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EARLY HISTORY OF OMRO AND VICINITY (of 1876)

In the Dec. 11, 1930 issue of the Omro Herald is printed the first installment of an Early History of Omro and vicinity presented to the paper by Minnie Wright, sister of P.M. Wright, former Publisher of the Omro Journal. Following are excerpts from the articles, researched and written by Wright,

The first white men to travel up the Fox River through what was later the site of Omro were:

- 1639 - Jean Nicollet
- 1670 -- Father Allouez
- 1673 -- Father Marquette, Joliet and 5 other Frenchmen
- 1683 -- LeSueur followed
- 1714 -- DeLorivigney's battle with the Fox Indians at Butte des Morts, which embraced the land on which Omro is situated.
- 1812 -- A British force under Col. McKay passed down Wisconsin river and captured Fort of Prairie DeChien.
- 1827 -- Quite a large force of Americans went through here on their way to Fort Winnebago, at the Portage. The same year a treaty was made with the Menominees at Butte des Morts.
- 1828 -- The 5th U.S. Infantry came through here from St. Louis on their way to Fort Howard; and the water at Portage was so high they floated their barges from the Wisconsin into the Fox without unloading.

Omro was settled by whites in the spring of 1845. Before that date, Chas. rron, a half-breed, had put up a log hut and established sort of a trading post near where the Compound Company's building stood. (Standard Oil Station)

The description of Edw West's land was of 500 acres in Township 18, the north of Range 17 East. 4 center 40s of Sec. 23. He was the first settler.

From a letter which Mr. West has kindly written us, we make the following interesting extracts. He writes:

"I marked out, and cut, where it was necessary, a wagon road from Rosendale Ford du Lac County, to my land in Butte des Morts (Omro), before I could move my family. Rosendale and the 'Fourierite' settlement south and southwest, and Oshkosh on the east were the nearest neighborhoods. There was an old block house a short distance above where the village of Omro is now located, and a few families. The Wrights, Galloupes, Stanleys and Fords-- were trading with the Indians, and farming a little where the city of Oshkosh now stands. The country far to the south, and for a great distance north of the Fox river, and westerly from Lake Winnebago, was uninhabited, except by Indians. There were two or three very wet seasons in succession about that time, and the general appearance of the country low and wet, and of a very spongy nature. After wading some distance through water and tall grass to reach the south shore of Fox river at Oshkosh, near where the Northwestern Railroad Company's freight depot now stands, I, with the rest of our exploring company, (Hon. R.B. Hinckley, Dr. Story and Edwin B. Fisk, all of West Milwaukee County, now Waukesha County) were taken over in Indian canoes by . Stanley, who offered to sell his claim for a small sum. I think the County buildings now stand on part of the land. Our little party, all practical farmers, were unanimous in the opinion that Oshkosh did not present a very inviting field or prospect for farming on an extensive scale. The same opinion was entertained of the site where your flourishing village-- soon to be a city--now stands. So I was saved by the timely counsel of my friends, together with force of circumstances, from becoming by change, or

otherwise, a proprietor of the village of Omro, or part proprietor of the city of Oshkosh. But I have not escaped so well since. The Indians of the our tribes, Winnebagoes, Menominees, Chippeways and Pottawottomies were there in force, and held possession and occupancy of the country lying between the Wolf river on the east and the Mississippi on the west, and using and occupying at their pleasure all of the country north and south of Fox river for hunting grounds. Most kinds of game were scarce on account of the Indians either killing it or driving it off, excepting wolves and prairie hens, which the red men were too superstitious to molest. Prairie hens were very plentiful--so numerous that I killed them in large numbers with a shot gun and with 'dead falls,' to save my grain; and what could not be used in the family were fed to the hogs. Strangers exploring the country, were accustomed to call upon me and make inquiries about the land, and they were generally loaded down with the wild chickens, part of which they ate themselves, as they generally stopped with me, and the rest found their way to the pig sty."

From The Omro Herald issue of Dec 18, 1930.

After Mr. West opened the way there was quite an influx of settlers. Among the earliest were Myron Howe who kept "bach" on the same land he now occupies; N. Gifford on Sec. 22, A. Beals, sec. 24; Barna Haskill, sec. 23; George Stokes, on the Rumery place; Al. Pease, sec. 28; M.C. Bushnell, sec. 27, now the Hatch place; A. Quick, sec. 26; George Beckwith, sec. 14, the Crego place; Wm. Remington, Nelson Olin; Joseph Whitehead, sec. 33; Leuman Scott, sec. 20; John Monroe, sec. 36; Frederick Tice, sec. 27; Gilman Loud, sec. 33; John Johnson, sec. 29; William Parker, sec. 28; Wm. Thrall, sec. 15; P.O. Sullivan and Mr. Polar, sec. 6; L.F. Arnold and W.O. Giddings, sec. 8; C.Cusick and Mr. Carpenter, Sec. 5; James Reid, sec. 18; the Maguire place; Nathan Wolverton, J.H. Perry, N.J. Forbes, Mr. Hayward and Richard Reed. There were undoubtedly others that settled here between '48 and '49, but we have not been able to get their names. Also Isaac Germain Origin Williams place, sec. 23.

Isaac Germain was the first postmaster, and had the office at his house on what is now the Origin Williams place. (Orin? Williams)

George Beckwith was the first School Superintendent in the town, and as far as we have been able to determine, Mrs. George Beckwith was the first school teacher.

In 1848, during Mr. Myron Howe's absence from home, his bachelor quarters were taken possession of and a school opened with "rs. Abram Quick as teacher.

Mr. Geo. Beckwith built the first frame house of any size--the building now occupied by Crego, near the Junction. There were one or two board "shanties" in the town at the time, but nothing that could be called a frame house previous to the building of Mr. Beckwith's.

About the same time, Mr. Joseph Whitehead built a frame house on Sec. 33. Some claim that this was the first one, but the majority were with Beckwith.

Milo Bushnell had the first painted house in Omro built on what is now known as the Hatch place, and the color was put on by George Wrightson.

The first collector was Mr. Hayward, who lived on Sec. 13, just east of where the Good Templar Hall now stands.

The first white child born in the town was a daughter of Leuman Scott's; and the other settlers felt so pleased with the fruitfulness of the climate,

that they "chipped in" and bought the girl a dress.

The first frame barn in town was built by David Minkler, on the Richardanner place. This was not built, however, until 1849.

In the fall of 1846, a gentleman by the name of Jones happened to discover that there was a scarcity of cats in the town, and he immediately proceeded to remedy this alarming state of affairs. He went to Illinois and gathering up a dozen or more of the coveted felines, he placed them in a box and started back. The traveling was then exclusively by teams, and Mr. Jones was obliged to put up at the taverns along the road. At one of these places the hostler heard a wonderful noise in Mr. Jones' box, and he had the curiosity to investigate a little. He lifted the cover very softly, and holding his lantern up to the aperture, he stuck his head down to peep in. About that time the cats had made up their minds to take a short recess, and they poured out of that box so fast that they knocked over the lantern before the hostler could see what sort of animal he had been fooling with. That gave him such a fright that he scooted for the door as though the last trump had blown. He only gave one look behind him, which frightened him worse than ever and then rushed into the tavern and told Mr. Jones that there were fourteen pairs of glistening eyes on every beam in the barn, besides about a dozen on every rafter. Of course Mr. Jones knew that meant cats, and he spent the rest of the night gathering them in. Nothing further happened until he got to Watertown, and there the imported felines all froze to death.

The earliest records of the town now obtainable are dated April 6, 1847. The accession to the population for the first two years could not have been large, for at the first town meeting of which we have any account, which was held at the date above mentioned, the whole number of votes polled was only 21.

The meeting was held at the house of Edward West, and Nelson Olin was chosen Moderator. Among the resolutions adopted at that meeting, we find the following:

"That the town officers for their compensation, shall receive 75 cents per day.

"That we raise the sum of twenty-five dollars to defray the necessary expenses of the town."

Edward West, John Monroe and Frederick Tice were elected Supervisors; Nelson Olin, Town Clerk; Barna Haskell, Assessor; Isaac Jermain, Justice of the Peace; John H. Perry, Treasurer; Alvin Beals, Collector; Nelson Olin, George Stokes and Gilman Loud, Commissioners of Highways; Edward West, Barna Haskell and Nathan Wolverton, Commissioners of Common Schools; Alvin Beals, Constable; Abraham Quick, Sealer of weights and measures; Nelson Tice and Edward West, Overseers of Highways and Isaac Hammers, N.I. Forbes and Myron Howe, Fence Viewers.

There was some other business transacted at the meeting which may prove interesting, and we copy from the record as follows:

"Also there were polled at the same election on the Constitution--suffrage to colored persons, twenty-one votes, five of which were in the affirmative, and sixteen in the negative. Also on the Constitution there were twenty-one votes polled, seven for the Constitution and seventeen opposed to it. Also there were eleven votes cast on the license question--against granting license."

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We see by this that even at that early day the license question was brought up, and it has not been lost sight of to the present time. Surely the no-license inhabitants of the town of Omro have clung tenaciously to their principles.

From the Omro Herald issue of Dec. 24, 1930.

Religious meetings were first held in the Winter of 1847-48, in a shanty on Sec. 27, on land now occupied by Mrs. Betts. Only one or two meetings were held there however. Mr. Richard Reed had put up a log house 18x22 and services were held in that. Elder Pillsbury preached the first sermon, we believe. Mr. Reed's house was known as the "big house" for some time, which will give a good idea of the size of the others then in the town. In those early days the mill facilities were meagre, and Mr. Reed informs us that the first grist he had ground he hauled to Kingston, 40 miles and back again.

On Mr. Reed's place was dug the first flowing well, we believe. The well was sunk quite a depth without reaching water, but while the workmen were away, a stream burst into it, and filled so rapidly that it could not be stoned up. It never was stoned.

The years of 1848-1849 were extremely wet. More rain fell than we have had this season. Many became discouraged, and moved away, but those who went away did not succeed so well, as a rule, and some of them drifted back to Omro.

The first male teacher in the town was George Herrick, who lived on what is now the Howard place, Sec. 9, on the river. The previous owner of the place, whose name has slipped our mind, went down to the river one evening to wash, and was never seen alive again. His body was not found until the next spring which must have been about '52 or '53.

In 1848, the territory was admitted as a State. On the 13th of March of that year, an election was held at the house of William Remington to vote on the adoption of the Constitution, which resulted in 27 votes for and 6 against the adoption. At an election held in April of the same year we find 22 votes against granting license and 7 in favor of it. The election for governor and other state officers was held in the following May. Again in November there was still another election for presidential electors, county officers, etc. the number of votes being polled being 40.

Between this time and the following spring, the name of the town was changed from Butte des Morts to Bloomingdale. The whole amount voted to be raised for the current expenses of the town that year was \$33.60.

In the latter part of 1852 occurred the Great Indian Scare. The Indians, in large numbers, came down on the north side of the river, to have their sugar dance. The villagers who appear to have been not very well versed in the Terpsichorean performances of the copper colored race, mistook it for a war dance, and the hair on their heads began to have an upward tendency. There was considerable excitement for awhile. All the shot guns and spare pitchforks were hunted up, and preparations made for defense. The Reds noticed the hurry and scurry on the south side of the river, and being as ignorant of the white man's dance as the Whites had been of theirs, they began to feel somewhat uneasy, and at last hurriedly adjourned the frolic. It is said that some of the Whites went out of town a little faster than they ever did before, and that some of them never returned, but we do not tell this for a fact.

The first settlement on land now the boundaries of the village was in the Spring of 1847. In 1845 or '46 Mr. David Humes passed through the town selecting Seminary land. The country pleased him. He saw that there was a good location here for a village, and he decided to return here. Sickness prevented him, however, from carrying out his plans as soon as he had expected, and it was not until the Spring of 1847, that he was enabled to come. He loaded a light skiff into a wagon and drove to Marquette. The rest of the journey he made in the skiff. He stuck his stakes in what is now called Beckwithtown, on Sec. 16, and also bought a fraction along the river, extending nearly to where George Challoner's foundry is now situated, and to him we accord the honor of having been the founder of the Village of Omro.

Mr. Humes built a log house, the first structure that could be dignified by the name of a house ever built in the village. It was just east of where Mr. Dennis Child's house stands now. After the house was completed, Mr. Humes went back to Janesville, and brought his family here.

From The Omro Herald issue of Jan. 1, 1931.

It was Mr. Humes' ambition to build up a thriving town. He settled here for that purpose, and laid every plan for the accomplishment of that end. Many scouted the idea of ever building a town on what they considered scarcely more than a mud hole, but Mr. Humes paid no attention to the scoffs and jeers which met him on almost every turn. He had a plan of his own and in the following Spring he proceeded to carry it out. Taking his axe, he crossed to the north side of the river, which was then known as the "Indian Land", and selecting his trees, he struck the first blow toward the building of the "grouser" or upright anchor boat, for towing logs against the current. The grouser was a new idea, one of Mr. Humes' own invention and predictions of failure were many. But he had faith in it, and persevered. "I am going to build a boat which will tow logs up this river and there will be sawmills built here and a town will grow up," was his reply to all attempts to discourage him. Swimming his oxen across the stream, he drew the timber to the river bank. He went on with the work, and soon had the satisfaction of making it a complete success. The timber of the boat was all hewed in the woods across the river, and framed and put together under Mr. Humes' own supervision. The boat was propelled by horse power--four horses on a sweep and was known as "Humes Horse Boat." When the first fleet of logs was brought up, Mr. Nelson Beckwith a son-in-law of Mr. Humes, went down the river in a skiff to meet the new boat. He paddled around the raft and boat and watched operations for some time, and then said: "Well! well! he will be a Fulton yet."

Well he might liken Mr. Humes to the inventor of the steamboat, for his invention of the grouser has been the means of building up not only Omro, but many other towns which never could have had an existence without this simple but effectual contrivance for hauling large rafts of logs against the current. Thus we say that to Mr. David Humes belongs the honor of not only being the founder of our village, but also of doing more than any other man in those early days to give the place a start. Yet he did not receive much benefit from his invention. Like too many other inventors, he saw those around him profiting by his work, but took no steps to protect himself with patent until it was too late.

Mr. Aaron Humes, a son of David's built the first steam grouser boat. It was called the Swan. Mr. Humes did not run it but a little while, but sold it to parties in Neenah, after which he put up a store nearly where Richardson's house stands in Beckwithtown.

As soon as it became certain that the boat which Mr. David Humes had intended would be a success, steps were taken by different parties toward building new saw mills. Mr. Nelson Beckwith, a son-in-law of Mr. Humes, proposed to his father-in-law to put up a mill, if he would give him ten acres of land on the river. Mr. Humes agreed to it. About the same time, Mr. Elisha Dean went to Mr. Humes on a similar errand. As the best mill site had already been promised to Mr. Beckwith, Mr. Dean did not accomplish anything, but Elder Theodore Pillsbury, who owned land this side of Beckwithtown extending to what is now West Division street, and who built the house now occupied by W.C. Dean, near the Fair Grounds, offered 40 acres of land to Mr. Dean. He accepted, and with an understanding the nature of which we do not know, Mr. Nelson Beckwith joined him and commenced a mill on the site of the present woolen mill. Messrs. Dean and Beckwith did not continue in partnership but a short time, and Mr. Dean associated with himself, Mr. Joel Taylor. Meantime, Mr. Beckwith erected a mill in Beckwithtown, on the site of the present slaughter house of Mr. Towers. This was in 1847. Mr. Beckwith's residence was on the site of the one now owned by John Douty. Among the other settlers who came to the village about 1847 to '49 we mention the names of Col. Tuttle, Dr. McAllister, Andrew Wilson, L.O.E. Manning, A. Corfee, William Hammond, Mr. Peck and John Wilson.

Col Tuttle purchased the fractional 70 acres of section 7 on the south side of the river, commencing at lot 1, Western Addition, and extending south and west. Near the site of the old Exchange Tavern was an Indian camping ground. Further south on Main street, near where Mrs. Martin lives now, in block 100, Western Addition, were thirteen mounds, the remains of one of which now be seen. On the north side of the river near the site of Wilson's mill, were other tumuli, or mounds.

From The Omro Herald issue of Jan. 8, 1931.

The original plot of the village was laid out in 1849, by Joel V. Taylor, Elisha Dean and Nelson Beckwith. The plot of the Western Addition was laid out the year following.

Previous to 1850, the river was crossed by a ferry, but in that year Col. Tuttle built a float bridge across the stream at the foot of Main street, where Thompson & Hayward's Carriage works are situated. There was quite a strife between the two sections of the village as to who should get the bridge. The people on the original plot wanted the bridge built at the foot of Exchange street but Col. Tuttle saddled his horse and going to Madison, got the start of them.

On the 10th day of May 1849, occurred the first death by drowning. A son of Wm. Parker lost his life in the Fox river, which at that time was considered scarcely more than a brook.

The first well dug in the village was by William Parker and Alex Allen near the old Compound building.

We find by the records that in 1850 there was quite an accession to the population of the village, and the business of the place. N. Frank and C. Gelow came in that year. N. Frank came up the river on the steamer "Badger", the first steamer, so far as known, that ever came up as far as the bridge. At that time, the bridge was not finished. The freight was unloaded on the end of the bridge in the north channel, and plank laid down to get them across to the south shore. The south channel was then very shallow, and many supposed it would never be navigable; but Mr. Frank and some others were of a different opinion and put a yoke of cattle and a scraper at work dredging it

out. After the current got fairly started through, the water deepened and it soon became the main channel. Mr. Frank put up a building at the south end of the bridge (1850)--the same building which Thompson & Hayward have been using for a paint shop and office, and built a dock. Mr. C. Bigelow became associated with him, and they opened the first store of any note in the place, although a Mr. Terwilleger had previously been in trade here in a small way. To show the extent of the business done during Mr. Terwilleger's time, and the prices, we mention a little incident which happened. A certain gentleman brought a load of wood to town, and tried to sell it. After trying for several hours, he gave it up, and started for the river to throw it in, rather than haul it home again. Mr. Terwilleger saw him and came out and offered him a pint of whiskey for the load. The trade was made, and the seller went home with the proceeds. Tradition doesn't say what became of the wood.

Mr. C. Bigelow built the Goodwin house, lots 97 and 98, Western Addition, just south of Sam Shaw's.

In the same year, 1850, the first hotel in the village was built--what is now the Larrabee House, except that it has been enlarged and improved until there is scarcely anything left of the original structure. The old Exchange Hotel was also built the same Summer, but a little later.

In 1851, the saw mill on the north side of the river, known as "Johnson's Mill", was built by Hiram Johnson and a gentleman by the name of Bump. The mill burned down in 1866, and the present one erected on the same site.

Educational matters were not neglected in those early days. The first public school teacher in the village was Mr. Henry Purdy. He taught in the winter of 1850-51, in the first schoolhouse erected in the village, in the year 1850. It was situated nearly on the spot on which Mr. H. Carter's barn now stands, just west of the present high school building. The house has been moved to lots nearly east of the cheese factory, and is now occupied by P.V. Young as a dwelling. Mr. Purdy received for his services as teacher \$22 per month and board. Miss Phoebe Pettingill was hired to teach the Summer term at \$2 per week and board at the residence of the scholars.

Mr. L.A. Reed soon after taught a school in the building now owned by A.J. Dickerson; and there was also a school on the north side, in Patterson's building, nearly on the site of Pelton's store, with Miss Peabody as teacher.

The first record we have of a school meeting is on the 7th day of May, 1850. This meeting was called by G.W. Beckwith, Town Superintendent of Schools. Every legal voter in the District was personally notified, which was not a very lengthy task, as there were only 55 of them.

From The Omro Herald issue of Jan. 15, 1931.

The meeting was held at the house of George Gallatin, at 2 o'clock p.m. and W.P. McAllister was elected Director, James Peck, Treasurer, and W.W. Wilcox, Clerk. The meeting adjourned to meet at the same place on the following day at 7 p. m. for the purpose of designating a site for a school house. At the adjourned meeting it was decided to raise \$200 for the school house.

This year--1851--was not a very flourishing one for Omro. Communications with the outside world were not of the best, and the previous wet seasons had been anything but encouraging. Money was scarce. Mr. C.S. Murphy, who came here in that year, informs us that his cash receipts during the year

were just one hundred cents, sometimes called a dollar. Nevertheless, the people stayed and struggled through the best they could, and there were some newcomers. Among these who came in that year, and the year previous, we mention, L.O.E. Manning, the Wilsons, Wilcoxes, L. Andrews, J. Waterman and the Pattersons. According to the recollection of N. Frank, Esq., there are not now ten men living in the village, who were men at that time, although many of the boys of those days are now residents of the village.

That year (1851), it was voted not to allow nonresidents to attend school in the district. At a school meeting the same year, it was resolved that the Board be authorized to furnish fifteen cords of "good two-foot wood," for the use of the school during the Winter, and the contract to furnish the same was let to E. Dame, at sixty-eight cents per cord, delivered. The following year the contract for furnishing fifteen cords of hard wood was let to the lowest bidder, D.B. Sneed, at sixty-two cents per cord, delivered. In '52, sections 7 and 8--the "Indian Land," as it was then called, were added to School District No. 5, and it was voted to hire additional school room, make two departments and secure another teacher.

During those early days, school meetings were very numerous. From '50 to '54 there were from five to eight adjourned and special school meetings and judging from the records there seemed to be business enough for the whole of them though it must be admitted that all that was done at some of these meetings was to rescind the action of the previous meeting.

In 1854, the sum of \$200 was voted for teacher's wages, \$10 for purchasing a globe, and \$5 for a District Library.

In the summer following, the Methodist church building was commenced. The Methodists had been holding meetings for some time in an old building on or very near the site of Ben Barnard's house. The foundation for the church was laid, and the frame work put up and enclosed, but was not finished off until the following season. The Baptist church was not commenced until 1856, but it was finished before the Methodist church.

In 1855, the 5th District voted to have a new school house, the old one not being large enough to meet the demands, and \$600 was appropriated for the purpose. At a special meeting held December 15th, 1855, a proposal of E.C. Mattoon for building the house was accepted, the price being \$1,500. At a subsequent meeting, March 3rd, 1856, Mr. Mattoon was released from his contract, and a proposal to build the school house of brick from Geo. Stokes, was accepted, the price to be \$2,140. The building was put up the same season, but was not finished until the following Summer. The brick used in the house were made by Mr. Stokes, on what is now known as the old brick yard, south of the Baptist church.

Soon after the upper room of the school building was completed, it was rented to the Presbyterian Society as a place of worship on the Sabbath, and was occupied by them for several years.

In the year 1856, the grist mill was built by Mr. McLaren. This was quite an event for the place, and was the means of drawing considerable trade into the village.

In the same year Andrew Wilson built his mill on the north side of the river. The float bridge which occupied the place of the present structure was also put across the river the same season. A compromise between the two sections of the village had been erected, and the bridge was located on the

line between the two. It was constructed by a company, and opened as a toll bridge.

From The Omro Herald issue of Jan. 22, 1931.

In 1857, we find among the new residents of the village, Dr. McCall, W. Ames, Dr. Gibbs, Benj. Sawdy and W. Larrabee. The first village charter was granted that year, and the first charter election was held on the 13th of April. The whole number of votes cast was 105. W.P. McAllister was elected President, Chancellor Johnson, A.C. Patterson, J. Gibbs and W. Larrabee, Trustees. W.B. Holcomb was elected Clerk; J.V. Taylor, Treasurer; Benj. Sawdy, Assessor, and A.J. White, Marshal.

The village expenses during the year were \$234.21. There were 457 rods of sidewalk constructed, at an expense of \$1108.75.

The building on the corner, now occupied by Berkley & Cain, was erected during the summer, by N. Frank, and rented to Joel V. Taylor, who put in a general stock, and continued in business here for several years.

The project of a railroad to Omro was first brought into definite shape during this year. In the Spring and Summer, the stock was all taken, \$90,000 in cash and bonds being the amount which the Town and Village of Omro pledged or paid. The first Directors of the company were C. Bigelow, D.P. Mapes, Mr. Bowen, Mr. Lyman, of Ripon, and Mr. McLaren. Mr. Bigelow was President of the company nearly all the time until the road was sold. The first Secretary of the Company was a Mr. French, but the position was filled the principal part of the time until the sale, by M.G. Bradt. The company was known as the Ripon & Wolf River Railroad Company.

In 1858, the float bridge across the Fox was purchased by the town for \$800, on condition that the Bridge Company put it in repair, and that the village maintain and keep it in repair. The village, at their annual meeting the same year, empowered the Board of Trustees to take action in the matter, and the proposition of the town was agreed to. The purchase was made and the bridge declared free to the public. William Devinney was the first regular bridge tender after the purchase.

The total disbursements of the village Treasurer during the year were \$330.66. The number of children reported in the district was 339. The number attending school was 280.

Grading and tying the railroad was commenced this year and progressed steadily but not very rapidly. In the following year the work went on, and the grading was nearly completed thru to Winneconne. The first depot was built by private subscription, and was located on the bank of the river, on the west side of the track.

Track laying commenced in 1860, in the early part of the Winter of that year the iron was laid as far as Waukau, and on Sunday, the 1st day of January, 1861, the last rail was laid at the bank of the river in Omro. This was the most important event in the history of the place, up to that time.

Hitherto, there had been no outlet for the lumber manufactured here, except by water, and all mails and communication with other towns was either by the same means, or by teams. The completion of the railroad was therefore a very important event for Omro, and although regular trains were not put on until June, 1863 it was a benefit to the village which but few have estimated at its true value. Too many have looked only at the cost of the road,

forgetting that it doubled the population and business of the place, created a better market for farm produce, and placed many advantages within reach, which without it would have been absolutely unattainable. Among these, and not the least, we may mention the superior mail facilities.

Instead of a tri-weekly mail and stale news at that, a daily mail was received, and newspapers printed in Chicago and Milwaukee in the morning and at noon were received here at night, with the latest intelligence. This was very important during the war times, and the crowd that gathered at the office at the arrival of every mail, showed that it was appreciated. For this privilege, the people of Omro were largely indebted to C. Bigelow, for nearly two years, or until the regular trains were put on the road. A hand car was sent out to the junction for the mail every night, which made the trip in nearly the same time that the train is now allowed. Seward Cady, a former proprietor of this paper, was the engineer, conductor and mail agent of that hand car for a long time, and one of the present proprietors of the Journal has a faint recollection of working his passage out on that line more than once.

From The Omro Herald issue of Jan 29, 1931.

There was considerable passenger travel, also, on that single hand car. There was scarcely a night that there were not from two to four persons coming to Omro, and the loose change for their fare went far toward keeping up the spirits of those who manned the brakes. Mr. A.K. Brush took a part of his wedding trip on this conveyance, and he says it was a good ride, too.

The Spring of 1861 was ushered in with the first dread notes of war. Summer had fallen, and the people of Omro in common with those of every other northern town, were too much occupied with the momentous duties which the Rebellion forced upon them, to think of anything else. War was something new and strange, and those who did not take an active part in the field, had their hands full at home, therefore, we have no new enterprises nor any great change to note in Omro during the year. Events of importance were transpiring, however, which are worthy of note. The President had called for troops to put down the Rebellion, and Wisconsin's quota must be furnished. Omro was not behind, and her war record she may well be proud of. Company C, of the Fourteenth Infantry, was recruited in Omro in the Fall of '61, mustered into the United States service Jan 30th, '62, and left the State on the 8th of March. W.W. Wilcox was Captain of the company, but did not go into the field with it, Colin Miller, 1st Lieutenant, and A.S. Smith, 2nd Lieutenant. A. Corfee was afterward commissioned Lieutenant. We have not the company roll at hand, but we call to mind the following men who were members from Omro; A.S. Childs, J.K. Bishop, David Hinman, John Reed, B.T. Crafts, J. McMahon, W. Anderson, L. Cady, P. Gallagher, R. Hunter, G. Perkins, B.F. Smith, J.S. Johnson, Richard and Royal Reed, O. Johnson, Sol. Statler, J. Statler, J.E. Williamson and Mr. Benton.

David Hinman, a son of J.L. Hinman, now residing in the village, was the first soldier from Omro who was killed.

The Fourteenth was under fire from the time it reached the front until it was mustered out. On the 5th of April 1862, not a month from the time they left the State, the boys took part in the battle of Pittsburg Landing. In the official list of the killed in that action, we find the name of James Alley, of Company C; the wounded from the same company were Lieutenant Smith, William Ditley, A.B. Miller, Sol. Statler, James Statler, J.K. Bishop and James E. Williamson.

In the following July, the regiment was in the battle of Corinth. The Brigade Commander, Col. Oliver speaking of the regiment, gives it the following noble tribute:

"The Fourteenth Wisconsin Infantry was always steady, cool and vigorous, and the one to rely upon in any emergency. Though suffering more loss than any other regiment in the command, they maintained their lines and delivered their fire with the precision and coolness which would have been maintained on parade."

The official list of killed in Company C. at that battle was R. Putman, G. Clark and Ellery Porter; wounded, J. Dean, D. Maxon, W. Anderson, J. Dewrose, L. Cady, T. Fitzgerald, P. Gallagher, R. Hunter, G. Perkins and B. F. Smith.

In January following the regiment embarked for Vicksburg and took part in the siege of that stronghold. In the terrible charge of the 22nd, the Fourteenth penetrated considerably beyond any other regiment of the brigade, and attained a position in front of the enemy's works, where no other regiment was near them. When the city was finally surrendered on the 4th of July, the Fourteenth was assigned the position of honor on the right, and ordered by General Ransom to take the advance in the triumphal entry of our victorious army into the city, the General complimenting them with the remark that "every man and officer of the Fourteenth was a hero."

The list of killed in Company C during the siege is given in the report as follows: Killed, Colin Miller, J.F. Wells, and G.S. Noyes; wounded G.T. Crafts, B.F. Hoy, D. Howe, C.M. Johnson, J. McMahon and B. Smith. A Board of Honor, of which General McPherson was President, awarded silver medals of honor to several members of the regiment, for gallant services, among which was one to A.S. Childs of Company C. Sergeant Childs was afterwards promoted to the captaincy.

From The Omro Herald issue of February 5, 1931.

More than two-thirds of the regiment re-enlisted on the 11th of December, constituting a veteran regiment. The regiment was conspicuous in many other engagements, always doing good service and on the 9th of October, 1865 were mustered out, and the remnant of the Omro boys who went out with it, returned home.

The Third Cavalry, which was recruited in 1861, and mustered into service in January, 1862, also contained many prominent citizens of Omro. Among those most prominent in mind were P. Samphier, John Rice, Alonzo Kimball, C.D. Phelps, John Havens, M. Baker and Frank Knapp. The regiment was mustered out in 1865, having done good service in the southwest and west, and probably ranged over a greater extent of country than any other regiment.

The Eighteenth Regiment also had one company from Omro, Company F. We can call to mind but a few of the members who belonged to it. J.W. Roberts was Captain, and Geo. Stokes 1st Lieutenant. James Samphier, Andrew Robbins, Nelson Hoaglin and Charles E. Johnson were on the company roll. The regiment took part in the battles of Pittsburg Landing and Corinth, the Siege of Vicksburg and the battles of Allatoons and Huntsville. At the last mentioned engagement, C.E. Johnson, of Company F, was killed, and J.W. Samphier and A.J. Robbins were taken prisoners.

There were also in the Twenty-first Regiment several men from Omro, whose names we have not at hand. Hiram H. Gibbs, the father of our predecessor

on the Journal, was Captain of Company E, of this regiment, and was wounded at the battle of Perryville, and died soon afterward, from the effects of the wound.

Business in Omro during the first three years of the war was dull. Very few improvements were going on, and no new enterprises talked up. In the way of manufacturing, there were three saw mills, Wilson's, Johnson's, and the Drake mill, but the two latter named ones were run semi-occasionally. There was a small planing-mill, run by Mr. Woodward, on the site of Lansing's livery stable, formerly run by F.R. Downs, we believe. The grist mill was also in full operation. It was during the year 1863 that Mr. George Challenger built the shingle mill now occupied by Thompson & Hayward. He put in a shingle machine of his own invention, and did a good business. Ellis Thompson and Thomas Charlesworth were associated with him at one time. Also L.B. Lewis, we believe. The Presbyterian church was put up the same year, but not finished off entirely until 1866.

In 1864, the business outlook was rather more encouraging. In that year the Charlesworth Brothers built the planing mill now run by Morton, Arnold & Morton.

The Soldiers' Bounty Question came up early in the year (1863). The draft during the Winter had taken off quite a number of the citizens, and it was thought best to offer some inducement for enlisting rather than allow another draft. At a special town meeting in January, it was voted to pay \$100 bounty to every unmarried man who enlisted and credited to the town, and \$10 per month to the families of married men.

At the annual town meeting in April \$4,000 was voted for bounties to soldiers. At a special meeting in August, it was voted to raise \$8,000 more, and at a special meeting on the 14th of January, 1865, \$10,000 more was voted to be raised, and the bounty raised to \$200. This amount was afterwards increased to \$300. In the Spring of 1864, the 100 day troops were called for, and Omro furnished her proportion. Seward Cady, the original proprietor of the Omro Union, went with the company. We think the most of the men who went from here, returned; but Mr. J. Clemons, whom many of our readers will remember, died soon after reaching home.

Very late in the autumn of 1864, the President called for 300,000 more men and Omro promptly responded. Company A of the Forty-eighth infantry was recruited here, and was composed almost solely of Omro men. C.W. Felker, now of the firm of Felker & Weisbrod, Oshkosh, was then practicing law here, and recruited a company, of which he was commissioned Captain.

From The Omro Herald issue of February 12, 1931.

Henry Felker his brother, was first Lieutenant of Company A, of the forty-eighth infantry. The regiment was mustered into the service, and left the State in March 1865, for St. Louis. From there the Forty-eighth went west into Kansas and out on the Plains. The war proved to be near its close, and the boys had no fighting to do, which was their gain. Among those who went from Omro, two died, Raymond at Camp Washburn, Milwaukee, and David Lake, at Fort Scott. The regiment was mustered out at Fort Leavenworth, on the 30th of December, '65.

In May, 1865, the first permanent newspaper, The Omro Union, was established in Omro. A paper called the Omro Republican, was published here in 1857-58, by E.R. More, but it was discontinued. We have one copy preserved,

No. 40, Vol. 1, printed on the 6th of May, 1858. It is a six-column folio, printed in a very creditable manner, and filled with original matter and selections. Among the home advertisements, of which, by the way there are double the number now carried by the Journal, although the place was not half the present size, we notice many familiar names. Many of the persons doing business in Omro then, are still with us. We glean a few items from the Republican, which we reproduce here. On Monday evening preceding the issue of the paper a meeting was held in Benedict's Hall for the purpose of organizing an independent military company. The company was organized under the name of the Omro Light Infantry Life Guards, with the following list of officers: Captain, Joel V. Taylor; First Lieutenant, A. Schermerhorn; Second Lieutenant, A.B. Larrabee; Orderly Sergeant, Daniel Douty; Second Sergeant, H.M. Howe; Third Sergeant, C.H. Larrabee; Fourth Sergeant, Geo. Pingrey; First Corporal, A. Corfee; Second Corporal, H.C. Hollister; Third Corporal, John Barrit; Fourth Corporal, James Richardson. It was decided that the uniform be cockade hats, dark blue broadcloth for coats and light blue broadcloth for pants, trimmed with red. W.B. Holcomb was appointed Treasurer of the company. We do not know what became of the organization, but some of the members have since that time trained in a military company that had more stern reality about it than fun. The "Republican" says there was a debating society at that time, and also a Good Templar lodge; and tucked away in one corner of the paper we find these few lines:

"It is now half-past twelve o'clock, and we are getting ready to go to press by sunrise, if possible."

All of which goes to show that the duties of a printer then and now, are not changed.

Leaving the gleanings from the old "Republican", we return to the Omro Union. S.H. Cady was the founder of this small paper. He commenced in a very small way at first. We remember the first copy. It was sent to some member of the Forty-eighth Wisconsin Infantry, while stationed in Kansas, and there was not an Omro boy there who did not read every word and line of it. It was very small, the size of a sheet of letter paper, yet very creditable in appearance. The third number issued was a three-column quarto--pages 9 to 12. We have a copy of it before us now printed in July. The local items are not very numerous, but we find that the publishers had just purchased a new press and promised a larger paper. There is a list of the persons doing business in the village at that date, which has sixty names, twenty of which are still here. We also find a notice of the finding of silver on the farm of Mr. Hall, on the Winneconne road. The metal changed to gold a few years afterward, and it is now probably undergoing another transformation, as we have heard nothing of it for a year or two. The steamer, "A. Lincoln," was running that year. According to the Union, the census taken that year showed the population of the village to be 975, but the return of soldiers immediately afterward increased it to over 1,000.

From The Omro Herald issue of February 19, 1931.

The opening of the Spring of 1866 witnessed a general increase of business in Omro. The soldiers had nearly all returned to peaceful pursuits, the feeling of joy that the Rebellion had at last been crushed, seemed to encourage everybody. Improvements were commenced, new enterprises talked of and started, and the busy hum of industry was heard from one end of the village to the other. All who wanted work found plenty of it, and at good wages and prompt pay; and workmen from other places flocked here for work,

the reputation of Omro as a live, growing town, having gone abroad. Both Wilson's and Johnson's saw-mills were run for all they were worth, and then would not supply the demand; and when they shut down in the Fall, there was no lumber left on the yard. It had all been shipped green from the saw. Johnson's mill unfortunately burned down in the busiest time, and although it was immediately rebuilt, much of the best part of the Summer was lost.

George Challoner's machine shop was built that year. He first put up a building for a machine shop on the site of the shingle mill, as far back as 1855 but did not use it as intended. In the Spring of 1866 he started his shop in the building opposite Putnam's Block, but during the Summer put up a large shop on the site of the present foundry and machine shop.

Lewis & Thompson's shingle mill was then running on full time, and making money. "A" shingles sold for \$5.00.

Goodenough & Utter put up a spoke and hub mill just above where Webster's sawmill is located. It did not succeed very well. It was burned down and not rebuilt.

Sheldon & Allen put in a broom handle factory in a building about on the site of Lansing's barn. It didn't prove a success financially, and was finally abandoned.

Scott's shingle mill was built near where the woolen mill is, and run for awhile. That, too, was burned and not rebuilt.

The first brick store on the street was put up that Summer--the Gibbs building, now occupied by Hilton, the jeweler. The Maguire building, next to Hollister's, and Bushnell's Hall were also built the same season, the Larrabee House enlarged, and the Presbyterian church finished. A large number of residences were put up in different parts of the village, and the whole appearance of the place was one of thrift and enterprise.

Our schools were then first-class. The standard of excellence which they had reached and maintained had given them a reputation second to none in the county. This fact alone was the means of bringing many settlers to the place, and gave the people of Omro a character for intelligence and culture.

The year 1867, like its predecessor, was a very prosperous one for Omro. To the business of the previous year was added nearly as much more and the prospects were very flattering.

The Webster saw mill was put up that season by L.B. Lewis and Ellis Thompson. N.B. Blackmer and Alfred Pelton were also interested in it, we believe. The Catholic church was built that summer, and Drew & Hicks put up their carriage shop, now forming a part of the Thompson & Hayward works. The lumbering business, which was then so important an element in the prosperity of Omro, continued very lively and other business was proportionately brisk throughout the year.

The following year, 1868, was not so favorable for Omro. The times were generally good, and the people did not experience any particular pressure in money matters, but there was a feeling that a change was coming. People did not exhibit the confidence in the place which had heretofore been expressed, and consequently went slower. The principal cause of the change was unquestionably the extension of the railroad. Omro had been the terminus of this branch of the St. Paul road for many years, which had given her an

advantage over the places north of us, but when the road was put through, it opened competing points, and the further increase of the lumbering business of the place received a check.

But there was considerable building during the year. Putnam's Block was put up, A. Pelton's brick store on the North Side, and many dwellings; and the highway bridge across the Fox was also built that year. The Omro Agricultural and Mechanical Association grounds were fitted up and enclosed during the Summer and Fall, and the fair held there. The Great Western Compound Company was organized, and the building erected the same year.

From The Omro Herald issue of Feb 26, 1931.

The year 1869 was not marked by any great changes. David Blish put up and run a planing mill on the North Side, and the manufactories already built were kept running.

1870 showed some improvement. G.W. Shafer built his corner brick block that summer. The Christian church, now occupied by the Methodist Society, was also put up, besides many fine dwellings. The American House, formerly known as the Exchange Hotel and several other names, on the corner south of Putnam's Block, was burned in April.

The spirit of improvement was still rife in Omro in 1871. The place had already shown such a marked change during the few former years that considerable pride was felt in its further advancement, and the people were restless to go on with the work. The financial matters of the country were not very encouraging, however, and the new ventures were confined principally to those who had ready means.

W.W. Race built his brick block during the Summer, and the alteration on private residences, and the new dwellings did much to maintain the thrifty appearance of the village.

It was on the 8th of April of this year, that C.E. McStay, the principal of our school, met with his sad fate in Lake Poygan. In company with Almon Ames and Emmett Hicks, he went to the Lake to gather evergreens for decorating the school room. Leaving their team at Mr. Lee's, they took a small boat and crossed the Lake. On the return the boat was swamped and upset. They clung to the boat, but the water was so cold that it numbed them, and it soon became apparent that Mr. McStay was losing strength and consciousness. The boys did all they could to keep him up, and did succeed in getting him across the bottom of the boat. But even then, he appeared to be lifeless, and the rocking of the boat pitched the body off, and it sunk to the bottom. The boys were so nearly gone that they did not have strength to make the attempt to bring him up, and they turned their attention to saving themselves. By clinging to the boat, and paddling with their hands, they reached the shore at last in an unconscious condition, and had it not been for some Indians who happened to be near, they also would have perished. The Indians wrapped them in blankets, gave them food, and brought them around all right again, and the next morning (Sunday) they drove home with the sad news of Mr. McStay's death. The tidings spread through the village in a very brief time. The bells were tolled, and the whole community gave way to the grief which the young man's sad fate awakened. Measures for recovering the body were immediately taken, but it was not until Sunday, the 30th, that the search was successful. On Monday, May 1st, the remains were brought to Omro and buried in the cemetery, each scholar following in precession and dropping an evergreen branch into the grave.

On the night of the 15th of May, about 12 o'clock, the foundry and machine shop of George Challoner's was burned. They had been casting during the day, and it was supposed that the fire must have originated from the furnace. The loss to Mr. Challoner was about \$20,000, but nothing daunted, he immediately commenced the work of rebuilding, and soon had the present buildings up, and the machinery in running order.

On the 14th of September, Omro had quite a little excitement over the bones of a mastadon which some workmen found while digging near the residence of Mr. John Wilson. From an account published in the "Omro Union", we copy the following:

"The tusks were the first portions exhumed. They were mistaken for petrified wood and the end of one which projected into the ditch was consequently struck off with a spade; soon, however, their true character was discovered, and by a little farther digging two enormous molar teeth were thrown out. Subsequently the two huge tucks were removed from the soil, getting somewhat mutilated, however by rough handling. They were of the enormous length of ten inches each, and one eight inches in diameter. The teeth, of which four in all have been found are of immense size and in a perfect state of preservation, the enamel looking as hard and as bright as if but yesterday they were taken from their sockets. They measure on the crown nine inches in length and five in width, and nine inches from the crown to the ends of the fangs. They weigh eight pounds each. The teeth of this animal show that it belonged purely to the herbivorous species. They have the peculiar mastoid or nipple-like elevations on their grinding surface, from which the animal takes its name."

The bones were placed in charge of C.W. Bushnell, and they were visited by hundreds. They were afterward exhibited in different places throughout the state, and were known as the Omro Mastadon.

From The Omro Herald issue of March 5, 1931.

The Fall of 1871 as all will remember was exceedingly dry. Fires were all around us, and the very air was so filled with smoke that at times it was difficult to breathe. Many began to fear that the "last day" was at hand, but fortunately the village escaped, and our people lived to respond nobly to the calls for help from Pestigo, and other towns scourged by fire.

In 1872 there was very little that is worthy of note in the way of improvements except in a general way. The village held its own in population, and each one seemed to be doing a little to improve the appearance of the town, but there were no important manufacturing enterprises started. The Spiritualist Hall was commenced, which was the only public building put up during the year.

In the year following, there was a change for the better. The cheese factory was one of the important additions to the industries of the village during the season. The school building was put up that Summer, and the woolen mill building was built. The latter was looked upon as a very important enterprise for Omro and so it was. Had not subsequent events worked against it, it would have added very largely to the business of the place.

The year 1874, was the most unfortunate one for Omro since its very first settlement. Our people were already feeling the pinchings of the financial crisis which had swept over the country, yet their courage was good, and there was a mutual desire to still press on. But the failure of A.H. Howard

changed all this. It was the lost confidence in each other; the pitting of neighbor against neighbor; the general feeling of insecurity which prevailed after failure; the distrust with which the place was looked upon by outsiders; and the hopelessness which our people manifested. Even the regular, every-day business of the place seemed to be at a stand-still, and the prospect was anything but encouraging. This state of feeling, continued through the season, therefore, the record we make of 1874 is one that we wish might have been left unwritten. We pass it, and take up the followig year, 1875. As mercantile and manufacturing business of every kind was rapidly falling off all over the country, it cannot be expected that Omro made any great strides during that year; yet there was a much better feeling among our people. The truth of the old adage about "crying over spilt milk" began to be felt and acknowledged, and instead of the too often unjust denunciations of friends and neighbors, there were plans laid for the future, which have already culminated in good results.

This brings us to the end of our brief sketch of the past. We have used every endeavor to insure accuracy, but having been dependent almost solely upon the memory of parties from whom we obtained our information, it is not strange that during the thirty years that have elapsed, some things have been forgotten, and some dates given inaccurately. Yet, we believe that the errors are few and unimportant, and before speaking of Omro's Present, we take this occasion to again thank all who have aided us in our work.

Next week the history will start with the Present, which is in the years of 1875 and 1876.

1. Om The Omro Herald issue of March 12, 1931.

In writing of Omro's present (i.e. 1876) our aim, is not simply to place upon record the most important events of the year, but to give as briefly as the subject will admit, a complete description of the place--its advantages in a business point of view or as a place of residence; the general character of its inhabitants; its educational facilities; its manufacturing interests; its surroundings and desirable location, etc, etc. Thousands are leaving the Eastern States every year and seeking homes and opportunities for investment in the West, and thousands more are looking forward to a change of location at an early day. Information relating to the West is eagerly sought by both these classes and it is but natural that they should be largely influenced in the choice of a location, by what they hear and read. Many a desirable locality is passed by and neglected for the simple reason that no pains have been taken to bring it into notice. The short-sighted inhabitants fold their hands and depend upon the natural advantages of the place to bring in settlers, forgetting that the people they are so anxious to have come and share the good things which they are enjoying, are unfortunately ignorant of the paradise awaiting them. We do not intend that Omro shall be truthfully charged with such a neglect of her interests; therefore, while jotting down the events of 1876, we shall interweave with the record, for the information of our outside readers, an exhibit of our advantages with

The Location

It is a fact that all places of importance, with scarcely an exception, are situated either upon the sea coast, upon navigable lakes and rivers, or upon streams which furnish power for driving machinery. Towns without these advantages may attain a certain stage of growth, but they lack the elements of an increasing prosperity and soon reach their limit.

Omro is situated upon the Upper Fox river, about six miles above its influence with the Wolf, one of the most important lumbering streams in West, and about twelve miles from Lake Winnebago. The Fox river is now a national charge, and the work of improving it, in connection with the Wisconsin river, and making a navigable channel across the state from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi, is already far advanced. The Fox will probably be opened from Green Bay to Portage the present season, altho the improvements will not be entirely completed and work on the Wisconsin will be continued. The advantages of this improvement to the places on the two rivers are so apparent that it is needless to enumerate. The rapid growth of these towns is assured, and the investment of capital here will bring large returns.

The village of Omro is situated upon both sides of the Fox river, which at this point runs east. The ground rises gently from the banks each way, affording very fine building sites.

Water street, on the south side of the river, on which the principal part of the mercantile business is done, runs parallel with the river, and is built up on both sides with business houses. West Division street, which runs at right angles with Water street is also occupied by business houses as far as Second street. The general appearance of the place is attractive, whether seen from the deck of one of the steamers which ply up and down the Fox, from the railroad, or from the many wagon roads which center in the village. The streets are well lined with shade trees, many of which are already quite large; the residence lots are all of sufficient size for gardens; the dwellings are neat and in good repair; and the air of comfort and thrift is especially noticeable throughout the village.

The farming lands adjacent to the village are not surpassed in fertility by any in the West. The substantial farmhouses, the large number of out-houses, the commodious barns and granaries, the well tilled fields and the well worked roads, all indicate that substantial prosperity among the farming community, which is such an important aid to the welfare of the village. South of the river, the land is prairie on openings, while the north side is heavily timbered, where it has not been cut away in clearing farms, or for fuel. It is all excellent wheat land, and the quality of this cereal is superior to that raised farther south. Both Spring and Winter wheat are raised, but Spring wheat is the staple. Oats, corn, rye and barley are also raised, and vegetables of all kinds, and fruits in abundance, excepting peaches. The apple crop of the present season is the best we have seen in the West, both as to quantity and quality, and when it shall have become fully determined what varieties of this fruit are adapted to this climate, Wisconsin will take a front rank among the apple producing States of the West.

From The Omro Herald issue of March 19, 1931.

The next point to be considered in the choice of a home is that relating to

Educational Facilities

Parents with a family growing up around them, consider this question of paramount importance. A community without good schools is not a desirable one, nor is there any real healthy advancement where the education of children does not hold a prominent place. Learning is essential, and no place can hope to prosper without a practical admission of this fact. The people of Omro have kept pace with the advanced civilization of the day, in this respect. Schools were established at a very early day--good schools, and we have heard

more than one good citizen say that this fact alone caused them to give Omro the preference over other towns in this vicinity. The interest in the cause of education has grown with the place, and will probably continue to increase.

The schools are now run on the graded system, with a high school department. The number of teachers employed in the different departments is seven, but a new department will be opened this Fall adding one or more teachers. There are two school buildings, both brick, one on the north side of the river and the other on the south. A third building will be put up this Fall, in the eastern part of the village, capable of accommodating about one hundred pupils.

The majority of people recognize the necessity for sustaining good schools, knowing that the future welfare of the place and the country depends almost solely upon liberally educating the rising generation, and there is no probability that the grade of schools will ever be lower than it is at the present time.

Not less important in the estimation of a large portion of those seeking homes in our western country, is the question of

Religious Sentiment

History, and their own experience has taught them the benefits of living among a church-going people, and they cannot be induced to cast their lot with any others. Omro is perhaps superior to most Western towns, in this respect. There are three societies which have churches of their own, and hold regular services. They are the Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist, and they each have a good membership, large congregations, and prosperous Sabbath schools. An Episcopal Mission has just been established here, and holds regular services. There is also a prospect of the formation of a Free Will Baptist society. There is a Catholic church in the village, but there are not at present enough of that belief to support it.

Besides the above, there is a society called Spiritualists, but it is not very large, having been depleted by removals and other natural causes. They have a hall, and we believe have regular meetings.

The Inhabitants

After the above showing on the schools and churches of the place, it is unnecessary to go into details in regard to the character of the inhabitants. Where schools and churches are well supported, none need fear to cast their lot.

The population of the village at the present time is in round numbers about 2,100. The people are nearly all American born. Indeed, we question whether there is another village or city in the West with such a large proportion of Americans. The few foreigners that we have, are good citizens, quiet and orderly. Many of them are owners of considerable property, and all are in comfortable circumstances. The population is steadily increasing, and the large majority of the citizens own houses of their own. In fact, renters are so few that it has never been considered a profitable investment to put up tenant houses. As the place grows, however, the demand for it is probable that before long some measures will have to be taken to supply it.

from The Omro Herald issue of March 26, 1931.

Another very important consideration with Eastern people, is the quality of

The Water

Born and reared in a country where pure, living springs burst from every hillside, good water becomes to them one of the essentials; and when inquiring about a new country, one of their first questions relates to the water. Especially is this true, when speaking of the Great West, for there are so many localities here which have proved undesirable just on account of the scarcity or the impurity of the water, that the people of the East are very apt to look upon the whole region west of the Lakes and the Mississippi as a country of brackish, impure water or none at all. In this respect they labor under a mistake, and especially in relation to the country lying along the Upper Fox.

Omro is situated on what may be called the "fountain belt", Almost anywhere along the river within the limits of the village, and for half a mile or more each way, a never-failing supply of flowing water can be had at a trifling expense. These fountains are bored with an augur made for the purpose, the size of the hole being from two inches to two and a half. From ten to thirty feet is the usual depth, and we are told that it is oftener less than twenty feet, than more. A pen-stock and spout is put in of sufficient height above the ground, and the work is done, excepting the ditch or drain to carry off the surplus water. There are many of these fountains in the village, nearly every one of which would supply twenty families; and a short distance to the Northwest, a fountain has recently been bored from which flows sufficient water to supply a whole village, could it be utilized for that purpose. The fountain water is of excellent quality, and the drought never stops the flow.

On the higher ground, away from the stream, good wells are obtained at the depth of 20 to 30 feet. Even when the ground is so high that the fountain water cannot be brought to the surface, it is, in some instances, taken advantage of by digging a short distance and boring the rest of the way.

The supply of

Fuel

is also another important question to be taken into consideration in the choice of a home. The West does not sustain a very good reputation in this respect. The impression prevails among those who have only read of the West, that it is a vast prairie, and that timber is the exception, not the rule. However true this may be of some localities, it will not apply to Omro, and the surrounding country. Wood of all kinds, and good wood, is abundant and cheap. Timber land stretches to the North, for many miles and although the clearing of the land may increase the value of wood some what, the immense supply of fuel which can be boated to this point, will always keep the price within a reasonable limit.

Before finally deciding upon any locality as a residence, there is another point which should not be over-looked,

The Means of Access

Under ordinary circumstances this is important in many ways. The enterprising spirit which characterizes a majority of the Western people sometimes prompts them to go beyond their means in certain directions. This is especially true in the building of railroads. In this age, a town without a railroad does not "fill the bill," according to the Western idea, consequently means are freely pledged to obtain the great desideratum. This is all right in the end, but for those who have to bear the burden of paying for the road, it is sometimes a heavier tax than they can bear without inconvenience, though it enhances the value of their property in after years. Omro has already passed thru this trying stage. The railroad, a division of the Milwaukee & St. Paul road, has already been built and paid for, and new comers can enjoy the benefit of it. Two daily trains are run during the Spring, Summer and Fall months, and in the Winter, one train daily is deemed sufficient to do the business.

From The Omro Herald issue of April 2, 1931.

Besides the railroad, we have river transportation during the season of navigation. Two boats ply daily between Omro and Oshkosh, the county seat on Lake Winnebago, one of which runs through to Berlin on the West. Transient boats are freighting up and down the river, and when the river improvement shall have been finished, the traffic will steadily increase to the advantage of all towns along the river.

There are also two daily stage lines from Omro to Oshkosh.

We have thus briefly sketched the advantages of Omro as a place of residence, without any particular mention of it as a place for manufacturing or transportation either by rail or river, and brings into tribute a farming section which is not surpassed anywhere, is a very strong point in favor of Omro, as a business center. In writing of the place from this standpoint, we shall particularize the different branches of business carried on, and shall first mention the

Mercantile Interests

In speaking of the merchants now doing business in Omro, it will be appropriate to commence with those who have been engaged here for the greatest length of time. This will bring the line of Drugs and Medicines first on the list, for G.W. Shafer has been in business here for a greater consecutive number of years than any other merchant in Omro. His place of business is on the corner of Water and West Division streets, in the largest brick block in town. Mr. Shafer put up the building expressly for his business, and it is not a substantial structure, but presents a very fine appearance. The north end of the building is occupied by the drug and medicine department exclusively, and its appointments and style of finish will compare favorably with similar stores in larger cities. The south end of the building is devoted to staple and fancy groceries, and is separate from the drug department, having an entrance on West Division street entirely independent of the other. Mr. Shafer has built up the business himself, and as an extended business acquaintance throughout the county and State.

Next in the line of Drugs and Medicines, we mention the firm of Jones & Morris, doing business in Omro only a few years, but they have built up a good trade, and have become a fixture in the place. They confine their

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trade almost exclusively to drugs and medicines. Mr. M.D. Morris is the resident manager of the firm, Mr. Jones being engaged in business in another ality.

The third drug store is that of C.S. Douty. He has but recently opened, but being an old resident of the place and having an extensive acquaintance throughout the county, as well as a knowledge of the business, he will undoubtedly hold his share of the trade. He is located on the south side of Water street, but will soon remove to the opposite side, where he will have all the conveniences for carrying on the business.

Groceries and Provisions

In this line of trade, Mr. G.W. Shafer takes the precedence in the length of time he has been in the business, but as we have spoken of him before in connection with the drug trade, we will pass to the next oldest firm, Henry & Carter. These gentlemen opened up business on the south side of Water street soon after the close of the war. They have continued in the same place ever since, and have a good trade. They keep a full stock of staple goods, and deal quite extensively in fruits in their season.

The next oldest firm, we believe, is that of H.J. Davis on the north side of the street. Mr. Davis went into business not long after the close of the war, and during the time has had other parties associated with him, but is now alone. He has a large trade in groceries, and also keeps a line of boots and shoes.

From The Omro Herald issue of April 9, 1931.

P.V. Shafer, on West Division street is the next in order, we believe. He was formerly in partnership with his brother, G.W. Shafer, and is now doing business in the same building which they occupied together, it having been removed to make room for the present brick block. Mr. P.V. Shafer deals in groceries almost exclusively, and while not attempting to do a large business, he is doing a safe one.

R. Webb, on the north side of Water street in the bank building, keeps a line of groceries and provisions. Mr. Webb was in business here many years ago, first operating a tailor shop. He left the place for a time. After 20 years he finally returned and went into business as a grocer. Often in the early years business firms changed commodities. Webb has now many of the old customers he had twenty years ago.

On the opposite side of the street, is the grocery house of Waite & Co. Although the business has been established many years, the present firm have conducted it only a few months. They keep a full stock of groceries, provisions, crockery, glassware, and deal extensively in flour and feed of all kinds. They have a large trade, and are constantly increasing it.

The store of R. Reed, Jr., on the south side of Water street, is also a new one, having been opened in the Spring. Mr. Reed was formerly in business with H.J. Davis. He deals in groceries, provisions, crockery and glassware, and is apparently doing a prosperous business.

Mr. Joseph Simmons has just opened a new grocery and feed store near the bridge and intends to keep a full stock in his line.

Some of the other dealers keep a small line of staple groceries, but they will be mentioned in connection with their principal business.

Dry Goods and Notions

In the Dry Goods and Notions, the oldest dealer is Peter Cole. His store is in Putnam's Block, and he keeps a general assortment in his line, and also carries a small stock in groceries.

Brookman & Co., on West Division street, came next on the list. This firm has been doing business in the same place for about ten years, and Mr. Brookman's extensive acquaintance in Omro and vicinity, has been instrumental in drawing a large trade. Nothing but the regular line of Dry Goods and Notions is carried by this firm.

The remaining dry goods house is kept by O.F. Berkley, on Water street. He is closing out the trade, however, having other business to occupy his time.

Clothing and Gents' Furnishing Goods

In tailoring and gents' furnishing goods, J.D. Treleven & Co. head the list. The business has been established nearly ten years, and has assumed larger proportions than any other establishment of the kind ever kept in Omro. A large force is constantly kept on custom work, and the sales foot up to a large figure every year. Besides their store on Water street, they have a branch at Winneconne, presided over by J.T. Orchard, one of the firm.

A few doors east of Treleven & Co.'s Mr. L. Kelly runs a tailoring shop. He confines himself exclusively to custom work, we believe, and has all that he can attend to.

Boots and Shoes

The boot and shoe trade is well represented here. P. Samphier & Bro. are the dealers who have been in trade the longest. They are located on the South side of Water street, and in connection with their sales room, do considerable manufacturing.

On the opposite side of Water street is Race's Block, the Demmon Brothers carry on the boot and shoe business. They also make up considerable stock.

B. Whitman, on West Division street confines himself exclusively to sales, having no workshop connected with his establishment.

From The Omro Herald issue of April 16, 1931.

E. Gummer, on Water street, handles some factory made stock, but the principal part of his business is custom work.

Hardware

In this line of trade, W.W. Race is the heaviest dealer in the place. In fact, his stock is larger and better assorted than many similar establishments in the large cities. He occupies a brick block erected by himself a few years ago, on the north side of Water street. In the rear of the sales room is the workshop, also brick, and the basement is used as a store room. Mr. Race has a large trade with the surrounding county.

Root and Bunker, on the same side of Water street, have been in the business but a few years. They carry a stock of hardware and do some manufacturing. They have a good trade.

Watches, Jewelry, Etc.

J.C. Hilton monopolizes the trade in this line of goods. He occupies a store on the south side of Water street, keeps a general assortment of goods in his line, and is a practical watchmaker and jeweler.

Furniture

G.H. Charlesworth & Bro. are the only dealers in furniture in the place. They keep a large stock at their establishment on the south side of Water street, and have a large trade in Omro and surrounding towns.

Books and Stationery

The oldest dealers in books and stationery in town are Kaime & Wright, who keep a general assortment of goods in their line. They are located on West Division street. They also deal in pianos, organs and musical merchandise, and furnish all the newspapers and periodicals. Their stock is the largest of the kind ever kept in the place, and is constantly increasing.

S.N. Bridge & Son have recently put a small stock of books into a part of the drug store of Jones & Morris, on Water street. They are also agents for pianos and organs.

Harness Makers

Two firms are engaged in this line of traffic. Russell & Walker have been the longest established, and occupy a building of their own on Water street.

W.D. Chapman does business in a building of his own, adjoining Russell & Walker's.

Meat Markets

In this trade, Welby & Tice take the precedence, having been here longer, we believe than any other. They are located on the south side of Water street. On the opposite side of the street, is W.E. Wheeler's market. Near the bridge W. Quinlan is located; and further down Water street, T. Condon has a shop. They all have a good trade.

Photographing

W.H. Hilton is the only photographer now doing business here. His studio is on the corner of Water and West Division streets, one of the best locations in town, and having the entire trade, is doing a good business.

Millinery

The store of Mrs. M.M. Newton has been the longest established of any in town, although the name of the firm has changed, Mrs. Jones going out. It has been in the same place, on West Division street, for many years, and is one of the fixtures.

From The Omro Herald issue April 23, 1931.

In Putnam's Block, on Water street is the millinery establishment of H. Jon & Barnes. Although comparatively a new institution, by judicious advertising and a strict attention to customers, they have secured a fair share of the trade.

Barber and Hair Dresser

No town of the size of Omro is complete without a well-regulated barber shop. In this respect, Omro is particularly favored, having one of the neatest hair dressing establishments in the State. J. Everts is the proprietor, and is one of the fixtures of the place. During his residence here, he has formed an extensive acquaintance and has a very large number of regular customers, and all the transient trade.

With this hasty sketch of the mercantile and miscellaneous business of the place, we pass to the

Manufacturing Interests

We will first speak of George Challoner's Foundry and Machine Shop. These works are situated on the South bank of the Fox, on Water street.

The main buildings of brick, 36 by 270 feet, taking the place of a wooden building which was destroyed by fire a few years ago. The machine shop is supplied with all the modern iron working machinery necessary for doing the work, and is very complete. Connected with the shop, is the foundry. Nearly all the castings used are made here, under the personal supervision of Mr. Challoner. The wood-working shop is a building 40 by 50, separate from the main building, but the power to run it is taken from the large shop. The pattern shop is 30 by 40. Several other buildings for storage, etc., stand on different parts of the ground.

The principal part of the work done here has been the manufacture of Challoner's Patent Shingle and Mill Machinery. These machines are the invention of the proprietor of the works, and are now in use in nearly every lumber manufacturing state in the Union. Wherever introduced, they have proved their superiority, and other machines have given place to them. Within the last year or two, several large orders have been received from California, all of which Mr. Challoner has filled promptly. Besides these specialties, a line of general work is done, steam engines and steam pumps comprising no inconsiderable portion of the business. Between thirty and forty hands are employed varying somewhat with the season. At the present time, the full force of hands is not at work, the general depression all over the country having affected Mr. Challoner's business somewhat; but as Spring approaches the demand for machinery will necessitate the employment of all hands that can be worked to advantage.

Sash, Doors and Blinds

From this establishment we pass to Morton, Arnold & Morton's Planing Mill and Sash and Door Factory. This is also situated on the South bank of the river, on Water street, and is a very complete establishment for one of its size. The present firm have been running it eight or nine years, and largely increased the business besides adding to the capacity of the works. Sash, doors and blinds, mouldings, flooring and siding, and dressed lumber of all kinds are turned out at these works. There is also a custom trade,

which in ordinary times amounts to a large sum yearly. A steam drying house of large capacity is connected with the mill, and sheds for seasoned lumber. Messrs. Morton, Arnold & Morton are all practical men stirring and energetic, and while doing a perfectly safe business, they keep thoroughly up with the times.

From The Omro Herald issue of April 30, 1931.

In this line of manufacture we first notice the works of Thompson & Hayward, situated on Water street on the South side of the river, and adjoining Morton, Arnold & Morton. During the summer another lot of buildings was purchased further west on the same street, and fitted up for their use to meet the wants of their constantly increasing business. Messrs. Thompson & Hayward are among the most extensive carriage manufacturers in the West. They turn out nearly everything in the way of wheeled work, but their specialty is the finer grades of carriages. Their work meets with a ready sale, and they have probably disposed of more open and top buggies, phaetons and light wagons during the season than any other makers in the State. The quality of their work is first-class.

In cutter making they take the lead, turning out more than any other manufacturer in Wisconsin. They build all the latest styles, and their trade extends into Iowa and Minnesota.

Between forty and fifty hands are kept constantly employed in and about their factories, and the proprietors are still reaching out further and further and enlarging each year. Should the business prospects of the country continue fair, this firm will undoubtedly take the front rank in their line of manufacture in a very few years.

Lindsey, Coe & Darrow, located at the South end of the bridge, do considerable in wagon making, but confine themselves more particularly to heavy work. They also do a general blacksmithing business.

Lumber and Shingles

The only establishment of this kind now in operation is that of the H.W. Webster, near the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway depot. The mill is comparatively a new one. Its capacity is about 50,000 feet of shingles. Lath and pickets are also cut.

There is another mill on the North side of the river, but is owned by non-residents, and is not run.

Glass Works

Omro has the credit of being the first glass manufacturing town in Wisconsin. The works have been built the present season, and are now in running order. It has been demonstrated that the sand is equal, and it is claimed by many, superior to any other in the United States. Certain it is, that the glass made here is superior to any received from the East, which its ready sale, when placed in competition with that of other factories, abundantly proves. The works will be enlarged, and no doubt other factories will be put up here at an early day to utilize the large quantity of sand in this vicinity.

Gray's Barrel Factory

This is located on the North side of the river, and employs quite a number. Though attracting but little notice, it is quite an addition to Omro, and is increasing every year. The work turned out is first class and finds a ready market.

From The Omro Herald issue of May 7, 1931.

Cheese Factory

The cheese factory of D. Grossman has been in operation but a few years but it is a great help to the farmers in this vicinity. Mr. Grossman is a practiced cheesemaker, and one of the best in the state and his cheese commands the best price in the market.

Flouring Mill

There is one flouring mill in the village, with a capacity of 100 barrels of flour per day. It is located on the river, with a dock and storehouse.

Hamilton & Chase have a feed mill on the North side of the river, and do a large amount of grinding for the people in this vicinity.

Woolen Mill

A year ago a company was formed for the purpose of woolen manufacturing. A very fine and substantial brick building was put up by the company, but panic and the hard times following were so discouraging to all new enterprises that the company concluded to defer putting in machinery until the prospects were better. Any one wishing to engage in the woolen business or any other for which the building is suitable, could no doubt make very advantageous terms with the company. The stock-holders are residents of Omro, and property holders here, and are directly interested in having the mill in operation.

Blacksmithing

Among the oldest blacksmiths in the place, we mention W. Ames, C.W. Bushnell and M. Adams. They may be said to have grown up with the village. W. Cundy, on the North side, T.W. Leighton and P. Rasmussen, on the South side, are the other blacksmiths in town. The carriage makers also have shops connected, and do some custom work.

Public Halls

We have two public Halls. Putnam's Hall on the corner of Water and Main streets, is the largest, there being but few larger in the state. Bushnell's Hall is located further East on Water street, and on the opposite side. Both are in much demand for entertainments, lectures, etc.

Hotels

Two hotels supply the wants of the traveling public. The Larabee House has been running the longest. It is on the corner of Water and Exchange streets, a large three-story wooden building, well known to all travelers.

The Northwestern House is on the same street further West, at the foot of Main street. It is a three-story building of brick and concrete; and

has been built but a few years. Both hotels have their patrons and their share of the trade.

Societies

Nearly all the secret societies are represented here. The Masons have a very fine hall in G.W. Shafer's building. The Odd Fellows have a prosperous lodge; and the Rebekahs. There is a Temple of Honor, a Good Templar's lodge and a Juvenile Temple. A grange of the Patrons of Husbandry is also in running order in the town.

There is also a Musical Association, which is in a very prosperous condition, having a membership of about 125, out of debt and money in the treasury. Few towns of the size of Omro have as much musical talent, and the benefit of practice and instruction given by this organization is showing itself in a marked degree.

Newspaper

One weekly paper is published in the place, the Journal. It is Republican in politics, as the majority of the voters are, and has a fair patronage.

Professions

The legal profession has three representatives here Messrs. A.K. Brush, J. Banks, and G. Carter. Mr. Brush is the oldest member of the profession, the other two being young men.

The medical fraternity numbers six at the present time. Drs. McCall and Gibbs take the precedence as to the time they have been here; and Drs. Cook, Hurd, Wescott and Pierce follow in the order named. All are men of age and experience. Dr. McCall is also a regularly educated surgeon.

In the dental line, we have Mr. I.H. Sheerar, who is considered one of the best dentists in these parts.

The End

*P.M. Wright - Platt M. Wright editor of Omro Journal.
1865 or before. He died Aug 11, 1921, having lived
in Omro for 60 years, since the year of his marriage
in 1878.*