

## APPENDICES & SOURCES

# Appendix I

## THE SETTLEMENT OF WOOD COUNTY, WISCONSIN: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

Situated in the center of Wisconsin, Wood County straddles the division between the glaciated and unglaciated regions of the state. The border between the marshes in the county's southwestern area and the more elevated land in the northern area marks this separation, and the powerful force of the Wisconsin River, which falls one hundred feet in its fifteen-mile course through the southeastern corner of the county, is a result of it. The existence of this source of water power in the great Wisconsin pinery first attracted the white man to the area which became Wood County. With his crude, water-driven lumber mills, he came to the wilderness hoping to gain a fortune.

Because the Wisconsin River was a main waterway, and because its fall through the county produced sufficient power to operate lumber mills, the first Wood County settlements arose along its bank from Whitney's Rapids at modern Nekoosa north to the Grand Rapids at modern Wisconsin Rapids. Within a short time the choice sites were all in use and the wilderness began to be pushed back from the bank of the river. New people coming into the pinery had to venture into the less accessible western half of the county to find suitable locations for milling lumber. Thus, the Yellow River area became Wood County's second major site of settlement.

The necessity of staying close to the rivers which provided power for production and water routes to major markets ended with the extension of railroad lines into northern Wisconsin and the expanded use of steam power to operate the lumber mills. From the 1870s on, new settlements sprang up at railroad depots often relatively far from any significant stream. In brief, the settlement of Wood County was first dependent upon the location of the Wisconsin and Yellow rivers and later often followed the railroad lines.

The story of the settlement of Wood County begins in 1831-2 when Daniel Whitney, David R. Whitney, and A. B. Sampson

erected a sawmill on the Wisconsin River just opposite Ne-koosa and north of the state highway 73 bridge. The second sawmill to be erected on the river was built by Sam Merrill and his partner, Grignon, in the late 1830s, and was evidently located at modern Port Edwards. By 1839 two lumbering establishments owned by Bloomer, Chamberlain, Adams, Strong, and Hill were in operation at the Grand Rapids. Also in the late 1830s Robert Wakeley established a tavern at Pointe Basse, not far south of Whitney's Mill.

During the 1840s the Wisconsin River settlements grew in size and importance. In 1845 the Grand Rapids settlement was formally named when Eliphalet S. Miner, owner of a general store there, became the first postmaster of the Grand Rapids postoffice. Cruikshank's Plat (also called Cruikshank's Town of Grand Rapids), the earliest real estate venture in the area, was surveyed in 1847 at the direction of John J. Cruikshank. Meanwhile, the Grignon and Merrill site had expanded: in 1840 John Edwards, Sr., and Henry Clinton started milling operations at "the French village," where a few French-Canadian families had already erected a stave mill.

Two other important lumber mill sites came into prominence during this decade. In 1846 Francis Biron bought out Faye and Draper's pioneer lumber company and began a business which formed the nucleus of the modern village of Biron just north of Wisconsin Rapids. Biron's old mill stood at the present location of the paper manufacturing plant of Consolidated Papers, Inc. Not far south of the Grand Rapids, on the west bank of the river, Sam Merrill, who had helped build the Grignon mill near the French village, started his own mill at a place later known as Hurleypoint (presently the South Side of Wisconsin Rapids). The name Hurleypoint did not come into use, however, until the 1870s when Timothy W. Hurley had a lumber mill there. In the late 1880s this also became the site of the Central Pulp and Water Power Company's paper mill, the first to be established in Wood County (Garr.).

The almost twenty years of growth from the building of Whitney's Mill in 1831-2 to the platting of the Grand Rapids settlement in 1847 left Wood County largely an untouched wilderness. The pioneers had settled in the Wisconsin River area and had not yet begun their assault upon the forest covering the rest of the county. Indeed, Wood County did not even exist as a legislative entity. The territory now within the county's borders was divided into the towns of Grand Rapids and Eagle Point, and was part of Portage County. Nevertheless, the development along the Wisconsin River during these twenty years had great significance for the county's future, for almost

every mill site established at this time later developed into one of its present cities or villages. Thus, the groundwork had already been laid for Port Edwards, Wisconsin Rapids' East and South sides, and Biron.

The 1850s ushered in an era of expansion along the Yellow River and into several other parts of the county. In about 1850 George Hiles came to the Yellow River region, and by 1851 he had set up a lumber mill there. In 1858 he was granted the Dexterville postoffice, which he apparently kept at the site of his mill near what later became the Dexterville settlement.

The timberlands along the Yellow River also attracted to the county Oliver W. Pitts, who set up a lumber mill around 1856 at a site which at first was called Pitt's Mill and later developed into the city of Pittsville.

In the northwestern corner of the county Solomon L. Nason and his brother William G. Nason cleared ground for a pioneer farm in 1855 (Jones, 276), and Solomon established a lumber mill and a general store nearby which became the nucleus of the Nasonville settlement. In 1859 he was granted the Nasonville postoffice; later he also maintained a stopping place for stagecoach travelers at Nasonville.

Closer to the Wisconsin River three other mill sites were in existence during the 1850s. One of these, located at Seneca Corners in east central Wood County, contained Tuttle's, Scott's, and Stearn's mills. From Civil War days until no later than 1873 the Forest Tavern was part of this settlement. Stearn's sawmill continued in operation through the 1880s. Beginning in 1883 it was run by Martin R. Hansen, who later purchased it. To this site Hansen added a planing mill, a general store, and a postoffice. By this time the settlement also included a stave mill, owned by a man named Mays, and a blacksmith shop.

By 1857 Henry Reed had established a sawmill in the northeastern part of the county at the Reed settlement, north and west of the present village of Rudolph. And in the early 1850s John Ensign established a "pony" sawmill on Ten Mile Creek. The settlement which grew up there was at first called Ten Mile Creek and later Saratoga after Ensign's Saratoga postoffice.

Meanwhile, the settlement of the area along the Wisconsin River continued. By this time the lumber business was thriving on the west bank of the river at the Grand Rapids, just opposite the Grand Rapids settlement. However, it was not until 1856 that anyone began to think seriously about developing the settlement there. In this year C. B. Jackson surveyed and platted a town named Centralia at this site. Orestes Garrison,

Henry W. Jackson, Ralph C. Worthington, L. Eugene Soquel, H. L. Fontaine, and Sophie Dutruit were responsible for having the survey made. From then on Centralia increased in size and importance, being incorporated as a city in 1874.

While the forests on either side of the Wisconsin River were being opened by the lumbering industry, Wood County was organized as a separate legislative entity. In 1856 Joseph Wood, whose name the county bears, introduced a bill to the Wisconsin state legislature detaching the new county from the existing western section of Portage County. The town of Grand Rapids, established as part of Portage County in 1850, now became a part of Wood County, and immediately other townships began to be formed. The first of these was Rudolph Township, established in 1856 and named for Frederick Rudolph Hecox, the first white child born in the area. In 1857 Centralia and Hemlock townships were organized to the west of the Wisconsin River and Saratoga Township was organized to the east of the river. In 1858 Dexter Township was established in the area where George Hiles and Oliver W. Pitts had started their lumber mills.

The extension of the railroads into northern Wisconsin changed the pattern of settlement in Wood County. Up to this time the communities situated here and there in the forest were centered around lumber mills and the general stores and postoffices associated with them. The communities were frequently located on the streams which provided a source of power for the lumber mills and a means of transporting lumber to market. However, since the railroads were a much more dependable and convenient form of transportation, the method of shipping lumber to market changed with their coming. The location of railroad shipping points quickly became more important to the pattern of new settlement than the location of the major streams, and villages began to spring up at depots rather than along river banks.

Three railroad companies extended lines through Wood County during the 1870s. The Green Bay and Lake Pepin Railroad—now the Green Bay and Western Railroad—entered the county in 1872; in the same year the Wisconsin Central Railroad built west from Stevens Point in Portage County to the site which became Marshfield; in 1874 the Wisconsin Valley Railroad was completed from Tomah, Monroe County, through Rudolph Township. These lines ran generally east and west through the county; none of them connected the Wisconsin River settlements with the northwestern part of the county.

In about 1874 the Wisconsin Valley Railroad established a station in Rudolph Township to serve the mill of the Clark and

Scott lumber firm, successors to Henry Reed, the mill's original owner. This mill, often called the nucleus of the village of Rudolph, was actually located one mile west and one-half mile north of the village. It is more accurate, then, to say that the railroad depot in the heart of the present village was the true nucleus of Rudolph, though the location of the depot itself was determined by the mill's location relative to the Wisconsin Valley Railroad line. In 1874 Rudolph post office was established in the general store of Charles Filiatreau and by 1877 N. Sterns and Son had established their lumber business in the village (State Gaz., 1876-7). (It is not known whether N. Sterns was the owner of Stearn's Mill at Seneca. See above.)

While Rudolph was beginning to grow, a few miles south along the Wisconsin Valley line, where the railroad tracks cross Mosquito Creek, was a place called Doudville. Here George S. Doud and Son had a stave mill from about 1877 to 1882 when a fire destroyed all of their buildings and stock, apparently causing them to move to Pittsville. The railroad station at Doudville was called Worden because the spur track to A. D. Worden's stone quarry, just northwest of the station, joined the main line there.

The location of railroad stations along the Wisconsin Central Railroad at settlers' clearings or near lumber mills also influenced the development of new settlements in the northern part of the county. Auburndale and Marshfield grew up around the stations and the postoffices from which they take their names. Milladore developed around a sawmill and the railroad station which had been established to serve it, and Hewitt grew up around a sidetrack serving Henry Hewitt's lumbering business.

While Doudville and Rudolph were developing along the Wisconsin Valley Railroad in the northeastern part of the county, and Marshfield, Auburndale, Milladore, and Hewitt were springing up along the Wisconsin Central Railroad in the northern section, the Scranton settlement was developing in the west at Scranton station on the Green Bay and Lake Pepin Railroad—by 1873 known as the Green Bay and Minnesota Railroad. The station had been established to accommodate one of George Hiles' lumber mills. E. C. Bullis, the first settler, was granted the Scranton postoffice in 1873, and during the 1880s Scranton contained a shingle mill, a boardinghouse, a church, a school, a general store, and approximately eighty-five inhabitants. By the early 1890s the village had died away.

Remington, another short-lived settlement in the western area, flourished on the west bank of the Yellow River along the

Wisconsin Valley Railroad as the home of about thirty-three railroad employees and their families from 1873 to the early 1890s. Its end came when the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad bought the Wisconsin Valley Railroad and other connecting lines and then, in league with the Babcock Land Company, created the village of Babcock by establishing its division point on the realty company's land just east of the Yellow River rather than at the already established Remington site on the west bank.

Despite the rush of development at railroad sites two communities were started in the 1870s which were not located at or near railroad lines. In 1879 James H. Baker established Bakerville postoffice in the northwestern corner of the county at a site which by 1886 contained a hotel, a gristmill, a sawmill, a general store, a blacksmith shop, and a wagon-making establishment. However, by the turn of the century the post-office had been discontinued and the Bakerville settlement became only a memory. Vesper, which developed near the center of the county around a lumber mill owned by Girard and Drake, was also not immediately adjacent to a railroad.

Another significant development of the 1870s was the appearance of interest in the cultivation and marketing of cranberries among such people as H. W. Remington and J. T. Bearss. This probably was related to the coming of the railroads to the county since they provided rapid access to large markets. This interest is reflected in the place names Bearss Marsh PO and Bearss Marsh, a "paper town." Since the 1870s, of course, Wood County has become known as one of the important cranberry growing areas in the nation.

The pattern of settlement along railroad lines instead of rivers continued strong in the 1880s when George Hiles built his logging railroads—the Wisconsin, Pittsville, and Superior Railway, linking Vesper with Pittsville and the Wisconsin Valley Railroad; and the Milwaukee, Dexterville, and Northern Railway, linking Romadka in Clark County with Dexterville and Remington. Veedum and Lindsey grew up along the latter of these. In 1887 Veedum, possibly named after Vedum, Sweden, was the site of a lumber mill and a general store. Lindsey, apparently named for F. D. Lindsey, a lumberman from Neillsville, Clark County, was also established in the 1880s. (A stove mill provided the nucleus for Hogan, about one mile south of Lindsey and west of the railroad.)

Besides the Hiles' railroad settlements, Sherry and Blenker also appeared during the 1880s. Sherry, a tiny hamlet in the northeastern part of the county, sprang up around the lumber mill of Sherry and Briggs. A spur line linked the mill site with

the main road of the Wisconsin Central Railroad at Sherry Station, which in turn became the location of the village of Blenker. In the mid-1880s John Blenker set up a steam saw-mill near the station; he was granted Blenker postoffice in 1886 and also ran a general store there. The settlement which grew up around his mill has continued to develop in the intervening years since this energetic beginning and is now actually larger than Sherry.

In the early 1890s the development of new settlements at railroad shipping points remained the typical pattern as the village of Arpin grew up along the Port Edwards, Centralia, and Northern Railway, which linked Centralia with Marshfield in 1891. Arpin station was set up near the lumber mill of John and Antoine Arpin, which had only begun operating in the previous year, and people settled near the station rather than at the mill site. At this time a "Martin's Town" flourished briefly along the railroad one mile south of Arpin station around the saloon, store, and cheese factory of Martin Pfyfe.

After sixty years of work the lumber industry had largely depleted Wood County's forests, and people turned to paper manufacturing as a new source of livelihood. In 1888 the Centralia Pulp and Water Power Company began manufacturing paper at Hurleytown on the Wisconsin River (Garr.), utilizing the stream's water power for industry as the pioneer lumbermen had done many years before. Some five years later the Nekoosa Paper Company started in the same business along the Whitney Rapids opposite the historic site of the Whitney Mill where Wood County's history began. The company laid out the village of Nekoosa adjacent to its mill in 1893.

Only a few more details remain to round out the story of Wood County's settlements. In 1900 Grand Rapids and Centralia were united under the name Grand Rapids, and in 1920 this name was changed to Wisconsin Rapids to avoid confusion in the mails with Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 1901 the village of Kellner—named for F. E. Kellner who bought the right-of-way for the Chicago and North Western Railroad—was laid out along the railroad.

Thus, the history of the settlement of Wood County follows a neat pattern beginning with the lumber industry and its early dependence upon the Wisconsin River's water power and ending with the paper industry's similar dependence on the river. The Whitney's Mill settlement on the east bank of the river at Whitney's Rapids gave place to modern Nekoosa directly opposite on the west bank. In the interim between the establishment of these places the lumber and railroad industries lent their determining influence to the origin and location of Wood County's communities.