

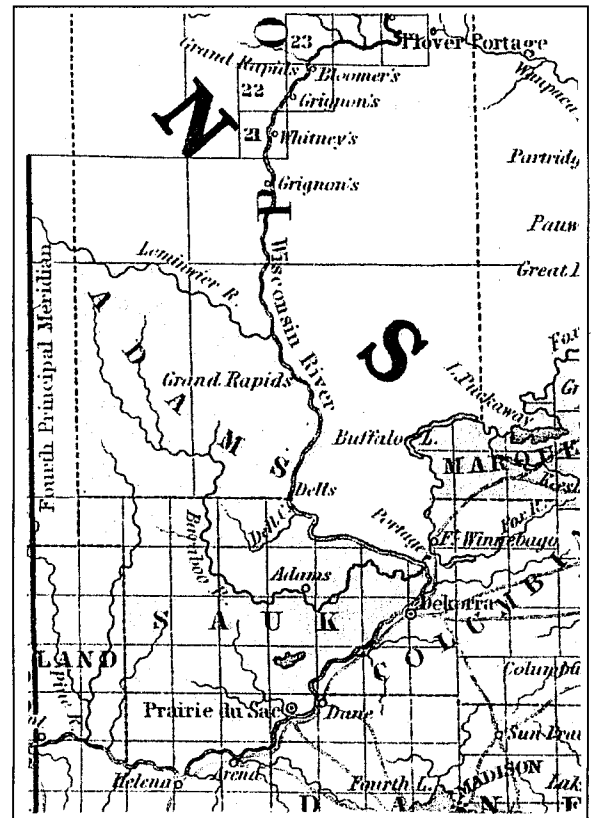
# Beginnings

## Pinery Road Days

**A**fter centuries of occupation by native people, Adams county welcomed its earliest European-American settlers in the 1820s and '30s. An old industry winding down in central Wisconsin--the fur trade--and a new industry just arrived--logging--brought newcomers to the county.

In 1827, when Wisconsin was still a part of Michigan Territory, Amable and Judith Bourassa Grignon built a trading post in the sloughs on the west bank of the Wisconsin River in what is now the northwestern corner of Petenwell Lake. After a flood wiped out their first establishment, the Grignons moved across the river to a site near the mouth of "Grignon's" or 14-Mile Creek in the future Town of Rome. The cabin they built in 1829 can be called the first home erected by a non-Indian in Adams County.

Part of Wisconsin's oldest French-Indian, fur-trading family, the Grignons were welcomed by the Ho-Chunk and Menominee Indians who still held legal title to this stretch of the Wisconsin River Valley. The Indians traded deer hides and beaver pelts for tools, powder, flints, tobacco,



pipes and other goods that the Grignons brought upriver by canoe from Portage. In 1832, Amable obtained Indian permission and built a sawmill upriver opposite Nekoosa, but the Grignons continued to live on 14 Mile Creek, where Judith gave birth to a son named Robert in 1837. He is recorded as the first child of European heritage born within the future bounds of Adams County.

About the same time as the Grignons were settling in what became the Town of Rome, another French-Indian trader, Francis Provonsal, opened a post on the west bank of the Wisconsin a few miles north of Petenwell Rock. Provonsal also traded with the Indians on both sides of the river and the family remained in the area for many years. Provonsal's son, Frank, started a ferry at Petenwell Rock in 1856 and ran it until he was killed in a brawl with an Indian named Bill Dandy in 1869. His wife Charlotte then "manned" the ferry until 1875.

In the 1820s and for most of the 1830s, Wisconsin north and west of the Fox-Wisconsin River waterway was not open to American settlement. The land was still Indian territory

*Above: An 1849 map of Wisconsin shows Grignon's settlement downriver from the Wisconsin river valley strip opened to logging in 1836.*



*Big Flats settlers Victor, Andrew, Baby Eva, Oline, Milton Harry, Lars and Martin Nelson, 1904 in front of their log home.*

under the control of the Ojibwes, Menominees and Ho-Chunks. Traders like the Grignons and the Provonsals were welcome because the Indians needed the goods they offered. Only occasionally did the Indians allow others to intrude in their territory.

Daniel Whitney was one of the first. In exchange for powder, shot, tobacco, seed corn and other goods, he received permission from the Menominees to build a dam and water-powered sawmill on the east side of the rapids at Nekoosa in 1832. The water-powered mill consisted of a simple up-and-down or "muley" saw that turned out rough-cut pine boards that were assembled into rafts and floated down the Wisconsin to market.

Whitney's was the first dam and sawmill on the Wisconsin, the predecessor of many more to come. Though not in Adams County it had an important influence here. To operate, the sawmill needed equipment and workers, but any craft larger than a canoe usually could not navigate the sandy and shallow Wisconsin River above the Dells and no railroads existed anywhere near Wisconsin in 1832. Therefore, in order to supply his mill, Whitney built a road to it from the nearest point where supplies could be obtained, Portage. Following ancient, Indian trails, crossing the prairies, skirting the hills and marshes, the sawmill owner blazed a roadway that ran from Portage north and west to Grignon's then upriver to his mill opposite Nekoosa. Since it connected the settled part of Wisconsin to the forests and sawmill country in the north, Whitney's trail was called the Pinery Road. From the time it was blazed until it was supplanted by railroads in the 1870s, the Pinery Road was used heavily by lumbermen cutting the forest of the upper Wisconsin Valley and by the settlers who joined them in Adams County and points north.

About the same time that Whitney was blazing his trail in Adams County, the Black Hawk "War" took place. Federal troops and militia men from the state of Illinois and the Wisconsin portion of the territory of Michigan, pursued a band of Sauk Indians led by Chief Black Sparrow Hawk across southern Wisconsin from Lake Koshkonong to the Mississippi River. The chase ended in 1833, with heavy Indian losses, Black Hawk captured and his people banished to reservations in Iowa. As a

result, settlers in southern Wisconsin pressured territorial and federal officials to expand the area open for settlement. A series of treaties followed--in 1832 and 1837 with the Ho-Chunk; in 1836 and 1848 with the Menominee--in which the Indians relinquished their claims to central Wisconsin, including Adams County.

The 1836 Menominee Treaty opened a six-mile wide stretch of territory on the Wisconsin River, between "Grignon's Bend" and Wausau, to logging and saw milling. The communities of Nekoosa, Port Edwards, Wisconsin Rapids, Plover, Stevens Point, Mosinee and Wausau all began as a result of this treaty. With more sawmills operating upriver, traffic on Daniel Whitney's Pinery Road increased, even though it ran through lands still closed to settlement.

On one of his trips to Portage, Whitney met a man named Robert Wakely and persuaded him to come upriver and work at his sawmill. Wakely and his wife Ann, taking advantage of a period of high water, helped pole a keelboat up the Wisconsin to a spot where an underwater rock shelf formed a natural crossing known as the "shallow place" or Pointe Basse. Just north of what became the Adams/Wood County line, Pointe Basse was at the intersection of the Pinery Road and several other trails. It was also the first resting place for river rafters who had completed the arduous run down the string of rapids that began at Biron and ended at Nekoosa. With traffic by land and river at hand, the Wakelys opened an inn at Pointe Basse.

At Wakely's, river drivers beached the "rapids pieces" or small lumber rafts they had manhandled through the rapids upstream and coupled them into larger "Wisconsin River" rafts which they then steered through the usually calm, shallow water in the Adams County stretch of river.

Hazards here included "Grignon's Bend" at the mouth of 14 Mile Creek where the current could shove a raft into the bank and hold it there, and the "Roche-A-Cri Flats," where the Big and Little Roche-A-Cri Creeks met the Wisconsin and created sandbars where the cumbersome rafts could run aground. The shifting sands also caused a bottleneck at Castle Rock, which could so clog up with grounded lumber rafts that some river drivers called it "the bridge." When they reached the Head of the Dells at the southern edge of



Adams County, the rivermen once again beached their rafts. Now the larger "Wisconsin River" rafts were disassembled into smaller "rapids pieces" better able to negotiate the narrow, fast-moving river.

Wakely's Pointe Basse developed into a busy little village of about twelve buildings and, in 1845, acquired one of the first post offices on the Wisconsin above Portage. It survived until railroad development began to bring an end to lumber rafting on the Wisconsin. The Wakely Inn was disassembled in 1873, the boards made into a raft and floated downstream to be rebuilt as a hotel in Lone Rock.

Settlement at the other southern end of Adams County was encouraged by the 1837 Ho-Chunk

Treaty, which opened up what became Sauk, Juneau and eastern Columbia County to non-Indians. The ink on this treaty, which many Ho-Chunk refused to recognize, was barely dry when Robert Allen built an outpost on Black Hawk Island in the river at the head of the Dells. Although federal troops from Fort Winnebago, rightly suspecting that he was selling to the Indians, raided the place and confiscated Allen's whiskey supply, his Dell House became a regular stopping place for river men rafting lumber from upriver and a gathering place for prospective settlers from downstream.

Across the river from Allen's tavern was the stretch of ground north of Portage, west of the Fox River and east of the Wisconsin, where the Pinery

*Rafts of lumber from upriver sawmills were common sights on the Wisconsin River from the 1830s to the 1870s. The Adams County stretch of the river offered few obstacles to the rafts until they reached the Narrows of the Dells*



Road ran, and which eventually became western Columbia and Adams County. It was still part of the Menominee nation, a fact which delayed, but did not deter white settlers from moving in. Generally credited as the first to settle in southern Adams County is Jared Walsworth. A frontier type with no identified occupation other than as "the notorious trader," Jared was related to Silas Walsworth, a prominent riverman, agent for the American Fur Company, storekeeper and judge in Portage.

Jared Walsworth married well for the time and the place. By capturing the heart, or at least the assent of a Menominee woman, (name unknown) he was allowed to live in a tribal village located a few miles west of Lake Mason. He also got a paying job, since the Menominee nominated him as a tribal blacksmith entitled to receive treaty money from the federal government in return for making and repairing traps, hoes, pots and other metal items for the tribe.

In 1838, with the Ho-Chunk moving out, white folks moving in, and the Menominee his welcoming in-laws, Walsworth opened a tavern built of logs on the Pinery Road in Section 30 of the Town of Dell Prairie. About fifteen miles out of Portage, Walsworth's Tavern was ideally sited to become a stopping point for lumberjacks and

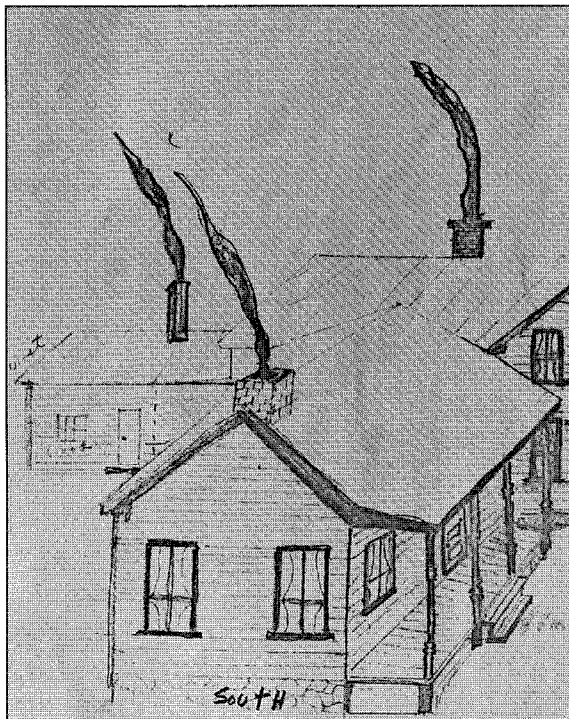
sawmill workers, river rafters and settlers tramp-ing north.

As the lumber industry continued to develop, so did traffic on the Pinery Road. As traffic increased, so did the need for stopping places. In 1845, William Sylvester, a Massachusetts native who had worked as a blacksmith for the America Fur Company on Mackinac Island for over two decades and later for the Menominee at Pointe Basse, moved a day's journey up from Walsworth's and built a tavern in Section 31 in the southeast corner of what became the Town of Lincoln. It was about one mile north of the present village of Grand Marsh. He was accompanied by his wife Ann and some, if not all, of their eleven children. The Sylvesters named their place the Marsh House and welcomed travelers until 1848 when Ann died and William moved to Portage, where he was elected mayor. The Marsh House remained in the family through Harriet Sylvester who married Silas Fletcher and bought the prop-erty from her parents.

The Marsh House became a junction point for pioneer trails. When Jean Baptiste Du Bay marked a road from Portage to his trading post and sawmill north of Stevens Point in 1851, he turned northeast at the Marsh House and steered for Pilot Knob and Coloma Corners where a teamster named Francis Drake had built the first house and tavern in 1849. Du Bay later operated a stage coach line on this route that carried Adams County settlers purchasing land to the federal land office in Stevens Point.

The Marsh House was also a stop on the east-west road that ran from Westfield to the ferry landing that William Kingsbury built on the Wisconsin in 1851. This road proceeded west from the Marsh House and passed the northern tip of Rattlesnake Rock before turning southwest to meet the river in Section 7 at what became the village of Quincy.

Also in the late 1840s, a fellow known only as M. Strong selected a spot on the Big Roche-A-Cri south of Rabbit Rock and built a tavern about one day's journey from both the Marsh House and Wakely's. Another road forked off from the tavern to the west, skirted the "prairie" where Strong also left his name and continued on to Petenwell Rock where the river could be crossed on foot.



*William Sylvester opened the Marsh House, near Grand Marsh, in 1845. This became a busy intersection of roads running from Portage to Quincy, Nekoosa, and Stevens Point.*



With bends, twists and turns in the road, each one of the taverns--Walsworth's, Sylvester's, Strong's, Wakely's--was fifteen to twenty miles away from its neighbor. It was a good trip on foot, by oxcart, or on horseback and one that an increasing number of people were making throughout the 1840s.

Two very important factors still delayed settlement in Adams County. First was the legal title held by the Menominee tribe, second was the absence of a survey by which individual parcels of land could be identified and purchased. Delay settlement yes, but the presence of Indians and the lack of surveyors did not prevent it.

Throughout the late 1840s, settlers moved into the Briggsville/Big Spring area that evolved into the Town of New Haven. James and Ann Briggs Crothers, Ira and Ursula Edwards Ward, Uri and Marinda Morey Morse, James and Sally Best Ramsey, Luther Stowell, Matthew Buckley and Henry Landt were among those who arrived prior to the survey in 1851.

In 1847, Ephraim and Lucinda Hecoeks came up the Pinery Road and squatted on land near the town line and built what has been called the "first frame house in Dell Prairie town." The Davis family then came along, settled a few miles west of Jordan Lake and gave their name to the junction of the Pinery Road and four other trails--Davis Corners.

Farther north in the glacial lakes territory that became the Town of Jackson was the log cabin of "a hunter and trapper" named Jordan who left his

name on the map and not much else. Settlers of the 1850s remembered the cabin, but not the man. About two miles northeast of the lake could be found the farm of Dutch immigrant Jacob Vroman and a bit farther on the new home of Chester and Olive Jones who arrived by oxcart in 1849.

Settlers also came up the Wisconsin River Valley along the river road into Dell Prairie and Springville. Henry and Lorenzo Van Wie, of an old New York Dutch family, settled near what became known as Olin in 1847. One year later a New Yorker named James Edson built a dam on Plainville Creek in Dell Prairie and started what became the county's first village, Plainville. Even farther up river was Henry W. Kingsbury, who may have settled at the site of the village of Quincy, then known as "Kingsbury's Crossing," as early as 1844.

Others followed, but not in any great number. The federal census of 1850 reported a total of 187 non-Indian people living in what was then Adams County, which also included nearly all of the future Juneau county.

### **The 1850s-- Indians Out, Settlers In**

The Menominees held the last recognized tribal claim to land in central Wisconsin until October, 1848. At a meeting with federal officials at Lake Poygan in Winnebago County, the Menominees agreed to exchange land that became all or part of Adams, Juneau, Marquette, Waushara, Green Lake, Winnebago, Waupaca,

*Rising above the prairie, Pilot Knob (County J and 3rd Avenue) guided travelers on the branch of the Pinery Road that ran from the Marsh House to Hancock and Stevens Point. It later helped travelers from Friendship follow the road to the Wisconsin Central Railroad depot about five miles east at Liberty Bluff.*

Shawano and Outagamie counties for 600,000 acres in Minnesota and \$350,000 in cash. Earlier that year, in March, the first "Adams County" had been mapped west of the Wisconsin River. With the Menominee leaving, the east side of the river was now open to "squatters" who claimed land not by right of payment but by possession.

Squatters had to then defend their claims from interlopers on the property itself and at the federal land office. Squatters in the Big Spring-Briggsville area organized a "Claim Protection Association" whose members promised to help each other run off latecomers, even those who followed the legal nicety of actually buying a piece of property before they settled on it.

Purchasing land became easier in 1851 and '52, when the survey was completed throughout the county and the federal land office moved from Mineral Point to the more accessible Stevens Point. The going rate for land purchased directly from the federal government was \$1.25 per acre. The Homestead Act, which granted land to settlers who promised to improve it, was not passed until 1862, too late for those who came in the 1850s.

State militia, and federal military veterans could exchange "warrants" they had received as pay for land. For example, ninety days of duty in the Black Hawk "War" with the Illinois or Michi-

gan militia was worth eighty acres of federal land anywhere in the country. While some veterans used their warrants to obtain a homestead, many others sold theirs at a discount to real estate "speculators" who used them to claim land they then sold to settlers at a mark-up.

The village of Friendship owes its birth to speculator Henry Whitney who bought 80 acres at the rapids of the Roche-A-Cri sight unseen, then quickly sold the promising property to developers Luther Stowell and William Burbank. They platted a village with lots they then sold at a mark-up. Needless to say, since they were perceived as driving up the price of land, speculators were often unpopular in frontier communities.

In the 1850s, the central Wisconsin River Valley was on the frontier. It was the place where settlers sought new homes, where the non-Indian population soared, where farm, schools and churches began and local government was organized. By 1860, counties that were less than sparsely populated in 1850 were filling up with people. Juneau county had 8,770 people in 1860, as did Waushara. Portage county had 7,507 residents and Adams county grew to 6,492.

Most of the newcomers to Adams County were native-born white Americans. They came from New England, New York and other north-



*The Atcherson House, one of the first commercial buildings in Friendship, was built shortly after the village became the county seat.*





eastern states and had ancestors who had migrated from Great Britain or Holland. They were joined in Adams County by newly-arrived Irish, German and Norwegian immigrants. In addition, Adams County was also home to an African-American community as early as 1852. Many pioneers came by water via the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes. Once they landed at Milwaukee or another Lake Michigan port they set out on foot or in wagons for the frontier where land cost less than in settled areas.

A sampling of settlers from these early years illustrates the ethnic roots, place of origin and occupations of the pioneers of Adams County.

James and Sally Best Ramsey came from Ohio to new Haven in 1850, accompanied by their 21 year-old-son, Robert. Remembered by New Haven historian Archie Crothers as "a large man of great force" Robert farmed 400 acres, raised cattle and "always several yoke of oxen." He used his oxen to break the virgin soil of New Haven for himself and his neighbors. "I personally, remember having seen him" wrote Crothers, "with his big wooden-beamed breaking plow, with ten yoke of oxen hitched to it for power, plowing up virgin soil and

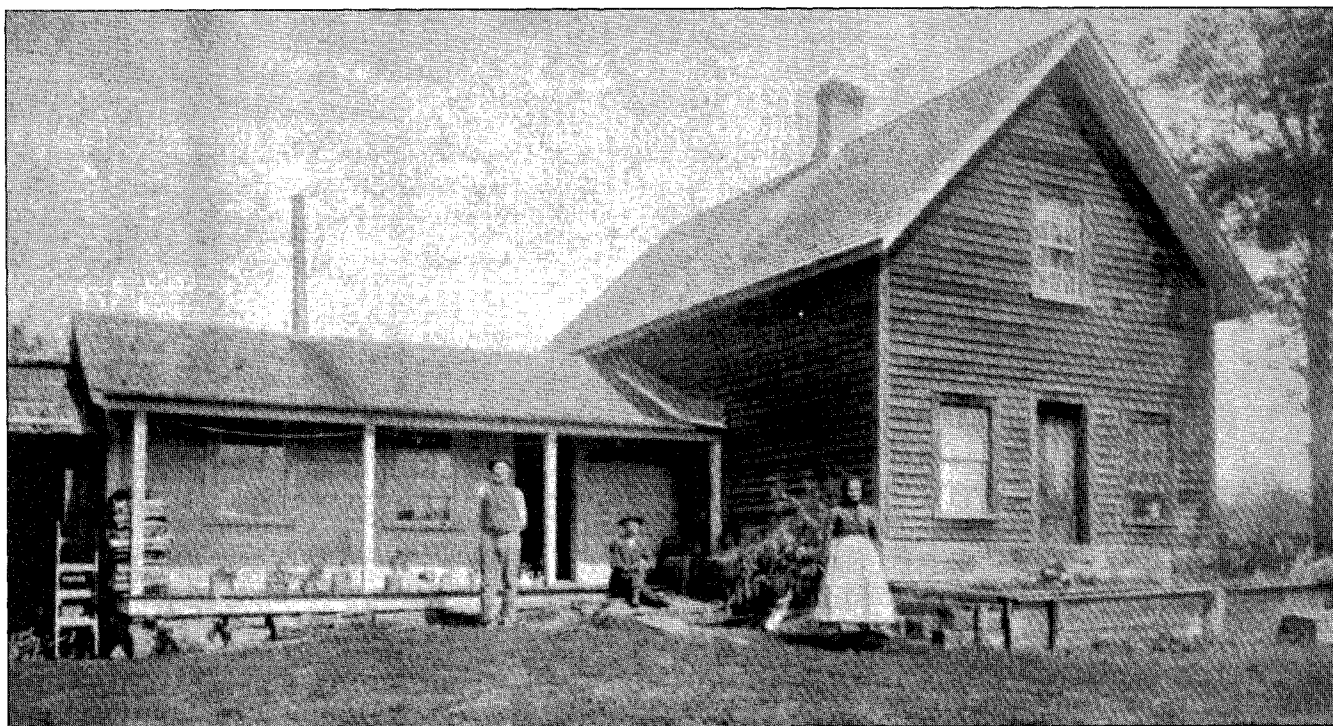
turning under brush and small trees in the process."

Another man who used his oxen well was Uri Morse, a farmer who came to New Haven from western New York in 1849. Morse was remembered as having learned about the outbreak of the Crimean War between Russia and Turkey in 1854 earlier than anyone else in the area. Knowing that war usually stimulated grain prices, he went around to his neighbors and bought as much wheat as he could. He then freighted it to Milwaukee by oxcart where it commanded a top price. What happened when Morse's neighbors learned about his successful speculation with their wheat has not been recorded.

Morse made the ten-day trip to sell his wheat in Milwaukee, because local mills that might have purchased and marketed it for him had yet to be built. In a few years, Morse could have availed himself of the services of Massachusetts emigrant Newel Carpenter. A millwright in the literal sense of the term, he arrived on the banks of White Creek in 1850 and, downstream of the present village, built a water-powered sawmill. The lumber he made was used to build some of the first

*Newel Carpenter, who built the first mills at Easton and White Creek at his home near White Creek*





*Gilbert Van Kuren and family at their home in the Town of Monroe. A small lake which bore their name is now part of Lake Petenwell.*

frame buildings in the vicinity of White Creek and Easton. A few years later Carpenter also built grist mills at White Creek and Easton.

About the same time Newel Carpenter was settling on the lower reaches of White Creek, Jonathan and Sarah Colby left Vermont and moved to 160 acres farther upstream. Members of their family have combined farming and teaching ever since and illustrate the pioneer commitment to public education that was the foundation of the school system.

Shortly after the Colbys arrived, the first public school teacher on record in the county was at work. In 1853, 15-year-old Amelia Seward, native of Alleghany County, New York, went to work in School District No. 1, Town of Jackson. Her first school house was a 12' x 12' smokehouse on the Vroman property. She was the first of hundreds of young woman, many of them teenagers, who brought a basic education to rural people.

The farmers who loaned their smokehouse for Seward's school were from New York, descendants of Dutch immigrants. Two Vroman families--Josiah and Elizabeth, Jacob and Fannie--settled in Jackson in 1850. Jacob Vroman was an avid hunter, who shot at least one deer every year from 1848 to 1898. He also bagged many black bears and, according to one author, "three elk, the only ones ever shot in the state."

Game was plentiful on the frontier, as reported by Sophronia Temple, who came from Granby, Massachusetts with her husband Timothy to a farm on the Wisconsin near Plainville. "There are some bears here yet," she wrote to friends in Granby in 1856, "five were killed last summer....have a plenty of partridges, prairie chickens and wild ducks in the creek near the house."

The Wisconsin River provided sustenance in the form of fish and game, and also supplied jobs. James Trumbull, who came to Quincy from Vermont with his parents Simeon and Helen in 1857, left home at age 16 to spend 25 years tending lumber rafts on the Wisconsin and Mississippi. Appropriately, the Castle Rock Dam is built on the site of the original Trumbull farm.

Matthew Buckley, a wheelwright from Ireland who settled on 200 acres in New Haven in 1849 also left the farm to work as a river rafter every spring for twenty years. In winter, George Harrington, another New Yorker, left the eighty acres he cleared in Easton in 1855 to work as a logger up the Wisconsin and Yellow Rivers. Many county settlers followed Harrington's example, sending young men to the lumber camps to earn cash to lift the mortgage and improve the farm. Others raised grain, meat and vegetables for sale to lumber rafters, as well as work horses, mules and oxen that they sold to logging contractors

working in the pine woods up the Wisconsin River.

At home, the river also made work for ferry keepers, like Dana and Annette Billings, who left Vermont for 160 acres in Springville in 1851, and for Henry W. Kingsbury, who was already running a ferry at Quincy when he started a stage line to Kilbourn after the railroad arrived there in 1857. The county had at least three chartered ferries in operation in the 1850s: Billing's in Springville, Kingsbury's in Quincy, Provonsal's at Petenwell Rock--and probably a few unchartered ones.

One of the early and regular users of Provonsal's ferry was the family of Pratt and Mehitable Dawes, who built a log cabin in Section 17, Town of Monroe in 1852. Members of a Boston Yankee family, one of whose members rode with Paul Revere at the start of the War of Independence, the Dawes certainly did their share to promote growth in Adams County. They brought nine children with them.

Matthew Buckley, the river rafter, was one of many Irish immigrants who settled in the county. Among them were William Kershaw, who left Ireland for 280 acres in New Haven in 1857--where he entered politics--while David and Mary Murphy, acquired 100 acres in Dell Prairie. Work on the railroad from Portage to Kilbourn in 1856-57 introduced many other Irish families to New Haven and Dell Prairie where they formed the nucleus of Irish-Catholic and Irish-Protestant communities.

The 1850s saw the first large-scale migration not only of Irish but also of Germans and Norwegians to Wisconsin and Adams County. Thaddeus Leute came from Baden to 150 acres in Dell Prairie in 1854. His descendants later developed the family farm into a country resort for Wisconsin Dells' tourists. Among the other early German immigrants were Bavarian farmers Franz Wohlfert who came to Jackson in 1855, and Urban and Margarita Huber who acquired 80 acres in Jackson in 1858. Fritz "Dittbender," whose name was Americanized into Dittburner, became one of the largest landowners in Quincy, starting with his first purchase of 100 acres in 1860.

Two Norwegian communities began in Adams County in the 1850s. Newcomers from the Norwegian settlement in the Columbia County Town of



Newport moved north into New Haven but the larger and better-known Norwegian community remains in Strongs Prairie. In 1850, blacksmith Peter Larson settled in what became the village of Arkdale, soon followed by farmers Olaf Tallefson and Isaac Rosgard. The story is told that the Rosgards had tethered a cow to a stake for the night on land they planned to purchase. When they awoke the next morning, the cow was gone. The Rosgards set off in search of the animal and soon found her grazing on pasture much richer than that which they had chosen. Following the cow's lead, the Rosgards changed their claim.

By 1853, the Norwegian community in Strongs Prairie had grown large enough to organize an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation that is the oldest surviving church in the county.

While records and stories of the Norwegian and other communities abound, little is known of the county's African-American pioneers. In historical material compiled by Arthur Kingsbury in the 1950s, the story is told of a group of young men from Brookside who, shortly after the county was surveyed in 1851, followed the markers north to Roche-a-Cri Creek. When they reached the site of the village of Friendship, "they came upon a group of log cabins and people near them were running and seemed very frightened. They turned out to be Negroes who thought the boys were law

*Yankees who settled on the "Roche-a Cree" in the 1850s: (l-r), Alice Ely Munroe, George Herman Munroe, unidentified man, Alma Burhite, May Fay, Leander Fay.*



*The Ladies Aid of the Norwegian Lutheran Church, Arkdale at the Hans and Bertha Warp house north of Arkdale, 1903.*

officers after them.”

It was not unusual in the years before the Civil War for runaway slaves or freed Blacks to settle on the frontier, out of harm’s way. What happened to these original settlers of Friendship is not known. However, in 1860, census takers found four families totalling twenty “Black” or “Mixed” settlers in Adams County: Leonard and Susan Manley, Isaac and Sarah Collins, Robert and Jois Valentine, John and Margaret Joyce. Farmers with children in school, they all lived in the Town of Newark Valley, which later became that part of Quincy and Strongs Prairie between County Highways F and J and west of County Highway N to the Wisconsin River.

The southern half of the county, plus Strong’s Prairie attracted the largest number of settlers in the 1850s. The marshes and sand prairies of Preston, Big Flats, Richfield, Leola and Rome were more thinly populated than the southern towns. For example, in 1860, Big Flats, then known as Brownville, had a population of 55 (none named Brown), Leola had no more than 155 and Rome, 134.

Not surprisingly, since most of the newcomers were farmers, towns with more fertile soil attracted more settlers. New Haven, Dell Prairie, Springville and Strong’s Prairie all had popula-

tions above six hundred on the census of 1860. By 1870, New Haven would have nearly nine hundred people and Strong’s Prairie more than one thousand. They would remain the largest and most prosperous towns in the county for the rest of the century.

### **Water Power And Villages**

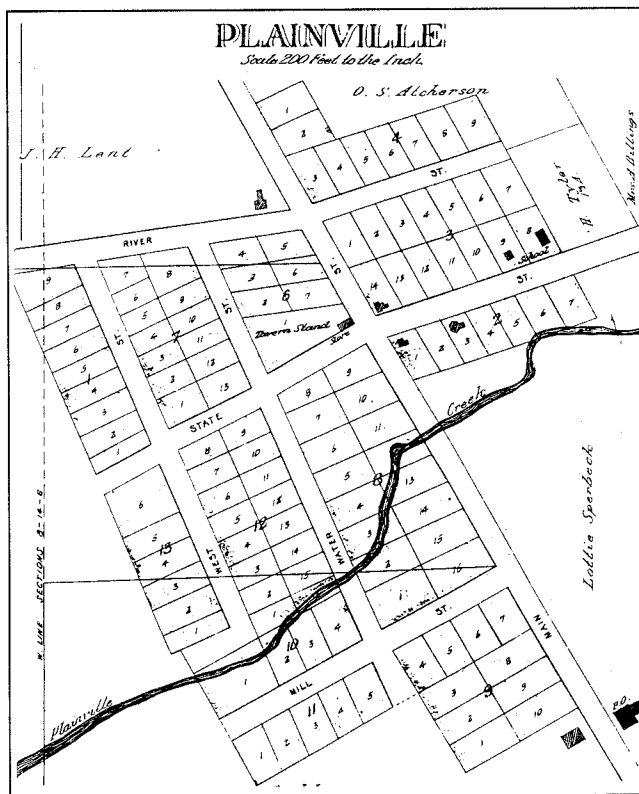
The first village in Adams County was Plainville, in the Town of Dell Prairie. At its nucleus was a sawmill built on Plainville Creek by New Yorker James Edson in 1849. Edson stayed only briefly, but Plainville grew into a village which, by 1856 had “30 or more homes all told and three good framed barns, one blacksmith shop, one tavern, one store, one church and other fixings.” The mill supplied lumber and perhaps power for C.W. Armstrong’s furniture shop. Armstrong was such a craftsman, it was said that, “his skill was watched with wonder by the Indians who yet owned the land.” By the 1870s, the mill and furniture shop, and most of Plainville itself was gone, but another mill was in operation slightly north at Olin, then called New Winsor.

Another early sawmill was built by Jeremiah Landt at Big Spring in New Haven. It must not have been very busy because when Solon Pierce came to New Haven in 1854, he reported that



About the same time as Big Spring was getting started, the village of Cascade was also on its way. Seth Thompson had a grist mill built there in 1853 and filed the first plat for a village in the county. Cascade was forced to change its picturesque name to White Creek in 1855 as the price of acquiring a post Office.

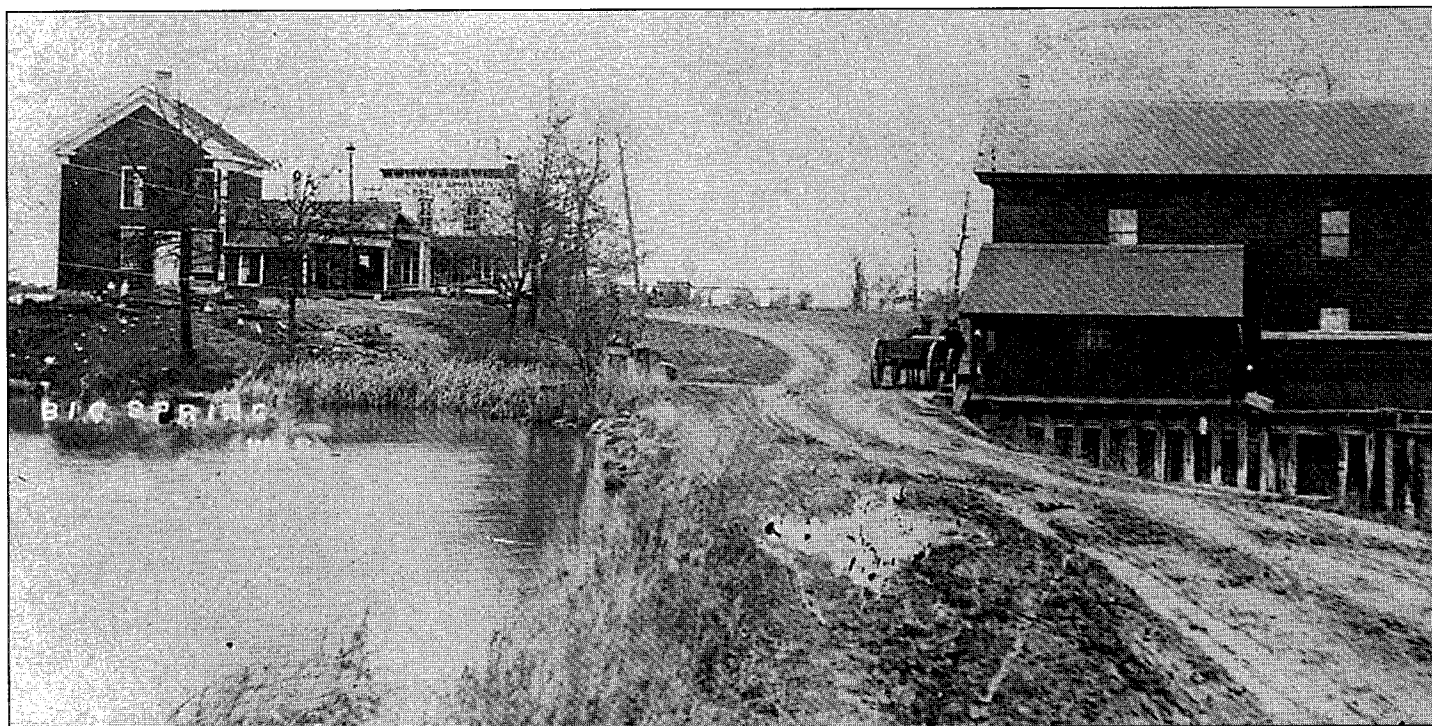
White Creek followed the now familiar development pattern. After the mill was built, David Bacon, blacksmith and storekeeper, arrived and went into business. Bacon family members later ran a store in the village and built a hotel that was the largest in the county for many years. It also served as the regular stop for the stage coach from Quincy and Friendship to the railroad in



Wisconsin Dells. Solon Pierce, the first attorney to practice in the county, hung out his shingle here before moving to Friendship. By 1876, the White Creek mill was owned by J.B. McIntyre and equipped with rollers to grind fine flour.

In 1852 or '53 Jerry Bacon dammed Campbell Creek, hired Newel Carpenter to build a grist mill and gave birth to the village of Easton. In the

**Above:**  
Plainville, the  
county's first  
platted village.  
**Below:** The dam  
and mill at Big  
Spring.







*Above: the White Creek Mill at right. Below: the Greenwood Store and post office.*

1860s, a general store opened, a blacksmith arrived and the post office began. To process wool from the sheep local farmers were raising, John Lambert, the blacksmith, built a carding mill that also used water power from the Easton dam. After the wool was carded, Mrs. Capron and Mrs. Schoff, who lived in the village, spun it into yarn

which they then sold to “fullers” in Baraboo who processed it into a heavy cloth used for men’s pants.

The carding mill was gone by the 1870s, but the “Stone House” was already built and occupied by John and Emma Pease Walton. It would remain an Easton landmark until it was demolished in the

1980s. The original Easton mill was improved to grind flour and, when owned by Fred Witt in the 1890s, specialized in the production of buckwheat flour.

Several mills and the villages that followed were built on the Big Roche-A-Cri Creek. First and farthest upstream in Section 29 of the Town of Leola was the saw mill built by John Sylvester in 1856. Sylvester was the son of Marsh House proprietor William Sylvester, which meant he had lived in the county longer than just about anyone but the Indians. Sylvester logged pine on the creek, milled it into boards, then reportedly, hauled it





by wagon to Petenwell Rock where he sold it to river rafters who carried it downstream. In 1862, he sold his mill and dam to Pennsylvanian John Barton and his partner Reuben Flight. They converted the lumbermill to a grist and flour mill, built a hotel and tavern. A school was built nearby, also a cemetery. The village was known as Flight's Mill until the 1870s when John Holliday took over and renamed it Holliday's Mill.

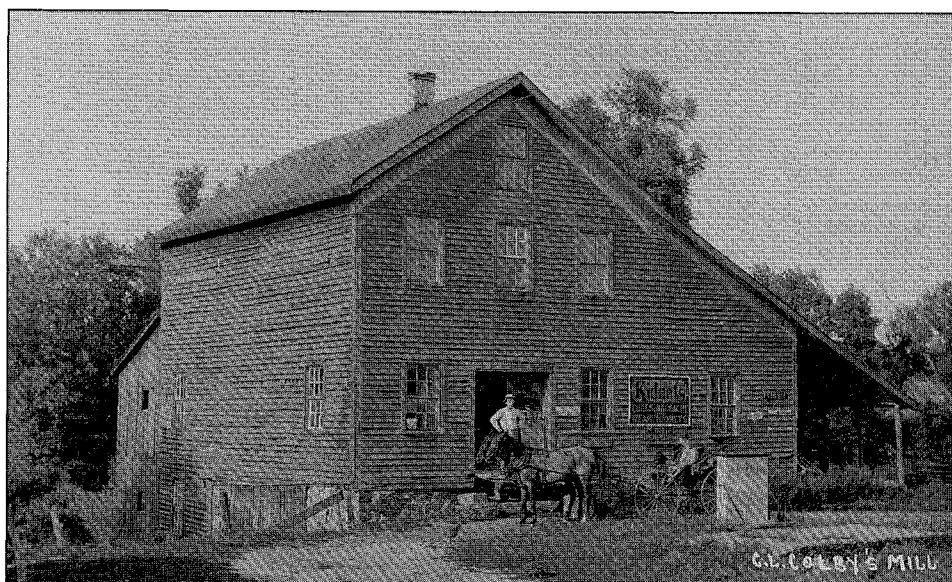
Not long after John Sylvester dammed the upper branch of the Big Roche-A-Cri, Julius and E. P. Cotton built a log dam and sawmill on the middle portion of the stream in Section 6 of the town of Preston. The customary development followed: blacksmith, stable, tavern, general store, school, post office. Apparently this mill was not converted to grind feed and, as better and bigger mills were developed at Arkdale and Friendship, it fell into disuse and washed away.

Another dam and mill was built a few miles downstream of Roche-A-Cri village in Strong's Prairie. The village this dam created was originally known as Arcade, later changed to Arkdale by Post Office order. In the mid-1860s, Ole Tolverson and William Harrison built a dam and

moved the milling equipment from Harrison's first mill at Fordham. The post office opened in 1864, the Harris store in '65, and so on. After a few years, the dam and mill was moved a short distance upstream where it was remembered as Thiele's and later Bower's. Located in one of the county's best farming areas, the Arkdale mill soon converted to flour and, by 1900, was the busiest mill in the county.

Ever the miller, William Harrison left Arkdale for Barnum in the Town of Rome in the late 1860s. He built a mill in Section 22 that was later drowned out by the pond of the Barnum sawmill. Undiscouraged, Harrison then moved to Section

*Above: Dunn's Store, White Creek, about 1910. Below: Colby's mill in Easton, about 1900.*





Eichstadt & Williams 240		Ed. Brewer 40	O.M.C.H. Fedon 40	Jas. Ordway 40	H. Yermineau 40
29		Phylas Senko 40	L.J. Marshall 40	J.S. Schofield 40	Geo. Philbrick 40
H.B. Holliday 400		80		Holcombe Lindsay 40	H.A.W. Schenck 80
		Geo. Nelson 120			
Chas. Schilling 80	Julius Prokopovitz 80	40		Aug. Drugich 80	Tom Drugich 80
F.J. Hubbard 80	M.B. Holliday 80			H.C. Nelson 80	
32				33	
Martin Mosher 240		A.S. Conant 80		B.H. Mason 280	
				S. Ba 40	
				J. Dia 40	

The village that developed here was known as New Rome.

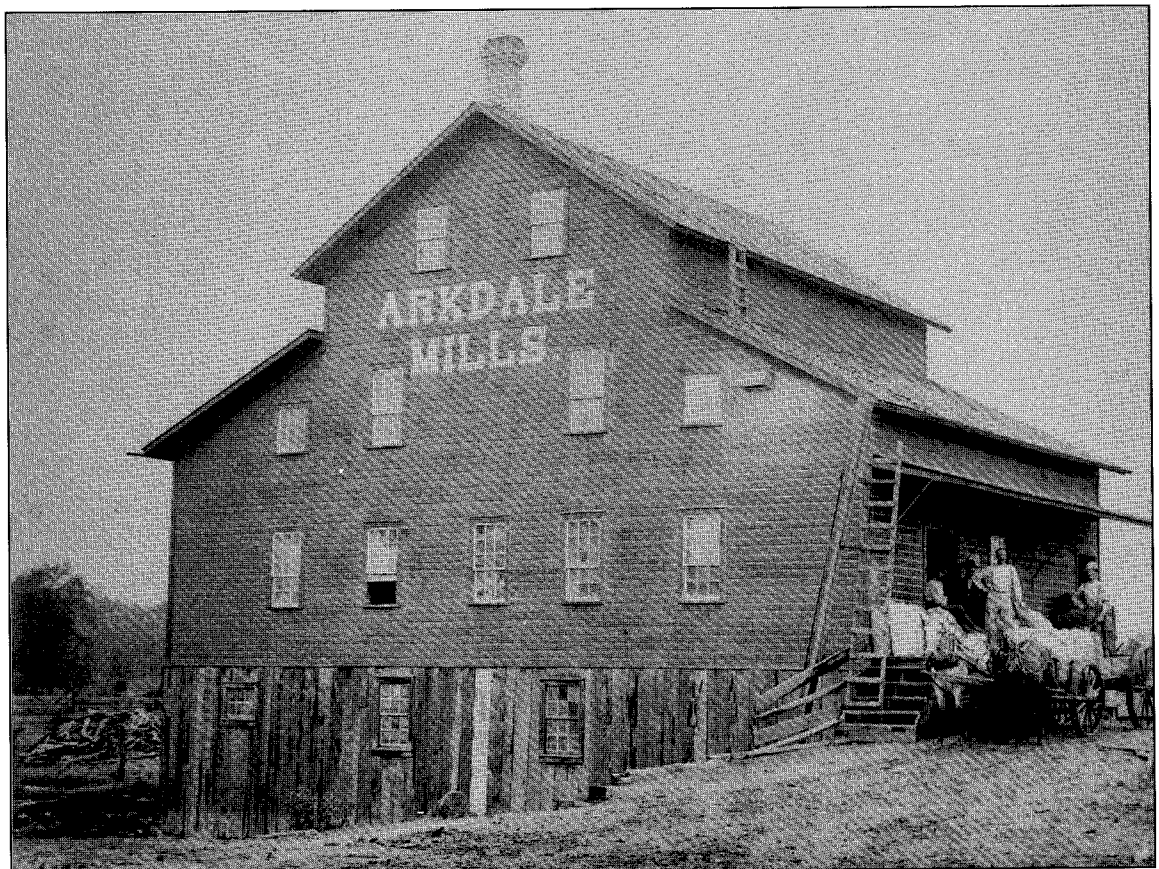
William Harrison should go down in history as the leading founder of villages in the county. Fordham was short-lived, but New Rome lasted until the 1970s and Arkdale is still intact today. In addition, although he did not found the village, William Harrison had an interest in the mill at Friendship.

The waterpower site on the Little Roche-A-Cri at the foot of what was then known as Rocky Rock was developed by New Yorkers Luther Stowell and William Burbank in 1857. They had purchased the eighty-acre village site from speculator Henry Whitney, built a grist mill and platted a village called Friendship, after their home town in New York.

Friendship had rivals upstream in the villages of Preston and Fordham. Located about two miles east of Friendship, at the common corner of Sections 33 and 34 of Preston and Sections 3 and 4 of Adams, the village of Preston was platted around a mill site owned by John and Diana Hill, and Thomas and Ann Marsden early in 1857. It is

**Above:** The village of Holliday's Mill was located on Aspen Avenue between 6th and 7th Avenues. **Right:** Built in the 1860s, the Arkdale mill served the county's leading farm community in Strong's Prairie.

10 where he built another mill on the bank of 14 Mile Creek that he operated until the early 1900s.





unclear whether a mill was ever actually built there, but Hill's store and a post office were soon in operation.

About two miles upstream of Preston village, in Section 35, Town of Preston, the village of Fordham grew around the dam built by William Harrison. On the Pinery Road with good water power, Fordham already had a mill and hotel when Stowell and Burbank built their dam at Friendship. Either Preston or Fordham could have developed into a larger village, but Friendship got the nod when Stowell and other villagers promised to build a court house if the voters opted to move the county seat from Quincy. They agreed and Friendship grew, while Fordham, which lost its mill to Arkdale, and Preston, which lost its post office to Friendship, diminished.

Nearly all the villages that existed in Adams County in the 1800s were located at water power sites developed in the 1850s. Arkdale came along in the 1860s and New Rome in the 1870s--also at water power sites. To be sure, crossroads communities with a single store, rural school, post office or country church also existed, but anyplace bearing some semblance to a village grew around a water-powered mill. Not until 1911, when the

railroad arrived, would villages develop away from places where water falling over rocks generated power.

#### **Filling the Map, 1860s-'80s**

In 1871, the Adams County board announced that 56,000 acres of state-owned land--about 12 percent of the county--was still unsettled and for sale at 50 cents an acre. Most of this land was in the northern and eastern townships, dominated by infertile sandy soil and wetlands. Preston, population 162 in 1875; Big Flats, 154; Richfield, 220; Leola, 217; were the most sparsely settled towns. Due to the Barnum sawmill and village, Rome enjoyed a temporary population increase to 330 in the early 1870s, but declined to 250 and dropping by 1885. By comparison, the most populous town in the county, Strongs Prairie, had 934 people in 1875, while number-two New Haven had 847. The fact that Rome and Big Flats were double-townships, covering about twice as much area as New Haven, Jackson or Easton, yet had only one-half as many people, and that the Town of Colburn had still to be carved out of Leola and Richfield, well illustrates the thin spread of settlement in northern and northeastern Adams County.

*The Friendship mill, about 1900.*



Nonetheless, settlers did make homes in the blowsand and wetland towns. In the 1850s, Thomas and Anna Shipway opened an inn for travelers on the Pinery Road in Section 18 of Big Flats about one-quarter mile west of the present junction of State Highway 13 and County Highway C. The first Big Flats post office opened about one-quarter mile north in 1862 and the first town school followed about one-half mile west in 1869. As the population grew in the 1880s, another post office called Beatrice opened in Section 6, closed after two years, then reopened in the 1900s.

The Danish migration to the town began in the 1870s, when Carl Sorensen and Andrew Paulson purchased land in Section 10. Other Danes followed and the community was named Niebull, either after the home village of the Danes or of their German neighbors. A school and church followed and Big Flats began to develop.

Settlement in Richfield began along the road from Grand Marsh to Stevens Point on the burr oak prairie north of Pilot Knob in the 1850s. Growth continued on a fairly steady basis, proceeding north along the glacial moraine to the Coloma Flats in what is now the Town of Colburn. Settlers also moved west down the old "state road" which ran from Pilot Knob to Fordham and Friendship.

*Big Flats church group, about 1900.*

In January 1866, Ebenezer Moffitt, who had just arrived in the Spring Bluff area, wrote the following description of Lincoln and Richfield in a letter to his family back in New York:

*"Dear Brother and Sister*

*We have got to the promised land and it is so cold that it takes the cows horns off, that and it never rains here. It hant rained here since we come here nor been but one cloudy day since we come here. The sun shines all the time except nites and Sundays. The land is so level that you can't tell when you go down hill. It was snowing all day yesterday and today the snow is about a foot deep. I heard that you got a chance to sell your farm, I think you can get a farm here bigger and nicer than yours....Hoskins has got a very nice farm of 160 acres with a good barn and house. Harris has got the same number of acres with a good barn and a log house. Lad has got a 240 acre that can be had for one thousand dollars...If you get here you can find land enough to buy if you like it. I think you never seen a nicer leveler country...we can't tell how good it is yet but it looks as nice as nice. I tell you you don't know how nice it is in Lincoln....*

*You can go from Kilbourn to Fordham thirty miles and not find a hill...I been east seven miles, west four miles and hardly a stone. If you want to buy land now is the time for it is very cheap."*



One person attracted to the "cheap" land was Ruel Hotchkiss, who paid \$200 for a log cabin and barn plus fifty acres of wooded ground and thirty of cleared in Section 3 of Richfield in 1869.

Although Hotchkiss was a wheat farmer at first, selling some, eating some, and parching some to use as a coffee substitute, he also grew hops and clover seed. In 1899, the Coloma newspaper reported that "E. Hotchkiss came to market with nineteen bags of clover seed worth as much as nineteen wagon loads of potatoes."

Not even "cheap" land could bring more than a few settlers to Leola in the 1850s. The great marsh covering nearly all of the town delayed settlement. Early histories mention that Uriah Dorman set up a hotel in Section 1 on the Plainfield-Wisconsin Rapids road in 1858 and later built a steam-powered sawmill that was still running in the late 1870s. It is easy to understand how travelers would have found Dorman's Inn, harder to guess where he found enough logs to run a sawmill for twenty years. At the other end of the town, on the Big Roche-A-Cri at Holliday's mill, the logs ran out in the 1860s.

People were about as hard to find in Leola as logs. There were 217 residents in 1875, 240 in 1895. Schools at Dormanville, Polebridge and the aptly named Farview did not open until the 1890s or later. Not until the drainage schemes of the late 1890s and 1900s dried up some stretches of wetland did population grow. By 1905, Leola's numbers more than doubled to 546.

The Town of Rome had its first wave of settlement in the 1850s, led by New Yorkers who named it: W.W. Burhite, Joseph Smith, Morris Burrows, Loren Finch, J.R. Hamond, Calvin Chester. They concentrated in the northwestern part of the town close to the river and the bustling little sawmill town of Nekoosa. Growth was slow, however, with the first school opening in 1869 on land in Section 2 donated by Calvin Chester. This was also the site of the original New Rome post office which opened in 1858. It later moved to the Harrison mill site on 14 Mile Creek in Section 10, later known as Deer Lodge Lake.

Interest in Rome was stimulated in 1865 when an outfit known as the St. Louis and Wisconsin Lumber Company built a sawmill on the Wisconsin in Section 26. These were the salad days of lumber rafting on the river, with many a load of

boards floated all the way down the Wisconsin and the Mississippi to St. Louis. The new mill was housed in a building 80 x 120 feet and operated under the name of the Barnum Lumber Company. The origin of the name is unclear, although one news report of the time attributes it to St. Louis lumberman Tiburon Barnum.

Be that as it may, and although it was on the river, the Barnum mill site did not have sufficient water power to run a mill large enough to meet the demands of the St. Louis market. Instead the lumber company bought a \$28,000 steam engine to run the saws. It was shipped to New Lisbon in Juneau County by rail, then hauled by oxen across the sands of Necedah and Armenia to the Wisconsin, and somehow moved across the river.

By 1870, the mill was up and running, with two circular saws and an edger capable of turning out 50,000 board feet of lumber a day. In three months of operation that year, the mill had thirty employees who produced about one million board feet of lumber that was assembled into rafts and shipped down river.

In 1871, the mill was purchased and improved by the Weed Lumber Company of Oshkosh. The Barnum mill sat on a side channel separated from the main river by a long, narrow island. Weed Lumber built a dam at the downriver side of this channel to create a "pond" where logs could be stored prior to milling. As a result, water backed up into the creek nearby where William Harrison had built a grist mill, flooding him out. As compensation, Weed gave Harrison enough lumber to build a new mill out of harm's way on 14 Mile Creek at New Rome.

Barnum Lumber hummed along in 1872, '73, '74 and '75, with shingle, planing and lathe mills adding value to the basic product of rough cut boards. A village grew nearby with housing for about sixty workers and their families, a company store, a hotel and Methodist Episcopal church. It was, as one reporter wrote, a "bustling hive of industry." The hive continued to bustle for the summer season of 1876 then, as was customary, it shut down in the fall to await a new supply of logs the following spring.

On one night in November, mill manager Andrew Bean was accosted by a armed man on the road to Nekoosa. Bean pulled out his own pistol and scared off his mysterious assailant. Two days

later a fire broke out in the mill buildings and "in an almost incredibly short time they were reduced to a mass of smouldering ruins." It was later discovered that pumps meant to provide water for fire fighting had been tampered with and arson was likely. The mills that were "the finest" in the valley shut down, never to reopen.

There is some suggestion that the Barnum mill was destroyed by a disgruntled worker--the same person who had accosted Bean--but it is just as likely to have been destroyed by accident or by its owners. Situated at the tail end of a string of mills that ran down river from Stevens Point to Nekoosa, Barnum was the last mill on the river to receive logs from the dwindling supply upstream. Since many a sawmill operator was not above filching logs from competitors, it is likely that many of Barnum's logs were diverted to mills upstream. Be that as it may, the days of driving logs to mills and rafting the output to market were also numbered, had been ever since railroads reached Wisconsin Rapids, Plower and Stevens Point in the early 1870s. With railroads to deliver milled boards, sawmills stopped shipping them by water. Located many miles away from the nearest railroad, Barnum was becoming more of a losing proposition everyday.

Furthermore, it was not unusual for pioneer lumbermen to "sell" a failing mill to the insurance

company by setting it on fire and collecting on the coverage. Perhaps it happened at Barnum.

In any event, Barnum was Adams county's first and largest industrial operation of the 19th century. Its loss was felt most acutely in Rome, where growth was set back for a generation. In the 1870s, after the town dug a drainage ditch that promised to transform the marshes east of Dyracuse Rock into cropland, settlers came to the southeastern corner of Rome. But in between Dyracuse and New Rome village stood twenty sections and more of land still in state or federal ownership. Not until the 1890s, when immigrants from central Europe occupied the sands in the central and southern part of the town, would the population of Rome again increase.

By the 1900s, the pioneering days were over in Adams county, so was the stagnation that had stifled population growth as well as rural and industrial development. In the 1890s, new immigrants from central and eastern Europe, and Americans already here, would look with optimism on the sparsely-settled sands and marshes of Adams County. Aided by drainage schemes, new methods of farming and the promise of a railroad on its way, Adams county got a second start.

### Population of Adams County

Towns	1860	1900	1960	1997
Adams	462	588	497	1,308
Adams, City			1,301	1,776
*Brownville	56			
*Chester	372			
Big Flats		550	246	764
Colburn		392	142	168
Dell Prairie	650	581	411	1,223
Easton	349	487	393	923
Friendship, Village			560	801
*Grand Marsh	427			
Jackson	528	589	449	729
Leola	155	384	207	244
Lincoln		479	283	345
Monroe	364	595	196	357
New Chester		397	422	1,887
New Haven	614	693	515	518
*Newark Valley	118			
Preston	295	377	337	1,155
Quincy	243	432	249	1,001
Richfield	303	417	165	160
Rome	134	654	181	2,146
Springville	615	568	368	874
Strong's Prairie	604	958	644	1,109
White Creek	207			
Wisconsin Dells, City				5
Total	6,497	9,141	7,566	17,493



*Right: Unidentified mother and child. After three decades of almost no growth, county population grew dramatically in the 1890s.*

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