



Historic

AFTON

Valley Creek Tour



Valley Creek lies about two miles northwest of Afton Village on Stagecoach Trail. The first inhabitants of the St. Croix Valley were the native Americans. The St. Croix River was one of the first thoroughfares from Lake Superior to the Mississippi.

Some of the first settlers in Afton were French families from the Red River of the north, who settled at the mouth of Bolles Creek. A voyager named Gaspere Bruce and family made a claim of 160 acres and farmed at the mouth of the creek in 1837. The first Yankees, Joseph Haskell and J.S. Norris made their claim on Sec. 21 in 1839 and settled on it in 1840. J. Baptist Fournier made a claim in Section 5 in 1841. Missionary Jacob Fahlstrom, the first Swede in Minnesota, made his claim in 1841. Lemuel Bolles made his claim in Sec. 15 in 1843. Prior to 1848 all early settlers were squatters on the land they wished to buy. In 1848, the first land sold for \$1.25 per acre, no speculators allowed. The early Yankee settlers settled along the river and in the valleys; it reminded them of New England. The Germans went for the good, flat farm land and the Swedes settled in the hills and coulees, which reminded them of Sweden.

In 1855, Erastus Bolles came to visit his uncle Lemuel in Afton. he liked what he saw and returned in 1856 with his wife Sophronia and family. He built a house and opened a blacksmith shop which he

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operated about two years, when he brought water power on Bolles Creek bringing the water through a race to the shop to which he added more equipment, consisting of a trip-hammer and other machinery. He began to manufacture farm tools, continuing until the spring of 1875. He then turned the shop over to his son Charles E. Bolles. Mr. Bolles acquired additional power and moved the shop a short distance down stream, and added corn and feed grinding. Part of the mill race was built of timber, where otherwise a ditch carried the water to the mill. In the early 1880s the mill was partially destroyed by fire and never rebuilt.

The Bolles family made an annual fall trip to St. Paul to get winter supplies. They would start out at 3:00 AM with a yoke of oxen. They would rest the oxen at what was known then as "The Halfway House" (which was near the Guardian Angels Church) then would continue on to St. Paul. They purchased barrels of apples, barrels of sugar, crates of dried prunes and apricots, salt, yard goods, thread, yarn, shoes, etc.

During the 1860s and 70s there was a migration of Germans into the area. Some were second and third generation in the US. They were known as the "Buffalo Germans" as they had first settled near Buffalo, New York. Many came directly from Germany. In the late 1860s, 70s, and 80s, the Swedes arrived. The "Buffalo Germans" had less problem communicating with the Yankees, but the Swedes had a terrible time. The Yankees considered themselves as Americans, all others were those "foreigners."

The first post office in Afton township was opened in 1852 at Lemuel Bolles Mill. In 1872 the post office was located at Erastus Bolles store in Valley Creek.

Early on, only the cultivated land was fenced, live stock roamed at will. In 1855 a hen was purchased for \$5.00 in gold and a cat for \$5.00. In 1883, Charles Bolles sold a piece of land for the Township hall for \$75.

The Valley Creek School #39 was organized in 1863 and classes were first held in the Bolles home. Land for a school was purchased from Erastus Bolles for one dollar. The first school building was moved in from the St. Mary's Point area, and located on the west side of County 21. The second school was built at the intersection of Indian Trail and Stagecoach Trail in 1890 or 91. In the early 1900s, school was so overcrowded, the town hall was used for a school and an additional teacher hired.

The first store in Valley Creek was built by E. Bolles; it burned in 1880. He rebuilt and then transferred it to his sons, Charles and Fred. Meanwhile during this time, Louis Riedell operated a store in the Geer House. A third store was built by Will Brower and was later run by Fred Brower. All three stores were located between Charles Brower's home and the barn at the Geer home.

In the 1920s the Chas Mattsons built and operated a small confectionary store just north of the town hall.

L.L. May Nursery, in operation from 1899 to 1923, located in parts of Sections 3 and 4, approximately 240 acres, and was a thriving enterprise, employing approximately 125 people. It had a packing shed on the railroad tracks in Lakeland and a floral shop in St. Paul. It is believed to have been the first tree nursery in Minnesota. It was later sold to Minnesota Nursery Co., and then to the John Stoltze family in 1928.

Early Valley Creek settlers found recreation in quilting bees, spelling bees, card parties, and dances. Valley Creek had its own band and a baseball team. They did bobsledding, skiing, and skating in the winter. They formed a literary society in 1911, which continued for many years.

The road, now called Stagecoach Trail, was first referred to as "the Point Douglas and St. Louis River Military Road in 1858. It picked up the military route which came down Trading Post Trail to Valley Creek Trail and then on to Stagecoach Trail. In 1893 an abstract refers to this road as Stillwater to Hastings Road. Because the name Military Road was used elsewhere, it was renamed Stagecoach Trail. The old road was rerouted at least once to bring it up out of the swampy area on the Herrick property.

The stagecoaches did travel this road before the railroad came through in 1883; Putnam was the only road from Afton to Lakeland.

Indian Trail was named because of Jacob Fahlstrom, missionary, and his descendants and extended families who lived along that road.

No reference occurs in title documents to the existence of "May's Lake" (officially Lake Edith). All property surrounding this lake is described without reference to the lake in tax bills. Thus each property owner bordering the lake pays taxes on a portion of the surface adjacent to his land. This arises from the fact that at the time the territory was organized, the lake was recognized as non-navigable, thus the lake was not "meandered" when the adjacent land was

surveyed and entered on the tax rolls. *An oral history from Grace Stoltze*

References: *History of Valley Creek* by Evelyn Grant 1963; Federal and State Census, *Minnesota Beginnings*; Bicentennial oral histories AHS; *After Fifty Years*, Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church 1932; *Fifty Years in the Northwest* by W.H.C. Folsom; *Stillwater Messenger*, Washington County Plat Maps, 1881 railroad maps, Washington County township directories, personal histories on file at the Afton Historical Museum.

1. Lemuel Bolles
Born in Union, Tolland County, Conn., Sept. 1792. In 1842, took claim on Sec. 15, Valley Creek, somewhere between 480 and 680 acres. He married Chloe Higgins of Rochelle, NY in 1854 and had 2 children. Lemuel built first private grist mill north of Prairie du Chien. It was a water powered mill, called Milton Mills. He was appointed first Afton postmaster in 1852.

In 1863, he lost his mill through debt and mortgage foreclosure. Being ill with dropsy, Lemuel moved to the Sawyer House in Stillwater, where he died. Wife Chloe died 1902. Mill property purchased by Emil Munch.

1. Anna and Adolph Munch
Adolphus Munch, born Dec. 1829 in Saxony, Prussia. Came to Minnesota with brother Emil, made a claim at Taylors Falls in 1854. He was a carpenter and a newspaper publisher. Married Anna Meinke, born March 1833 in Brunswick. Anna died in 1896, Adolph in 1901.

Adolph was a business partner with Emil Munch, who rebuilt a mill at L. Bolles location, calling it Reliance Mill. Emil came to Afton in 1875, from Lakeland, where he and Adolph had a boat building enterprise. Emil and his wife Bertha (Seeger) lived in the Village in Asa Tracey's house until a new home was built adjacent to the mill.

Other property owners were C. Carli, A. Mackey, F. Roebecke, E. Munch, N. Hartman, N. Lindgren, Sauber, Sommerdorf.

1A. Nels Nelson
Came to Afton 1869, listed as stone mason. He was the father to Arthur Nelson, Lakeview farm.

1B. John Lofgren
Born Nov 1835 in Skane, Sweden and came to Afton 1869. Married Sessla Person, born June 1839, in Bronstad, Christianstads lan, Sweden. They settled in the northwestern part of the township. In 1873, they bought a farm near Afton village. It was in their home that the final action in the organization of the Swedish Lutheran Congregation took place in 1882. They had five children. John died in 1911, Sessla died in 1892.

2. Ruth Clymer Berry (Mrs. George Berry)
Born Nov. 1845 in Indiana, came to Afton with her family in 1858. Married George Berry Sept. 1880. George H. Berry was born 1844 in Manchester, England and came to Afton with his parents in 1854. He was a graduate of Cornell University. They moved to Harriman, Tennessee in 1893. They had four children. Property later owned by Nels Lindgren.

2A. P.A. Keller (no info)
Land purchased in 1881 by Sam and Belinda (Linguist) Hedstrom, from Sweden. They were married at Afton in 1881. Sam worked at Glenmont Saw Mill and helped build road bed and lay track for railroad through Afton. They had three children. Son Levi became next owner of farm and then the Belz family

3. Erastus Bolles
Born in Madison County N.Y. in 1821. Worked as a blacksmith and tool maker with his father. At age 21 went to New Boston, Conn. He worked his trade for 2 years, then went to Mass. and engaged in a jewelry business for 9 years. He married Sophronia Hayward of Oxford N.Y. in 1847. They had three children.

In 1856 he came to Valley Creek and built his first home which is part of the present home. He started a blacksmith shop and two years later added water power. In 1873, he gave up this business and started a store, which burned in 1880. He rebuilt store and became the postmaster in Valley Creek. Property between Gilbert House and Geer house, where Bolles store stood, was purchased by Charles Brower in 1907. A cottage was constructed next door in 1933. Lester Brower dismantled Bolles feed mill, which was located about 1/4 mile south of Town Hall, with the

arrangement of owner that he get 1/2 of lumber for dismantling job. With his half, Lester constructed the cottage. *From 1976 oral history of Lester Brower.*

4. Peter Nelson
From Sweden circa 1875, worked and boarded at Reidels.
- 4A. Frederick W. Schultz
Frederick Schultz (1867-1947) born in Germany. Married Augusta Pechuman (1872-1946) in 1889; they had 2 children. Listed occupation as a lime-burner.
5. Robert Reidel
Born in Afton to Charles and Caroline Burkhardt Reidel. Charles was a merchant and nurseryman (1873). They had 6 children. Robert married Carrie and had seven children and was listed as a fruit farmer.
- 5B. William Pennington
Born in 1836 in New Brunswick. Came to Afton area with father James and brothers They were in the lumber business in Stillwater, and Kenebec County. Wm. came to Afton 1861, owned and farmed around 500 acres. He never married. Lived at the Dernelly Hotel in Block 19 in Village. Died in 1908, buried in Evergreen Cemetery.
6. Albert Meisner (1858-1915)
Albert Meisner was born in New York to Charles and Augusta (Ottersteen) Meisner. Came with his family to Valley Creek (Sec. 16) in 1867 . Albert married Fredericka (Hanghor), and acquired acreage including North Star Mill building, built a home and had nine children. He was employed by L.L. May Nursery and also farmed. Children: Agnes (Culbertson, Geo.); Arthur, Amanda (Brower, Carl); Clara (Brower, Fred); Anna (Scheel, Art) Albert, who changed his name to Allen; Ida, who never married and is 104 years old at this writing; Harry, who died age 4; and Everett.
- 6A. L. Gedatus
L. and Henrietta Gedatus came to Valley Creek in 1875. L. was born in Prussia. They farmed in Section 16. Paul J. Gedatus, born in Afton, ran a saloon in Afton Village 1910.

7. Ernest Meisner (1856-1948)
Ernest was born in Martinsville County, NY and came to Valley Creek in 1866 (Sec. 16). He married Fredericka Porth and had seven children. In 1898 he moved his family to Lakeland. Fredericka died in 1930.
8. William Kapingst
Was born in Germany and came to Valley Creek 1887. Married Wilhelmina, and had two children . They farmed 76 acres in Section 16. Also owned property in Afton Village Block 16, Lot 3. Property bought from Bahneman, later owned by Herman Spreeman, then Best.
- 8A. J.W.Boxell 1824-1899 Martin E. Bahneman(n) (1810-1885) Maria E. Bahneman (1814-1885)
J.W. came to Valley Creek from Ohio, in 1854. He was a teacher and a poet, and founded the “Boxell School” a private school emphasizing horticulture. He married Mary Shaw and had eleven children. Enlisted in Company B Third Minnesota Volunteers, and was discharged 1863.

Martin E. Bahneman came from Germany in 1845, and settled in Martinsville, NY. Came to Valley Creek in fall of 1866 and bought J.W. Boxell property (300 acres)in Section 17. He had several children. Sons Martin F. and Ferdinand remained on the land. Ferdinand married Mary; had four children and remained on the home place on Valley Creek Trail. In 1872 Martin F. purchased the old Lowry Mill in Afton Village and moved it to his farm on Valley Creek Trail to use as a barn. Barn torn down 1979, due to structural weakness. Son Albert and grandson Hubert also remained on the home place.
9. Henry Gehrke
Henry and Mary were born in Germany. They came to settle in Pennsylvania, where Henry was a wheel wright and wagon maker. Came to Valley Creek (Section 10, 210 acres) with family, including three children, in 1875. Daughter Clara, born in Valley Creek, was a music teacher. Property later owned by Fred and Bertha Pribnow and their eight children.
10. William Wetzal, Jr.
William was born in New York, came to Afton with parents William, Sr. and Catherine, settled on Section 6 in 1875.

William and Ida Wetzal had an 80 acre farm next to

Martin F. Bahneman on 15th St.

11. Magloire (1827-1898) and Ellen (Hayes) Fortin
Magloire were married in 1858 Ellen died in 1872. With son John A., came from Canada to (Section 9) Valley Creek in 1874. Magloire married Adelaide Boyar in 1874. The 1880 census shows a wife named Deli, and in 1895, a wife named Marie. He farmed 120 acres.
12. Bolles-See (13)
13. Charles Bolles 1853-1933
Charles was born in Oxford, Mass. the son of Erastus and Sophronia Bolles. He was educated in Valley Creek School Dist. #39, then at the Boxell private school and finally the St. Croix Valley Academy at Afton. He married Mary Churchill , and adopted the daughter of Lemuel Bolles, in 1884. Mary died in childbirth in 1886. Charles married Addie Kellogg of Friendship, NY in 1889. She died after the birth of their fourth child.

In 1904 Charles married Lillie Harriman Wilcox of Hudson. She died in 1943, her only child was Evelyn Bolles Grant. Charles was a teacher, blacksmith, manufacturer of farm tools, storekeeper, postmaster, clerk of townboard for 49 years and a miller. He called his mill the Valley Creek Roller Mill.
14. Nels Melander 1837-1907
Nels was born in Onestad, Sweden and came to America in 1869. Anna was born in Sweden in 1834. They were married Nov. 30 1874. Son Olaf, born in Afton 1876 and daughter Hilda, born 1878. He was the ferry operator between Glenmont and So. Afton in 1879, mail carrier in early 1900, a gardener and fruit farmer. Property later owned by James Johnson, then Bierschenck.
16. Francis Spreeman 1853-1940
Came to Afton from Germany in 1879. Married Minnie, born 1851 in Germany. They had 10 children. Francis engaged in boat building and a boat livery business on St. Croix River. They lived in the octagon house in village, and had a fish shop next door from which they sold fresh and smoked fish that sons Frank and Albert seined with large nets. Minnie died in 1934. Farm property later owned by Ferdinand Zollner, Jr.
17. T.J. Yorks (no information). Property was later owned by Hertzmanns. John Hertzman 1856-1941. Born in Bronnestadt, Sweden. Married Mathilda,

born 1856 in Fenja fors. Sweden, came to Afton in 1882. They had four children.

18. August Kleinschmidt
August married Sabina Hanghor born 1862 in Germany. They came to Valley Creek in 1883. Sabina died in 1886. They had three children. In 1905 he was married to Melia and there were four children. They farmed in Section 10 on Strawberry Hill Road.
19. Ferdinand Zollner 1840-1913
Ferdinand and Tina (1846- 1917) Zollner came from Germany to Afton in 1881. They had six children and farmed 40 acres in Section 10 on top of Strawberry Hill Road.
20. Newington Gilbert 1815- and Celestia Bangs Gilbert
Newington was born in Onodaga County NY. He married Celestia in 1850, they had two children. Daughter Alice married Preston Jackson.

Newington came to Washington County in 1851. In 1860, in the company with D.C. Buswell, he built the North Star Mill at Valley Creek. The mill was 24’ x 32’ , with 3 run of stone, power, 32 foot overshot wheel; capacity 700 bu. per month with custom and merchant work. They could grind about 200 bu. per day. He held his interest in mill for 2 years, then sold to P.P.Persons.

Newington, Celestia and family built a home and came to live in Valley Creek in 1864. Newington was a member of State Constitutional Convention in 1857. He sold home to Hablutzel, followed by Dawson, Reynolds-Mattson and Steglich.
21. C.F. Bean
Born in Sandwiche, NY in 1827. Came to Stillwater in 1863 and in 1865 became one of the firm of Hersey, Staples, and Bean, dealers in pine land. He became intersted in real estate investment and moved to California in 1887. Married twice, 8 children. Later property owners were Hanghors and Meisners.
- 22 and 23. Henry and R. Barnard
May have been related to Alonzo Barnard of Oberlin College, who was an early missionary in area. Later owned by Gust Nelson who came from Sweden in 1883.

24. Andrew and Annie Spence. Andrew and Annie came from Sweden in 1878. They had three children and were farmers. Daughter, Ella Spence, was a teacher at Swede Hill School #66 in 1901. Owners later were Parker, Stanton, Haynes, Mills, Blomquists.
25. See (25 and 39) Fortin Owned 240 acres in 1886
26. Charles Kunkle 1864- Charles and Wilhelmina came from Germany. They arrived in Valley Creek 1883 from NY, with sons Walter and Willton. Farmed 80 acres in Section 9. In 1930s owned by Best then Emert.
27. John Fahlstrom (Folstrom) 1823-1861 Son of Jacob and Marguerite (Bungo) Fahlstrom. Born at Sandy Lake (Leech Lake) MN. Married Marguerite Reeve, born around 1829, Lake Superior. Died 1865. They had seven children.
28. Linda Culbertson 1835-1922 Born in Pa. Came to Afton 1855 and stayed with Cleggs. Enlisted with the 3rd Minnesota Company Bought 80 acres and farmed in Section 9. Married the widow Merceline Clegg in 1890. He had 8 children and two stepchildren. Merceline was the niece of M. Fortin, born in NY in 1843 and died in 1941. Property owned later by A. Nelson, Browers, Meisners.
30. Wm. Zabel (Zaubel) 1816- Came to Afton in 1865 and lived with A. Heuer. He was born in Prussia. He married Johanna (Annie) from NY and they had 9 children. They farmed 80 acres in Section 3 and 4. Land owned later by Sahnnow and Pribnow in 20s, Nelson, Davidsons in 30s.
31. Peter and Mary (Bungo) Kelly They farmed in Section 4. They had a large family. Daughter Tillie married Olaf Melander. Farm later owned by Art Nelson family. Mary Bungo was daughter of Stephen Bungo.
32. Charles and Martha Gorgus Charles and Martha came to Afton in 1860. Charles was born in France, Martha in Germany. They farmed 80 acres in Section 5 and had 7 children. Later owner was A. Richert.
- 33A. J. Baptist Fournier- 1814 Born in Canada at age 23, J. Baptiste went to work for the American Fur Co. and traveled to Lake Superior. In 1841 came to Afton, married Sarah Fahlstrom, and made a claim of 120 acres. Sarah was born in 1827 at Mille Lacs. They had one daughter Marguerite, born 1842. Sarah died 1887.
34. Charles F. Holmstrom-1826- Charles came to Texas in 1852 from Sweden. Here he married Sarah L. Peterson. They bought 150 acres in Section 4, Afton in 1864. They had one son Charles, who died 1933. Later property owners were Bishops.
35. Preston Jackson 1816- Son of Mitchell Jackson, born in Mt. Vernon, Ohio. Family moved to a location 1/2 mile from Lake St. Croix, between Afton and Lakeland. They farmed there for 17 years, selling parcels of land for profit. The Lakeland farm was sold in 1870 for \$2400.00 and they moved to Iowa. His large home had 2 bedrooms, 2 parlors, a sitting room, a kitchen, four fireplaces, and a brick oven downstairs. Two bedrooms, a store room and closet upstairs, and a large cool cellar below. Prestin married Alice Gilbert from Valley Creek.
37. Guy M. Salsbury Guy was a land speculator at Lakeland. Purchased 180 acres from Jacksons in 1860 for \$2050.00. The land originally sold for \$1.25 per acre in 1850. This land was partially in Afton and Lakeland. Land later owned by Archie Nelson.
38. Jacob Fahlstrom (Folstrom) 1793-1859 Born in Sweden. At the age of nine became a cabin boy on his uncle's steamer. The steamer was wrecked on the coast of England. He could speak no English, and applied to Swedish consul for aid. Lord Selkirk, who spoke Swedish, offered to take him to the new world. After his arrival he found work with the Hudson Bay Co. and soon became proficient in French and Indian languages. After the construction of Fort Snelling he found employment with US Government as a mail carrier between the fort and Prairie du Chen. In 1823 he married Marguerite Bungo, a Chippewa girl, born at Superior, Wis. in 1797. He was converted at the Kaposia Methodist Mission at "Little Crow" village, opposite Red Rock, in 1837 or 38. As a missionary he found his experience as an Indian trader an invaluable asset. In 1841 he settled on a farm in Valley Creek, where he lived and continued his missionary activities.
39. John Fortin see (11 and 39) Owned by J. Fortin, Beauchamp, Wm. Weyer, and Moris.
40. Martin F. Bahneman Martin, son of Martin E., built a home off of 15th St. (now Scheunemans). Martin F. who married Caroline (Brunner) in 1868, and sons owned a large threshing machine and did custom work in the area. Martin F. and Caroline lost five of their children in the fall of 1881 to a childhood disease. Son Arthur owned farm in later years.
41. John Markgraf John and Wilhelmina (Borchert) Markgraf arrived in Afton in 1865, with their 12 children. Wilhelmina was born in Germany in 1826. She died 1919. They were farmers in Section 8.
42. Ferdinand Frederick 1828-1905 Ferdinand was born in Germany, he came to Valley Creek from NY in 1871. He married Dorothea Beutel, and had eight children and farmed 175 acres. Son Paul E. Frederick went to Ruckers Business School in Minneapolis. He owned and ran a store and lived in Afton Village in 1897. Paul was also a member of Modern Woodmen of America lodge.
43. F.A. Bahneman Son of Martin E. Bahneman married Marie (Mary) Schultz, born in New York, 1851. They had four children and came to Valley Creek in 1874. Mary died in 1933. Ferdinand's son Albert, and grandson Hubert remained on the home place. Original home was removed and a New England style home was built by Ferdinand.
45. Frederick Pechuman 1831-1909 Frederick was born in Wallmow, Blandenberg Prussia. Came to NY in 1849. He married Caroline Beutel, born 1837 in Pommeran Prussia. They were married in NY in 1858. Frederick became a US citizen in 1860. They came to Valley Creek in 1867 with 5 children, in a covered wagon pulled by oxen. One child born in Valley Creek. They lived in a sod dugout until a cabin could be built. They first lived close to road and later bought 80 acres in Section 20 and built a house on Haskell Rd. (30th St.). Caroline died in 1909. *The Afton Museum has recorded and printed memories of Caroline Pechuman given by granddaughter Hazel Pechuman Nielson.*
46. Adam Brunner Adam and Barbara Brunner were in Valley Creek in 1870, they came originally from Switzerland. Son Emanuel and wife Minnie, born in Germany and one child were on the farm in 1880 census. In 1895 there were 6 children. In 1912 farm was owned by A and J. Fritsche.
- A. Charles Nodin 1846-1930 Charles was born in Melby, Sweden, and in 1875 married Rena Swanson, born 1843 in Bronestad, Sweden. They came to Afton 1881. They had one child Emma. They were listed as gardeners. Rena died in 1917.
- B. Christ and Amelia Larson Gardeners from Sweden, came to Afton 1879. They had six children. No record after 1912.
- C. True and Ellen Swanson They came from Sweden in 1875 with four children. True died 1885 of typhoid fever. In 1905, Ellen is listed as a nurse, and daughter Emma teaching school. In 1910 Ellen was living with adult children, Theodore and Emma.