

JUNCTION CITY, The Village of

When the Wisconsin Valley Railroad (Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul) intersected the Wisconsin Central (Soo) tracks in 1874, a village was almost a certainty at this point and it was also reasonable to assume that it would be called a "junction." In the proceedings of the town of Stevens Point, under whose jurisdiction this area fell before 1879, there are several references to town meetings held in "Junction City." But when the post office was established here on July 20, 1874, with George E. Oster serving as postmaster, it was officially called Junction. The bank of the village still uses this designation, i.e., Junction State Bank.

But the citizens of the community liked the appellation Junction City better. When it was decided to incorporate, the original petition, sponsored by Joseph Skibba and four others, prayed that the territory described be incorporated "as the village of Junction City." The election to incorporate was held May 9, 1911 with 38 votes cast of which 32 were for incorporation and six against.

Between 1879 and 1911 Junction City was administered by the town of Carson. The first election of village officers was held in the village hall June 6, 1911 when 23 voters went to the polls. Elected to office were Jacob Skibba, president; A. B. Ferkey, O. Voyer, Henry Rux, Frank Dix, August Piekarski, and Dave Heise, trustees; S. S. Leith, clerk; John Slota, treasurer; Wm. Arians, assessor; E. J. Heun, justice; Anton Zivney, constable; and H. G. Grashorn, supervisor.

The first taxpayers listed in the Junction City assessment roll were Frank Kania, Martin Jagodsinski, John Gurskey, Valentine Kocejez, N. S. Durst, Aug. Mallek, Albert Gurskey, Peter Selinski, Frank Robek, Henry

Rux, Henry Voyer, John Columba, H. G. Grashorn, Joseph Gingle, A. B. Ferkey, Wm. Klimont, Joe Zivney, Aug. Piekarski, Frank Dix, Anton Zivney, John Skibba, Frank Zelinski, Frank Gingle, L. Leshavick, Mrs. Lena Voyer, A. L. Voyer, Jacob Skibba, Mrs. J. E. Burns, A. Arians, Wm. Vertheim, Junction State Bank, David Heise, Joe Dix, and Joe Chyplewski. The personal property roll reveals there were eight horses in the village and 12 neat cattle of which Jacob Skibba owned four of the horses and all of the cattle. Five persons were raising swine and, while there were nine wagons, carriages and sleighs, there were no automobile owners in Junction City in 1911.

One of the early restaurants in Junction City is referred to in 1877 when an auction was held on "a certain two story frame building" situated on the northwest angle of the Wisconsin Central and Wisconsin Valley Railways and "being the same building erected therein as a eating house. . ." It was sold to H. Lefebure, the highest bidder, for \$604 who "further saith that said sale was made in the day time and in all respects honestly, faithfully and legally. . ." Later this may have been the combined hotel-depot which was situated east-west along the Soo Line tracks in the northwest angle and, according to the *Portage County Directory* of 1896, known as "Russel House," operated by Frank Russel. Either before or later, it may also have been known as "Rosebud House."

Perhaps the first store in Junction was operated as a company store by one of the local saw mill firms. The 1876 plat carries an advertisement of Thomas Mathews, manufacturer and dealer in shingles, whose mill was being built in the early spring of 1876. Either a saw mill or shingle mill was already in operation,¹ which was probably built by a Williams & Russell. The 1876 plat also carries an advertisement of E. Farrond, operator of the Junction City Hotel & Billiard Hall. This may have been the same building bought at auction in 1877 by H. Lefebure. On March 6, 1876 the *Stevens Point*

¹ *Stevens Point Journal*, Feb. 9, 1876.

Journal reported that one year earlier there were only two log shanties here and "now there are two depots, two saw mills, one hotel, one boarding house, one saloon, three dwelling houses and school house. . ."

George Oster, who became the first postmaster in 1874, operated a store, believed to have been a saw mill company store at the start, but which was later taken over by himself. The 1876 plat also reveals that Oster was station agent of the Wisconsin Valley Railroad.

Charles Holbrook had a store on Main Street, north of the depot, which is identified on the 1895 plat. This plat also reveals that the post office was then located in the southeast angle of the tracks, across from a saloon operated by William Arians in the southwest angle. The *Portage County Directory* of 1896 reveals that F. E. Foubare operated a saloon and restaurant; Henry Grashorn was a merchant; Jacob Skibba, Jr., was a merchant; and Mrs. Lena Voyer was the proprietor of Voyer House.

Behind Russel House, north a few rods, stood a saloon, also operated by Russel, later a cafe owned by Carl Wallengh. A few yards beyond the saloon towards Main Street stood the CM&SP depot, known as the "Red depot." The Soo Line ticket and telegraph office was eventually taken out of Russel House, the Red depot demolished and a combined depot serving both railways was constructed directly within the northwest angle of the tracks where it still stands, probably one of the most colorful of the old style railway depots in Portage County.

Across the CM&SP tracks, i.e., in the northeast angle, stood Voyer House, built by Oswald Voyer. The original Voyer was built as a two-story, one-directional frame building but later enlarged to its present size, now a part tavern and residence. Here, in this dining room, big enough for at least four tables with six places each, the early residents of Junction met for masquerade parties, wedding affairs and dances. A postcard of 1909 shows the dining room furnished with wide-backed wooden chairs, heavy-legged tables covered with fresh

linen and place settings, each table crowned in the center with a bowl of fruit. There was no rug on the floor — the easier to mop before linoleum was invented.

In 1909, when a postcard photo was taken of the hotel across the tracks, ex-Russel House, it was called Hotel Voyer Annex, which had been taken over by son Arthur. During the night of Oct. 6, 1939 the annex, then operated as a restaurant and soda fountain, burned, as well as the former saloon converted to a cafe by Carl Wallengh. Neither was rebuilt, leaving a long train of memories to those who could still remember, but only a barren spot to those who could not.

In 1921, three men from Junction City, A. L. Voyer, Peter Layman and George Tendler won considerable publicity both for themselves and the village when they held the winning tickets in a lottery in which the first prize was the Northern Hotel at Chippewa Falls. However, there were several others who shared the same block of tickets in the lottery, mostly employees of the Soo Line. Before leaving to claim the prize, the three men went to Stevens Point and engaged an attorney, W. E. Fisher, who was taken in as one of the winners on share basis. When the trio from Junction City arrived in Chippewa Falls on July 5, the *Chippewa Herald* described them as "well attired in Palm Beach suits, silk shirts and straw hats, in reality three good looking men. No wonder the ladies fell for them. And such luck! Nothing like it ever heard of in Chippewa Falls, Eau Claire, the Northwest, or the whole country [and a] greater reception than if President Harding was in town trying to get acquainted."¹ The hotel was eventually disposed of and the winners divided the profits.

A document of interest concerns the first volunteer fire department of Junction City organized Feb. 6, 1923. Elected to head the new organization were Paul Bernhagen, fire chief; R. I. Grover, assistant chief and inspector; August Piekarski, Jr., captain (both crews);

¹ *Chippewa Herald*, July 6, 1921.

William Skibba, lieutenant of engine crew; Barney Skibba, 1st fireman; Henry Martens, 2nd fireman; Fritz Jingle, 3rd; Geo. Stertz, 4th; Edward Lasacage, 5th; and Edwin Lasavage, 6th fireman. Willard St. John was named 1st sub-lieutenant and Frank Strykowski, 2nd sub-lieutenant; Barnet Berg, 3rd sub; Carl Wollengh, 4th, and Gustave Burge, 5th sub-lieutenant. Frank Pekarski was made captain of the ladder crew, Daniel Skibba, 1st lieutenant, and Frank Skibba, James Skibba, John Marten, Wm. Bernhagen and Joe Beck 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th ladderman.

Serving with the fire department appeared to be more important in this early period than it is now and more fun, too. From a photo, probably taken in 1923, the fire department possessed one two-wheeled cart pulled by hand, equipped with chemical pressure tanks. As antiquated as this equipment appears today, from the reports of fires extinguished by the department it is obvious that it served its purpose in a small village still unable to afford the luxury of a fire engine, but dissatisfied with the old-time bucket-brigade. What the volunteers lacked in equipment they made up for in the pride they took in answering an alarm, most of which were answered, according to their own records, within ten minutes.

In 1926 the Junction City fire department began to file a quarterly report to the state industrial commission on various premises inspected by a member of the department. And with the increase in the use of electricity, it was found that more and more fires were being caused by short-circuits and faulty wiring. Accordingly, the Wisconsin state electrical code was adopted and the village board of Junction City fell in line by passing ordinances relating to electrical construction, repair and extension work, effective Jan. 1, 1930. Under this ordinance a permit was required from an authorized member of the department to construct or repair any electrical installation and, once finished, it had to pass inspection. This was not a law; it was a code issued by the state for the cities to follow if desirable and each was responsible for enforcing the code by passing or

dinances according to local circumstances. In this manner the pattern of life in the village was being changed, not by man, but by the instruments of man himself. The more he made for himself in the way of creature comforts, the more freedom he lost because each new technical advance required a new regulation. A man could not clutter up his own basement any longer.

By 1930 the Junction City fire department was paying \$1 to each officer attending a fire and \$1 for attendance at monthly meetings. It was also found necessary to issue regulations governing the responsibilities of each member of the crews. These new regulations hint at another facet of life in the village, no matter how small, namely, definition of responsibility. In the early period everyone ran to a fire and fought the flames with water buckets. If one building burned it was not always a threat to the entire village because a neighbor's house was usually separated by at least a lot or two. But as more and more homes crowded together, a fire in one could mean a fire in all. The element of chance had to be eliminated, individual initiative restricted and duplication of effort avoided. Everything had to be directed from a higher source and each man in the department had to limit himself to one assignment in order to avoid the common fault of having "too many chiefs and not enough Indians."

In addition to several general stores, filling stations and garages, Junction City in 1958 was served by the Junction State Bank and a weekly newspaper known as the *Community Press*, the only other English weekly in the county in 1958 aside from the *Amherst Advocate*. Established on Sept. 26, 1946, it is owned and edited by Irwin M. Denkmann under the firm name of Press Printing Company. The weekly is published every Thursday, has four pages and a circulation of about 410.

The Junction State Bank was organized Oct. 2, 1909 with a capitalization of \$10,000. The original 23 stockholders were all from outside the county with the exception of H. G. Grashorn, who was made the first president, and John Slota and T. J. Pitt of Junction

City. The capitalization was increased in 1946 to \$30,000. The statement of condition at the close of business Dec. 31, 1957 revealed that the bank had total deposits of \$1,279,833.38 and a capital structure of \$178,528.63. Directors were W. B. Greateon, president; Jacob Hertel, vice president; and John Perziak, Lloyd Dickrell and Louis Joosten, while LeRoy Wanta served as cashier.

Serving on the village board of Junction City, with a population of 329, in 1957-58, were Paul B. Kitowski, president; Joseph Kabot and Edward Lesavich, trustees; Martha Martens, clerk; LeRoy Wanta, treasurer; Eiolf Hanson, assessor; Irwin Denkmann, justice; Edward Panko, constable; and Paul Kitowski, supervisor.

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