

History of Pretty Lake

by The Late Clayton Lurvey

Although George Davey was Postmaster of Ottawa for several years at Pretty Lake, he was not Ottawa's first Postmaster as many believe.

Ottawa was not settled as early as the townships of Summit (there was a postoffice at Summit corners in 1838), Genesee and Eagle. The territorial roads went to the north and south of Ottawa. The early settlers of Ottawa used an Indian Trail considerably, that crossed the township diagonally from the northeast to the southwest. This trail was developed into town roads and is now a portion of County Highway C and State Highway #106. In 1839 Talbot C. Dousman was instrumental in developing a road from Waterville to Waukesha which touched the northeast corner of Ottawa. Later a road was extended through the southeast corner of Ottawa which is now County Highway Z. Ottawa was not an independent township until 1843. From that date the roads were developed faster.

The earliest settlers went as far as Milwaukee, Prairieville, Summit Corners, Waterville, North and South Genesee, North Prairie and Eagle for their mail. Even after the township was settled and Ottawa had postoffices within its borders (Ottawa-Weiners), many still got their mail from Waterville and North Prairie and a few from Eagle and Utica. Many did not patronize the closest office, as they went where they did most of their trading. Weiner's postoffice at the Henry Weiner farm, somewhat northwest of Big School Section Lake was a very popular place. One could get most anything he needed there. He was a successful merchant, as well. He sold groceries, dry goods, small farm equipment, hardware and ran a tavern. He also held different town offices.

The first postoffice in Ottawa, was established July 13, 1848, by Peter D. Gifford in his home, which was on the south side of State Highway #67, which is known as Fardy's Corners. William Miller was made postmaster in 1854. Then J. Griffeth and Josiah Elting were postmasters at the Old Ottawa House, which was on the north side of the highway at Fardy's Corners. This building burned down and a portion of it was rebuilt and later was the home of the Fardy's. It was later property of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Aplin. Accompanying the Ottawa House was a long barn built to accommodate several teams of horses of the local people and travelers from other counties, as they used this as a stopping off place on their way to and from Milwaukee.

Later the office was held by George Davey at his farm on Pretty Lake, a considerable distance from the main roads.

Beverly Aplin also kept the postoffice at his farm south of Pretty Lake.

Different ones were hired to carry the mail from one postoffice to the other. One person went a-foot across lots through the woods and marshes around Pretty Lake. He put up markers

through the marshes to avoid the sink holes; while another used a one-horse, two-wheel cart, standing up on a step with the mail in front of him. He often followed trails and short-cuts across fields and through the woods. As most of the people received little mail, whoever happened to be at the postoffice would bring whatever mail there was for his neighbors.

On March 31, 1902, the Ottawa postoffice was discontinued. The Rural Free Delivery Service had taken over. For a short period a portion of Ottawa was served by a route from Oconomowoc. The first rural mail carrier out of Dousman was Stanley Barnhart (Mrs. Harvey Lurvey's father). He received his appointment Nov. 15, 1900 and carried the mail until November 1924. Later a second route was added with Charles Van Brunt as carrier. One of the routes was later discontinued, being combined with routes from Oconomowoc.

Many of the first boxes were home-made and were of various shapes and sizes. One of the local boys sold mail boxes to help defray his school expenses.

The roads at this time were unsurfaced. There were many stretches of sandy roads to pull through in the summer, while other places would become almost impassable in the spring when the frost went out and in the winter, they tried to keep on top of the snow. For winter, they would replace the wheels on their carriages with runners. Although they were not required to make their routes if the roads were not open, they seldom missed a day. Occasionally, they would change horses at a farm along the route or feed, water and rest them. They carried a shovel for emergencies and a lantern for warmth.

Pretty Lake was surveyed in 1836 and was one of the four lakes in the township that was meandered. It was recorded merely as a pond. One would hardly dare to call it such today in the presence of the present 145 home and cottage owners.

The early owners of land around Pretty Lake were Peter J. Grant, J. Kierman, John Banister Smith and George Davey. Mr. Grant was a stone-cutter and a contractor in New York and lost considerable money on a contract to build a section of the Erie Canal. He decided to come to Wisconsin and settle in Jefferson County, but further misfortunes stopped him in Ottawa, near Pretty Lake, where he built his home. He died from blood poisoning due to a leg injury. Three doctors tried to save his life. One of his sons, James D., is claimed to be the first white child born in Ottawa, who later took over the farm, and was widely known throughout the county. Besides farming with his sons, Ralph and Harvey, he sold farm machinery, buggies, robes, whips and sewing machines. He made many of his sales at the homes of the farmers. They were members of the First Presbyterian Church of Ottawa.

John Banister Smith and George Davey were in-laws and

EARLY HISTORY OF PRETTY LAKE

(Continued from page 1)

operated the same farm. Mr. Smith was very active in the town affairs and held different town offices including office of Superintendent of Schools in the township. He also developed two cranberry bogs adjoining the lake. The water in the lake was high enough at that time to flood the bogs. He installed gates to regulate the flow of water. Ditches were dug later in this area to drain land for agricultural purposes has lowered the lake. These cranberry bogs are not to be confused with the big Scuppernong Cranberry Corporation which was farther south near the Trout Pond.

George Davey, besides holding the postoffice at Pretty Lake for many years, was known throughout the area as a Bible Christian. He was a lay minister and would occupy vacant pulpits in the area. He also went about selling Bibles. At one of the farms where he called, they were having difficulty in loading their hogs for market. One of the boys there advised him, "If you know my brother, this is no time to try to sell him a Bible." He and James Aplin conducted Sunday School in their homes before the local Ottawa Methodist church was built. After its organization, he became one of its first deacons. This church has been abandoned.

Sheep were raised on many of the farms at this time. Since it was more profitable to sell washed wool, Mr. Davey built many washing yards along the lake to accommodate its farmers who would come for miles with their flocks. The clean water and shallow sandy beaches made it an ideal spot. One cent a head was charged for this service. This sand was also hauled as far as Eagle for a discriminating builder.

Mr. Davey sold his farm to Mr. Grant, which gave him the possession of the entire lake. Mr. Grant was always very generous about permitting the neighbors the use of the lake for picnics, bathing and fishing.

Several forties of land, adjoining Pretty Lake to the north were marsh and heavily wooded, containing several smaller lakes and ponds. This area is now known as Paradise.

Several farmers in the township bought tracts of the marshland to provide them with marsh hay. Much of it was so wet, that they had to cut it by hand and carry the hay to stacks with poles, then hauling it out in the winter after the ground was frozen. Some went through the Pretty Lake farm to reach their marshes. They relate of stopping to warm themselves in the tents of Indians who used to return to their old hunting and fishing grounds. The Indians were very appreciative of tobacco and marsh hay that the farmers would throw off for the Indian horses. The early Indian Trails also led to the springs around the Trout Pond and to the large springs east of the Ottawa Cemetery.

Mr. Grant had many opportunities to sell the lake or portions of it, but he wished to preserve it as a unit. It eventually passed into the hands of Col. Gustav Pabst as well as 2,000 acres of land adjoining it. Mr. Pabst was much interested in wildlife, hunting and fishing. He acquired many ring-necked pheasant and Hungarian Partridges to stock his land. He also hired a bird man to raise them on the Pretty Lake Farm. A man was also hired to train his dogs. Much time was also spent catching hawks and owls. Foxes were rare at that time. The bird project was a successful adventure. They gradually increased and spread to the lands of the adjoining farmers. The farmers became attached to these birds as they were quite tame and beneficial to the crops. Through the use of horses for farm work at that time, they were able to see much of them. After a few years the Conservation Commission had an open season on these birds in a small area around the Township of Ottawa. Hunters came for miles and congregated on the farms of this small area, killing off the birds that the farmers wished protected and frequently doing damage on the farms. The farmers were at a loss to know how to control the situation. In 1922, the Ottawa Protective Association was formed to protect the beauty, wildlife and welfare of the township. This organization was very effective while at the same time, larger areas were opened for hunting.

Gradually the Pabst holdings were sold back as farms with the exception of the Pretty Lake Farm which was sold to a real estate firm, who sub-divided the area around the lake into lots.