

SETTLEMENT AND EARLY HISTORY OF MINONG, WIS.

(By JOSIAH BOND, Jr.)

I have been asked to give a few details of the early settlement of the place and in a way start an old settler's meeting which may be continued from year to year and made hereafter an annual source of pleasure to all our people young and old and young settlers as well as old settlers. It is a little difficult to do this, as so many of the early scenes that would be particularly interesting have faded away in clouded remembrance while many things that would not be of any interest whatever stand out in bold relief; as is only natural from the varying moods of life and the ever changing aspect of things in a new and unsettled country. I am prone to remember the three trips I made here before I took my claim and some of the conditions we had to face then may be of some interest to you.

The first time was in the summer of 1888. I had been pretty familiar with the general surface features of Douglas county for a few years before that, having been over the county in different directions and mostly on foot or by wagon, so that I had an opportunity of seeing at my leisure the various natural advantages and had found many beautiful spots, when it was proposed by my old friend Mr. Robert B. McLean to come down here and look around and see how I liked this. He had been an engineer on what was generally known as the "Air Line" a railroad that was being

built in 1880 and had camped at the Beaver Dam on Shell Creek near the old county road crossing for several weeks and had thought well of the country. So acting on his advice I determined to come down here one July day. The "Omaha" road then known as the North Wisconsin Line which was built as nearly on the survey of the old "Air Line", as possible (you can see the "Air Line" clearing for right of way adjoining the present track) was then newly built and when on schedule time the trains used to leave Superior which was their northern terminus then, at 6 o'clock in the morning and get into St. Paul at 11 o'clock that night and back the next day on the same time. But the morning I came out the train had not arrived from St. Paul in time to start out and when they did come in all hands had to get something to eat and feed the engine so that it was nearly 9 o'clock when we got started. It took about three hours and a half to run the fifty miles, because the road was in horrible shape especially at the northern end. In fact it was so bad just before this that a short flat car had run its forewheels over a culvert and the culvert was up on grade having been put in solidly, while the fill on each side had settled so that when the fore wheels of this car dropped over the culvert and the car just fitted and would not move either way and the train which stopped pretty sud

denly had to wait right there until the crew ballasted up the track a foot or so on the rear side of the culvert. Of course the worst places had been fixed, but the company had been in such a hurry to get their road done in time to earn the land grant, that in some places no road had been built at all, just the ties strung along the ground and rails strung on them, so that as a matter of fact it was the worst piece of railroad ever I traveled over. But we got down here at last. The old river tote road crossed the track, where the station is now and the place was known as "Frog Creek Tote Road" and was so entered on the books. So at Frog Creek Tote Road I got off and after eating a lunch, I went through about two miles of land on either side of the track, went up to the little lake at the head of Shell Creek and was very much pleased with the location. The next fall I came down to Gordon and drove out to Totogatic river where Gillmore lake enters into it and stayed over night with Mr. Partlow Miles who was thinking of making a settlement there but had not fully made up his mind to it when I was there and I think did not file on his present claim until several years afterward, though his house now stands where the old one stood and in fact an enlargement of the old one. This occasion I remember because I had a hunting companion who shot me through the hat and spoiled the day for me. There in the winter following I came down to look over the land here to see if any one had taken it and found on my present claim a small hut which I found out afterward was built by some hunters that fall, but I came near to giving up the land, as I thought someone else intended to take it, but just as I was leaving the place I saw an old Indian, who I afterwards learned was Otiah, who told me that the fellows who built the hut had gone away and

were not coming back. Mr. Byron Kimball came down with me on that trip and he also concluded to take a claim, which he held for many years living there steadily for about five years and a half, and which adjoins the village on the south where Mr. Randall now lives. We went over to the land office to file on this land and we both filed under the homestead act.

On this last trip it was very cold and the food we brought with us froze up solid, but we managed to make out a lunch, which we needed bad enough as we had to walk from Lakeside, and we went up to the Frog Creek Lower Dam while we were here. There had been built early that winter by Jim Lane, a logger on a large scale, a log cabin at the station, which was now called by the name of O'Brien's warehouse and he brought Alexis LaPraie, an old half breed Indian who had served in the union army during the war, from Chengwatona to look after his supplies. But when we came here that time he was not here and we did not see him: but when we came down in the spring he was here and stayed about here until he died two years ago. The old cabin in which he lived during the first few years was torn down after a while, but the warehouse which gave the place the name it then bore is still here, but by the looks of it, will not remain much longer, and probably within a short time will be replaced by a station building that will help the looks of that end of the village.

When we came down in the spring there was a side track here and we got our lumber for house building switched off and unloaded, but immediately afterwards the side track was taken out, and when we brought our furniture and stock down we came to Lakeside in the evening and had to wait there all night, until the morning freight came by, which brought us up here

and waited while we unloaded the car for which we had to get that night, special orders. That time we brought our lumber was early in the spring and there were no horses in the country, but I borrowed a yoke of cattle and a sled and on a small flurry of snow which fell one night and went off next noon, I brought over the heavy stuff, but all the siding, shingles and a great many other things we carried on our backs or on a wheel-barrow, which at times made pretty slow work of it. The building of our house and the work of getting settled and getting a little hay meadow cleaned up on which we cut about 20 tons of hay, occupied us all that summer, but I remember having some fine watermelons that year and some other good vegetables. After we got settled we traveled all over the country trying to get acquainted with it. We had three horses, two cows, a colt and several calves and such was the sense of loneliness that fell upon the animals, that when we hitched up the team and started off anywhere, the other horse, the colt, the cows, calves, dog and many times the cat would come along as if afraid to stay at home and it was very amusing to see the calvascade which on one of the old tote roads would stretch out a quarter of a mile and whenever we would start off through the woods, which we had to do often to see the country, they would close right up and keep as near together as possible. But this feeling wore off gradually and by the next summer it was as hard to keep them together, as it was that year to drive them away. One thing I noticed in those early days was almost the entire absence of song birds and the usual house and farm birds. There were crows, jays, herons, eagles and such birds of prey, but of the partially domesticated birds, there was not a one; all that are here now have come here in the wake of the settlers. After taking out the side track as I have said it became somewhat difficult for passengers to get off here. Sometimes while we had no trouble ourselves to get here, strangers would be put off at Lakeside, where there was a long passing track and which was a "flag station" or at Gordon or at the water tank. It all depended on what the conductors had for breakfast. I am afraid they sometimes forgot their duties as common carriers and put the public to as much inconvenience as possible. So far as I was concerned I have always found the train men of this road obliging and unless they had their tempers upset by something else, courteous also. The first fall we lived here, the fall of 1886, Mr. James Wolfe came here on a hunting expedition and liked the country so well that he decided to move here which he did the next year in September. Mr. Dave Goodvin had been here that same fall and fixed up a house in which he lived during that winter. Mr. Wolfe while up there suffered severely from a tooth ache, improvised a blacksmith shop, made a pair of forceps and pulled his tooth with it, which was a fair sample of the way things had to be done when men had the grit and ingenuity to do them. That winter was the winter of the 'great snow'; 96 inches of snow fell. It lay in February 4ft. deep on the level, the 1st of April, 1887, the snow was 30 inches deep on the openings and still deeper in the woods, and did not all go until nearly the 1st of June. One of the tote teams traveled a road by my house all winter and in April got stuck on the top of a stump 12 inches high over which they had their track all the time without knowing it. A postoffice was established here in the early winter of 1886 by its present name and all the loggers got their mail here and they kept the main tote roads open fairly well.

There were: Mr. Lane logging upon Little Frog Creek, just south of where Dick Elder now lives; Fred Pennington at the head of Little Frog; Loyd and Carlson between the two on the north bank of Sink Creek; Sauntry Pennington and Tozer on Pokegama Lake and at and near Lakeside.

Mr. Squires came in and ran a shingle mill at Lake Side, employing four or five men and of the settlers there was Mr. Goodvin and Mr. Wolfe part of the time and Mr. Miles who from the fact that he had family ties at Gordon, never came here in the early days and it was not until we got a town organization that he seemed to be one of us.

The great quantity of snow that winter kept every body more or less locked up as it was impossible to travel any where but on the roads used every day or on snow shoes. The weather had been beautiful that fall and there was no more snow than in the ordinary year up to Christmas, the first snow coming on the 20th of November, but the day after Christmas it snowed dreadfully and after that to the early part of February it would snow two or three days then get cold, going down most of the time to 30 to 40 degrees below zero and then as soon as it warmed up to zero weather, commence to snow again. February was as pleasant as could be with all that snow, but in March again it snowed such snows as have never been known since. The afternoon train after New Years which was due about three o'clock, only came in twice by day light until the middle of March, the rest of the time arriving from supper to breakfast time and after the great blizzard on the 2nd of March, I believe, we were two days without seeing a train. All the loggers in here dropped money, but when the snow went away it made a great driving stage on all the rivers and Mr. Lane put a drive of six million feet of logs out

of Frog Creek without shutting down a dam and drove his rear under the railroad bridge the first Sunday in May. Just at the last snow Mr. Goodvin's family arrived by sled after a hard trip and settled where he has since lived. In the spring Mr. Wolfe went back and came in the early fall with his family and settled down on his present place. Shortly after Johnny Goodvin brought up his wife and went to work building himself a house on the forty where Achitonio now lives. That summer was warm and noted for the beautiful crops of all sorts of berries, not since equalled and there were at times as many as a hundred Indians here picking blueberries. Of these old man Otiah who died three years afterward and Chicaug lived here permanently while the rest of them came from the Reservation. These Indians were a yearly visitation and the better the crop the more numerously they came. Owing to the poor crop lately, they have fallen off greatly and the time will soon come when we shall see no more of them.

That fall of 1887 Lan Severns came up and looked over the country pick'd him out a claim and brought his family up the next spring.

The next spring I was up in Superior one day when I met Judge Clough and he urged me to go down in the spring election and vote for Judge. This was just before the spring election and we knew nobody we could write to to get the information we wanted, so after talking it over, Mr. Kimball and I started off to find our polling place on the night before election. We had somehow the idea that we should vote at Spooner, so went down there on the night train and found about half the town out and engaged in a spirited fight for town officers in what was called the town of Bashaw which included both Shell Lake and Spooner in fact the whole south half of the country.

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The north half formed the Town of Veazie and we belonged in that. All this we found out afterward, because that night everybody we asked either did not know or else thought we were guying them and would not give us any aid at all. And it was by the merest chance that I ran across a railroad man I had known who introduced me to Geo. Tozer, who gave me the information we wanted at least as to where we should vote. So we caught a special in the early morning and got to Mills then known as Superior Junction. From there we walked to the town house about a mile away near the dam on the Namekagon river. Here we voted. There was a hot fight that spring between Judge R. D. Marshall and Judge Wm. P. Swift for the circuit bench, and a rather tame town election, the only fight being over the erection of a bridge to be put over the Namekagon, which was quite spirited for the moment.

One of our greatest difficulties in the early days was the lack of fresh meat. Everybody had tried to keep a little on hand but it was a hard thing to do, as we had no conveniences and while we got along well enough in the winter when we could freeze the side of a cow or pig in the hot summers with no ice it could not be done. But at that time the rail road right of way was not fenced and a stray ox or more would get killed by the cars. The first year there was a whole drove run down by a freight near Shell Creek and if I remember rightly six of them were killed. And then the deer would run on the track and get killed or hurt, (it was against the law to kill them in the summer). They were attracted there by the dry sand and the little breeze in the clearing, so that we could get one often to prevent us from going meat hungry and a good many of the deer when injured must have run right off up the tote road for I never heard

of Wolf or Goodvin going without a decent supply of venison in those early days. The spring of the great snow we caught a very large buck hung over a down pine a rod or two from the road and almost dead. By hard work we put him in our sled box, brought him down to the barn and kept him until the snow had partly gone and he was able to travel when we turned him out. He used to come and feed on the refuse around the barn for two summers but after that he came no more, was probably killed. Several of us tried to bring up fawns of which many were found in the spring, but it was a good deal of care and they would generally get so tame as to be a nuisance, and get killed by some stranger on account of their very tameness. I had one once that got in the habit of going to all the neighbors for a piece of bread or potato and it would run right into the house if a door was open and if not would stand on the step and cry until somebody let it in and to get it out of the house it was often necessary to take a stick to it. This was a great deer country in those days and it was quite a feat to raise a crop of cabbages of which they are inordinately fond. on account of eating in the patch every night after they discovered it. They like sweet corn too, and would come in my corn by the dozens and you could hear them snort and play around any clear night. It would have been very easy to have slaughtered them if one had been so minded.

The second fourth of July, 1888 was spent in a picnic at Frog Creek at D. R. Goodvin's house and while the gathering was small it was enthusiastic.

That fall several Indian families came in and we endeavored to get a school for them. Got a school district set off, but the board would not establish a school for Indian children and we got none that year.

That fall Mr. Louis Desroisiers

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came up and finding a claim to suit him, filed and brought up his family in the year following. Mr. Hopkins moved in the same summer, put up a small mill on Shell Creek near Matt Dimmick's house and sawed out several hundred thousand feet of pine which was all used in the neighborhood. The next year 1889, with the coming of Derosier's family, we had quite a neighborhood and on the 4th we had a dance in my barn which was just finished. There were present all hands amounting, if I remember to 17 of the settlers and three or four strangers. One of these strangers drove through McKenzie settlement on his way down and told Mr. Meredith who was living there then that "this was the greatest country he ever saw; the settlers would take an ox team and drive 60 miles to a dance, being out on the road over night each day." And this he said had happened at Minong while he was driving through. This was manifestly an exaggeration, but it cannot be denied that there is nothing to prevent it, our people did like to congregate at a dance, which in my mind has always been a good sign too. The same fall we had school for the first time with Miss Nellie Soule of South Range as teacher, and we have had school here ever since. Among our teachers was Miss Nellie Niles who has since accepted a better and more permanent position, and who will I trust be with us many years.

The next spring, 1890, and summer a number of families moved here—Mrs. Hulten and Jno. Dean who kept a stopping place a number of years, both of whom have now gone to that new country from which there is no return; the Severns boys who went up again that year. Chas. Kallener who worked on the section. The section house was then at the 20th mile this side of the tank in Douglas county, and who moved

here with the section house the next year. That summer the first public money was spent on road work, and a road was made between here and Lakeside where we had to go for all freight. It never was an extra good road. The next fall a new school house was built at Frog Creek where it still stands.

In the year 1891 there was a large number of new settlers among those who took land being Jno. Detwiler, Geo. Thompson, Ernie Crocker, Joseph Davis, Hans Skinvik, Olaf Heminway, Fred Richert and Frank Hunter. Thompson, Crocker and Hunter are gone. The rest are here yet. Charlie Gardner and Hunter put in cedar that winter and the next summer came Peter Nichols and Albert Small who are now here and Chas. Bradford and Pat McDonough who have gone away. This year we also got our sidetrack put in and the section house was moved here or rather the Co. gave their foreman permission to build his own house here, Mr. Gus. Nordholm who will probably be a fixture. Among those who filed on land in 1902 were: Walter Crocker, Hugh Detwiler and Delano Heath, who brought fleas here and who has been always detested here since; Ed. Goodwin, Frank Detwiler, Richard Elder, Sam Peaks and Edward Bunnell. In this year came Frank Parent, Thomas Clement, Alex. Egan and numerous others who did not take land, also K. Lewis, S. P. Fay, H. H. Meredith, Arthur Francis and Ben Parent. There had settled in the far eastern part of the town even before this, John Joseph, B. W. Johnson and Troed Munson, who did not come here until 1896, doing their business in Hayward.

In 1893 we commenced an agitation for a township government our own and for the purpose of helping it on, several team loads of men with gay banners went down to

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Spooner to vote at a special election and make ourselves known which led to our getting the new town in operation in the spring of 1894, at which point I will leave it for someone else to take up hereafter.

Pioneering is in many respects is the most delightful work in the world while in many respects it is full of privations and suffering endurance, and if any of the newer settlers feel prone to complain of the conditions, they should bear in mind that those of us who came first had to wait four years for our first road work, five and six years for our schools, and eight years for the right to govern ourselves. Such things came slowly, but they came just as surely and the time will be when the grey-haired old settlers will sit down in peace and comfort and relate to their grand children the hard experiences of those early days, which will then I suppose seem almost impossible, together with brighter and sometimes comical ones. All these together would fill a book or two or three books, and I have only drawn an outline of the years which will always remain with me as a cherished remembrance, and with good new men coming in to join those already here, (and they make the best neighbors I know anywhere) there is nothing to prevent our growing up into a prosperous and respected community.

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