disappearing because of the methods of cultivation. There are small businesses as well as a fertilizer plant and company to which the farmers sell their grains. There are farms that raise horses but they are used for hobby and pleasure. The villages are no longer part of the township makeup as such. They have separate offices to maintain their local ordinances taxes, parks and businesses. Post offices are maintained in Fairwater and Brandon with rural delivery for Metomen residents coming out of Brandon , Ripon and Markesan. The fire district is divided between Brandon and Ripon. The election process is run by Metomen Township mandated by Fond du Lac Co. and the State of WI in the Town of Metomen Building. The roads are kept in good repair by funds through taxes. All in all, the Town of Metomen is a great place to live.

REFERENCES

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