

Timber Lands, Prairie Brought First Settlers to Oregon Region

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OREGON – The history of Oregon follows closely upon the history of Madison and other early settled parts of Dane County. Dane county was organized in 1836 and the price of government land was quoted as \$1.25 per acre, with timber lands, good prairie, plenty of water and a healthy climate offered as inducements to immigrants.

Soon the easterners started westward seeking new homes in the unknown country frequented by Indians, and from New England and Northern Atlantic states came the first settlers of these townships surrounding Oregon and known as a territorial township Rome.

The land on which the village now stands was entered from the government in the early 40's, but the first log house in the vicinity was built in 1841, two and one-half miles south of the village by Bartlett Runey, who was a native of Baltimore, MD, coming to Wisconsin with his family, who spent the winter in Janesville. For several years, on this location known as the "Corners" Runey operated a tavern, and for many years members of the Runey family lived near. The A.L. Hanson residence stands on the site of the first home and tavern.

Other Early Settlers

Other settlers of 1842 were Garland Thomas, Robert Thompson, James B Earl, Daniel Hess, and James Smith, all of whom settled in Oregon township, followed soon by Thomas Hook, Charles Sargent, Abraham Kierstead, C.P. Mosely, David Smith, Schuyler Gilbert, William Bedford, Stoddard Johnson, S.J. Pratt, J.S. and Elisha Frary, Ira Ames, Nathaniel Ames, J.N Ames, and R.P. Main. Nathaniel Ames immigrated with his family to Wisconsin at the age of 84 and took of 320 acres of land. He was probably the last surviving Revolutionary soldier in the northeast and died in Oregon village on Aug. 27, 1863 at the age of 102 years, four months and two days, and was laid at rest in Prairie Mound cemetery north of the village.

The original plat of Oregon village was upon the lands of Charles C. Waterman, William S. Bedford, A. S. Mygaff, and John E. Tipple, additions later being made by S.S. Johnson, Abraham Kierstead, E.E. Bedford, A.W. Parson and H.H. Marvin,

C.P. Mosely built the first log cabin house in 1843 just north of the present water tower site and there operated a tavern in what was then known as Rome's Corners, thus termed because all the adjacent territory was then known as Rome.

One of the few old landmarks in the village is the first store built, for that purpose on the site of the M.J. Wischoff store and moved south on Main street where it was last owned by T.H. Grady and used as a store previous to the erection of the new brick building on the old town hall site. The old store, now remodeled into a home is occupied by Mrs. A.S. Parsons.

Old Homes Remain

Among the older home still much as they were built are, Mrs. R.C. Cronks, Mrs. C. Cronks, Mrs. S. Olson, Wesley Custer, William Usher, George Theobald, T. H. Hobbs, Mrs. Edgar Nichols, J.S. Waterman, B.G Cline, Henry Plumb, Floyd Plumb, old Main home on E.D. Main lawn, barn at Thomas Elliott erected in early 40's. Many other are still here in part but have been extensively remodeled.

Previous to 1848, when the first post office was established, with Edgar Bennett as postmaster, mail has been coming to Oak Hall, which was then a more pretentious village than Rome's Corners, as was Rutland, Union and Lake View, all waiting and hoping for the railroad to be built through their little settlements.

Early Oregon postmasters were I.M. Bennett, John D. Tipple, C.P. Mosley, J.L Brown, William S. Bedford, C.W. Netherwood. Money orders were first issued on Aug. 1, 1871.

The Presbyterian Church was first organized as the First Congregational church of Fairfield in the spring of 1845 with Rev. Matthew A. Fox serving until 1856, as supply and then being installed as pastor serving into the 80's. The initial church edifice was built in 1856 by Elias Jacobson on ground donated by Charles Waterman and has been enlarged and remodeled since.

Methodists Started in 1846

The Methodist Episcopal society was organized about 1846 and the church built in 1860 on a two-acre tract donated by Stoddard Johnson, has been raised and a basement for social affairs built.

The first Catholic Church was erected two miles northeast of the village on the southwest corner of land recently acquired by the state but owned by the Doctor Fox's of Madison for many years. The church was surrounded by graves, all of which have been removed to other cemeteries since the congregation built the present structure in 1885. Among the earlier priests were Rev. P.R. Knox, 1882-1888, and now of Madison, and Rev. M.A. Condon, who served from 1889-1921.

The Danish Lutheran Church was incorporated in 1896 and dedicated May 1, 1898. This church has also raised the church proper and now has a church basement, which is used for all social affairs of the church. Most of the organizers of the original church were previously members of the Rutland church, which was recently sold.

A Free-Will Baptist church was organized in 1848 at Storytown and the Rutland United Brethren church built in Rutland in 1854 and having a resident pastor until approximately 1905.

The first Free-Will Baptist church of Rutland was erected in 1874 on the Oregon-Stoughton road and for many years was a landmark and it had fallen into disuse, but several years ago the building was sold and went the way of the Danish Lutheran church of Rutland which will soon be moved away by its purchaser.

The tavern built by I.M. Bennett in 1849 was operated by: Charles Waterman, Mr. Postle, A.L. Bube, Richard Chandler, Lamboley brothers, Michael Doyle and Thomas Monks before it was destroyed by fire. The hotel was always known as the Exchange Hotel. Another old hotel at one time operated by Mr. Hayes, father of William Hays of this village, stood where the Oregon Equity warehouse now is near the depot. The Hotel Portland, as it was named in later years, was built by C.H. Cronk in early 1884, and has had many innkeepers in the intervening years. The old Exchange Hotel was burned in 1886 and in 1892. The remainder of the business section for the south of the square was burned. Charles W. Netherwood in 1873 built Netherwood Hall on the site now occupied by the Bank of Oregon.

The last Indians in tribe formation passed through the village in 1878.

C.H. Cronk built the opera house for a skating rink and on Dec. 17, 1884, it was so dedicated. A local band was organized in 1882.

The Chicago and North Western railroad was finally completed in 1884, though hereafter one after another previous company has been forced to abandon their work through lack of funds.

The first school house stood on the site of Mrs. Andrew Madsen's residence on West street* and later the location was changed to the present grade building site, with the present town hall with two wings serving until 1895 when the grade and high school building was erected and served as both until 1922, when ground was broken for the new high school and the older building used only for a grade building. The town hall was moved on to the site of the H. Grady store building** and used first as a school until the new one was completed; later being moved to its present location on the north side of the park.

**127 Jefferson Street, current site of BMO Bank*

*** 134 S. Main Street, current site of Maria's Pizza*

The Oregon Observer, edited by Smith and Urie and in 1882 sold to C.J. Rollis (now of Stoughton). This weekly followed the Oregon Record, which was established in the late 70's and only existed a short time. In 1884 Rollis took as a partner H.D. Hanson (now editor of the Brooklyn Teller), who soon after became sole owner and continued its publication until he sold his business interests to E. F. Kramer, who published his first paper February 16, 1910, and still is owner and publisher.

The village was incorporated in 1882 with Manual Wolfe serving as its first president, followed by C.W. Netherwood, H. Haskell, E.D. Main, J.C. Shampnor, F.R. Cowdry, R.C. Richards, R.D. Ozburn, Andrew Madsen, Fred Luchsinger, C.A. Hanan and W. L. Ames.

The oldest resident still living here is Frank Coward, born in 1856. E.G. Booth came here with his parents when six months old and F.B. Cowdry when very young.

Saloons were licensed here up to 1887, and much of the time until 1914 when no license was voted and has remained so ever since.

Some of the earlier residents and the dates they came to Wisconsin are:
Rueben Boyce, 1843; John Keenan, 1843; Isaac Kierstead, 1843; John McWilliams, 1843; O.K. Bartlett, 1844; Dr. George Fox, 1844; J.S. Frary, 1844, S.J. Pratt, 1844; Schuyler Gilbert, 1844; Stoddard Johnson, 1844; Joseph Williams and Brevitt Devine, 1844; R P. Main, 1845; John Underwood, 1845; Rev. M.A. Fox, 1845; James Terwilliger, 1846; Manual Wolfe, 1847; L.L. Adams, 1847; Patrick Burke, 1848; Mr. Spencer, 1848; Michael Barry, 1848; A.S. Parsons, 1850; O.M. Palmer, 1853; Con O'Brien, 1853; J.C. Kiser, 1854; E.W Dwight, 1854; J.H. Coward, 1855; James Day, 1855; H.N. Algard, 1856; Lewis Mutchler, 1856; H.O. Gray, 1857; C.W. Netherwood, 1865, J.J. Lindsay, 1865; T. B Cowdrey, 1862; Isaac Howe, 1866; and J.L. Jackson, 1867.

Transcribed by M. Woodworth for the OAHS, Jan 2021.