

TOWNSHIP HISTORY

ALTON TOWNSHIP:

Alton Township is drained by the LeSueur River, contains Buffalo Lake and was largely covered with timber originally. Alton was not settled as early as the other townships of Waseca County, due to the fact that it was a portion of the Winnebago Indian Agency.

Settlers first arrived here from the East in September of 1863. One of the first settlers was Elijah Hills. Alma City was platted in 1865, a thriving village for the benefit of residents of Alton and Freedom Township, named after Elijah Hills' daughter, Alma.

BLOOMING GROVE TOWNSHIP:

First settlers in this half-wooded, half-forested township were four bachelors who build a log cabin in the spring of 1855.

The first school district in the county was organized here, comprising a portion of two townships, Blooming Grove and Woodville.

BYRON TOWNSHIP:

Byron Township was completely treeless as the first settlers began arriving. Drained by Boot Creek, the levelness of the land caused the soil to remain cold and damp longer into the growing season than surrounding country.

Jeremy Davis came first and located on Section 34 in the spring of 1855. He built the first house in the township, which burned down two years later. His son, Daniel C. Davis, also settled in 1855.

FREEDOM TOWNSHIP:

Freedom Township is drained by the Little Cobb River and Bull Run. Settlement here was late due to the fact that this township, along with Alton and parts of St. Mary, Wilton, and Janesville, was within the Winnebago Indian reservation until the summer of 1863, after which the lands were sold by sealed bid of not less than \$2.50 per acre.

Luke Chase took up the first claim in the fall of 1863. Many of the first settlers were young, unmarried men who had just been discharged from the Civil War. Returning to their old homes they found their places filled by others and pushed out in search of new locations.

IOSCO TOWNSHIP:

Iosco Township and about all of Janesville Township were once called the present of the Empire. Early in 1856 a village was platted on the southeast quarter of section 20 by H.W. Peck and called Empire. Some records show that the first election was held here at the hotel of John H. Wheeler in June, 1857. William Long build a sawmill here, and Daniel Tripp build a hotel. When Wilton become the county seat in 1857, this village soon disappeared, lasting only about two years.

In 1857 came Jacob Hagadorn (first person murdered in the county), Peter Farrell (first murderer in county).

JANESVILLE TOWNSHIP:

Janesville Township boasts of having the largest lake in the county. First white settlers were in the summer of 1855. Indian traders, settled and sold whiskey and goods to the Indians until they went broke from non-payment of debts owed them.

The original township name in April of 1858 was Okaman. In May, 1858 a petition was filed to change the name to Janesville. In 1854 a town plat was laid out by a government surveyor. Called Peopolis, it was the north half of the site of "Old Janesville" in Section 28. The surveyor advertised heavily in the East but no one bought land here. In 1856 DeRegan laid out a town in almost the same location which he called at first St. Caesar's, but changed to New Albany. J.W. Hosmer arrived and purchased half of DeRegan's interest and renamed it Janesville after his location in Wisconsin. "Old Janesville" gradually disappeared as the present village of Janesville was platted and added to. In 1869 and 1870 all of Old Janesville was moved to East Janesville.

NEW RICHLAND TOWNSHIP:

New Richland Township is situated in the southeast corner of Waseca County at the headwaters of the LeSueur River. It was originally all prairie except for the trees along the riverbank. First settlement was a colony of Scandinavians in June, 1856.

Originally a part of Otisco precinct, this township was named Norway, Richland, and finally, New Richland. It was separated in 1859 from Otisco precinct. The village of New Richland was platted in August, 1877 by Henry T. Wells. The first building, a saloon, was put up by a man named Buncho. J. H. Wightman erected a store building and put in a stock of hardware. C.H. Cooper operated a drug store until 1880 and sold to Henry Jaehnig, who was in furniture and undertaking. Nels Johnson and Michael Murphy started a hardware business in September, 1877. Not having a building, they opened up shop on a lumber pile and slept there at night to guard their investment until a building could be put up. John Larsen put up a general store which also held the post office. He sold to M.A. Larsen, Waseca County's first travel agent. Many more establishments followed such as a 'ready-made' clothing shop, tailoring business, saloons, lumber yards, boot and shoe store, pioneer jewelry establishment, hotel and a wagonmaking shop. Ole Johnson Moe built the Commerican House in 1877. Charles Brunell built the American House in 1877.

OTISCO TOWNSHIP:

Otisco Township, before 1858, consisted of what is now Vivian, Byron, New Richland, and the south third of both Wilton and Otisco Townships. Several villages have been born and put to rest on the soil of Otisco Township and only one remains. Waters and Chamberlain, two speculators came in 1856 and bought claims to lay out a village they called Waterlynn, which consisted of a store and hotel. The hotel soon burned after being constructed and occupied by Dr. William Murphy and family. The village of Otisco was laid out by Warren Bundy and S.S. Goodrich in 1857 and had a store, post office,

blacksmith shop and sawmill. This location of Otisco village as in existence for only a short time and various circumstances caused its downfall. With the building of the M. & St. L. Railroad, the present Otisco 'station' was laid out and remains.

ST. MARY TOWNSHIP:

St. Mary Township was originally apart of Empire precinct and also once a part of Wilton precinct until April, 1858, when the tavern of J.W. Clark was named to hold the first township meeting.

The village of St. Mary was platted February, 1857 and came to challenge both Wilton and Empire for county seat in 1857. On October 5, 1873, the site of St. Mary village as vacated by a decree of the district court and the ground reverted to its original condition of farm land.

VIVIAN TOWNSHIP:

Vivian Township was known in early days as "Cobb River Country." It is the most level township in the county with the richest soil, intersected by the Big and Little Cobb Rivers. This township settled rather slowly due to the wetness of the land.

The first white settler appears to be E.S. Woodruff and his Indian wife who settled in Section 27 in 1856. He was also an early mail carrier. Many settlers arrived in the fall of 1857. John A. Wheeler, windmill inventor and manufacturer, came from St. Mary in 1858, having built a flouring mill with windmill power at Freeborn Lake. Wheeler Lake was named after him.

The first death was Sweeney who lost his way in a snowstorm in November, 1857. The first schoolhouse was built in 1859 and the first religious services were held there by a Baptist minister.

WILTON TOWNSHIP:

Wilton Township has the distinction of being the first township settled in Waseca County in August of 1854. The LeSueur River runs through this township along the east edge. Silver Lake lies in the western portion.

The village of Wilton was surveyed and laid out in the autumn of 1855 by six men of Owatonna and Wilton. The actions and subsequent reputations of these men deterred the erection of buildings in the village for a year. The opposition to the persons having control of the village was adjusted in the fall of 1856 by the establishment of a saw mill owned by John C. Ide and A.B. Cornell. Even through the winter, the stores, hotels and other buildings appeared and by spring Wilton was a village.

During the first part of 1857, Wilton village increased by leaps and bounds with the coming of settlers. But by 1887, not one store was left, deterioration of this village beginning 1870 when the county seat was moved to Waseca.

WOODVILLE TOWNSHIP:

Woodville Township was named after early settler Eri G. Wood. There's no doubt that native Indian tribes made this township a principal village by the relics and mounds found on the shores of lakes and in the vicinity. Woodville Township contains 2,000 acres of lakes named Clear Lake, Loon Lake, Goose Lake, Rice Lake, Watkins Lake, and Gaiter Lake. It has the best railroad facilities in the county. Forests covered the land to the north and northeast for shelter, fuel, and building materials.

A village was laid out on Section 17 early in 1856 and named Waseca by some Winona developers. There never was any building except a pole claim shanty. Oak Hill Stock Farm was begun in 1867 in sections 35 and 36 plus sections 1 and 2 of Otisco Township. Mapleton Stock Farm in section 16 and 21, headquarters for finely bred stock of cattle, horses and swine.