

TOWN OF GROVER OFFICIALS

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Supervisor	Jean Dehn
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Chairwoman	Jean Dehn
Member	Shawn Paul
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HISTORY OF THE TOWNSHIP OF GROVER

Wisconsin became a part of the Northwest Territory of the United States in 1836, organized as the "Territory of Wisconsin." It officially became a state in 1848. In 1854 the state was surveyed by government surveyors and divided into counties. Taylor County was created on March 4, 1875.

In 1875 Taylor County had four townships: Westboro, Chelsea, Medford, and Little Black. At that time the townships ran straight across the county.

In November of 1885, the Taylor County Board organized three new townships: Grover, Browning, and Greenwood. The new township of Grover encompassed what would later be the Townships of Hammel, Ford, and Aurora. North Grover, however, originally belonged to the Township of Chelsea, and in 1886 it became part of the Township of Molitor.

Latton writes in his book *Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Early Taylor County*: "According to Fred Westrich, in 1882 Jacob, Peter, and Henry Maurer, George Bahn, and Henry Richter took homesteads in the vicinity of what is now Perkinstown. Four years later, Frederick Westrich, Joseph Lechner, John Kausse and John Spuhr joined the settlement."

These homesteads were granted through the Homestead Act of 1862, which gave 160 acres of public land to anyone who was head of a household, at least 21 years of age, and who settled on the land for five years and then paid a nominal fee. If settlers wanted to acquire title earlier, they could do so after six months by paying \$1.25 an acre. This law was a great opportunity for anyone wanting to acquire land.

At this time the lumber era was in full swing. When the first loggers came to the area it was said the pine trees were so thick that "a squirrel could leap from tree to tree and make its way from Upper Michigan across Wisconsin to Minnesota without once touching the ground." Forests covered five-sixths of the total land area. The dense tree

canopy prevented the sun's rays from reaching the ground in many places and winter ice would not completely melt until late summer. Sometimes there were frosts every month of the year.

The tree the loggers were after was the white pine. Some of the virgin pine here were one hundred and twenty feet tall, three feet across, and three hundred years old. One tree would build a good-sized house, even though logging methods wasted one-fourth of each tree. No one worried too much about the waste as the supply of trees seemed limitless and the demand was high. The best and most accessible pine was next to the rivers, but it was already gone by 1882.

Before the railroads came, early logging used the rivers extensively. Logs were hauled and unloaded on the riverbanks and in spring, when water levels were highest, the dangerous river drives began. Logs were floated down the rivers to temporary earthen dams such as the Baker, Stitts, and Feeder Dams on the South Fork of the Yellow River in North Grover. The dams were blown up with dynamite allowing the logs to float down to the next dam where the dynamiting was repeated. This process was repeated until the logs reached a railhead or a milltown.

Logging camps were located throughout the area. Most of the early settlers worked their farms and cleared land during the summer and went to the logging camps in the winter, leaving the wife and children in charge of the farm.

The settlers who came and homesteaded had an enormous amount of work. The early loggers had left behind a maze of huge stumps and slashings, in addition to which were many hardwood and hemlock trees, which were considered undesirable by the loggers at that time. The damp conditions made it difficult to burn the unwanted timber. It had to be piled and left to dry before it could be burned. Removing stumps was a time consuming and difficult affair. The early pioneers had a wooden device known as a stump puller powered by a horse, but dynamite was by far the easiest method for removing stumps. Oftentimes the crops were planted around the stumps until there was time to remove them.

The Town of Grover has both historic and prehistoric Indian campsites. One Paleo-Indian campsite is in North Grover. The Paleo-Indians were the pioneers of American Indian history. They hunted in Wisconsin as the last glacier retreated.

There are two Woodland Indian sites in the township; one at Anderson Lake with a conical mound, and the other at Indian Hill in North Grover. Woodland Indians were early mound builders. These mounds were usually built for burials.

There are three more prehistoric Indian sites in South Grover. North Grover has two other prehistoric sites.

In historic times the largest settlement in the county was the Indian Farms in the Town of Westboro on the North Fork of the Yellow River. This site also is a prehistoric site and probably was used as a campsite for prehistoric Indians for hundreds of years.

The last settlement at the Indian Farms was in 1896-1897. The Big Indian Farm was populated by Potawatomi under the leadership of John Young while a half mile north was a smaller settlement known as the Little Indian Farm whose chief was Paul Whitefish. The settlement had a population of approximately 130. They came from a similar settlement near Rozellville in Wood County and were known as the Prairie Band Potawatomi. They lost their lands in the Chicago Treaty of 1833 and the government had relocated the tribe to a reservation on the Kaw River near Topeka, Kansas. This group

had either refused to leave, living on abandoned cut-over land in the state, or had drifted back to Wisconsin, unhappy with reservation life in Kansas. However, they continued to have strong ties with the Kansas Potawatomi, frequently visiting. John Young was an influential leader and introduced the controversial Dream Religion or Dream Dance to the Kansas Potawatomi.

An Indian camp was also located at Anderson Lake. This site had a garden where corn, beans, and squash were raised, and a padded circle where dances were held. There was a trail, which led from the Indian Farms in the Town of Westboro to Diamond Lake. The Indians probably stopped at Anderson Lake when traveling back and forth from Diamond Lake to the Indian Farms. There are two burial grounds at Anderson Lake, which is an indication that this camp was used quite often.

Paul Whitefish and his band of Ojibwa Indians also lived for a time at Indian Hill north of Perkinstown. A trail followed the high ground from there to the Indian Farms in Westboro. A smaller group known as the Hardwoods Indians lived west of Perkinstown on land now owned by the Cloughs.

Although the Indians had gardens and raised crops such as corn, beans, and squash, a large part of their subsistence came from the land through hunting, fishing, berry picking, and gathering maple sap, which they boiled down for maple syrup. The Indians would sell berries and maple syrup as well as ginseng, which they gathered near Perkinstown and traded at Barney Molitor's trading post on Perkinstown Ave. in what is now the Town of Hammel.

A smallpox epidemic in 1900-1901 ravaged the Indian Farm. Between sixty and eighty Indians living there died during the epidemic. The Indian Farm was eventually abandoned in 1908. Many of the Indians, including Chief John Young went to an Indian settlement in McCord, Wisconsin. Others, such as Paul Whitefish and his family, settled near Diamond Lake.

Paul Whitefish was the last Ojibwa Indian chief in the area. He died on August 11, 1917 and is buried in the northwest corner of the Perkinstown cemetery next to his mother and his son, George.

Earliest town records begin on April 6, 1886. C.B. Powell was chairman, G.H. Brown and Samuel Cleveland were supervisors, Christ Krueger was treasurer, and Solomon Leuthy was clerk. There were also two assessors, four justices of the peace, and three constables. Building roads during this time was a high priority. A motion was made at the first recorded town board meeting to divide the town into road districts and overseers were appointed in each district. Men living in each district were listed who would do roadwork for the township.

There were very few roads except logging or tote roads. Everything had to be carried in, usually by women and children, if the items were not too large. Going to town was a major all day affair, so trips were infrequent and only life's essentials were purchased. The settlers tried to get most provisions in the winter when roads were best and big loads could be hauled.

C.B. Powell was the chairman of the Board of Health and he was also the "Poormaster". The town board would pay for essentials for the needy: groceries, doctor calls, firewood, hay for the animals, boarding costs if an individual could no longer live alone, burial costs, etc. The county would sometimes reimburse the townships for the

care of their poor, but the welfare of the poor was primarily the responsibility of the townships.

Perkinstown was a drinking town. Town records show six saloons in 1893. The majority of these were located on Second Avenue, on the west side of the road going up the hill. Second Avenue was something of a 'saloon row'.

Perkinstown also had a house of prostitution. This was not unusual as most logging and mill towns had "sporting houses." It was in fact a necessity because "at one time there were three hundred men in the area and no women except the settlers wives".

The job of constable was a thankless one but very necessary with the drinking population of lumberjacks, tannery men, and later, the CCC boys. Perkinstown had three jails. The only one remaining today is located behind the town hall. John Zester was the last constable. The constable job was eventually eliminated.

A notable and interesting individual in the Town of Grover was a black man by the name of George H. Brown. He was a supervisor on the town board and also had a crew of men working for the town building roads. He owned a saloon in Perkinstown in 1891 and again in 1895 and 1896. The town board appointed him constable, possibly because he liked to fight. "George often had settoos in other parts of the county, and sometimes impromptu affairs with Medford officers who occasionally thought it time to quell some of his noise and challenges. His reign came to a sudden end one day when he attempted to put out of his place at Perkinstown a quiet, peaceful woodsman who had never had a quarrel or a fight in his life. While Gabe Lee was a powerful young fellow, he had never had a scrap, and was never looking for trouble, but he did object to being put out of a public place, so he resisted. He had plenty of friends around who felt that he was in the right, who egged him on, and when it was all over, there was a new champion."

In 1892, the Shaws built a tannery in Perkinstown. The hides were hauled by wagon from the railroad in Medford. The tannery gave area men employment, not only at the tannery but also peeling hemlock bark. The tannic acid in the hemlock bark was used in the tanning process. The tannery was responsible for a great deal of pollution in Kathryn Lake. The gully on Highway M, west of Perkinstown was dammed up by the tannery and used as a sludge pond after they could no longer dump the sludge in the lake.

Because of the many slashings left by the loggers, fire was a serious threat. Phillip Westrich stated the land at one time was as bare as Arizona from the many forest fires. In 1893 fire broke out in the bark camps near Perkinstown. One hundred and fifty men fought the blaze, but fanned by high winds, the fire destroyed the bark camps and slashings surrounding the village and burned almost 300 cords of tanning bark peeled that spring. In 1896 another fire nearly destroyed the tannery. A large crew of men worked for more than a month rebuilding parts of the tannery. In 1897 town records show that the Shaws were instrumental in the installation of a fire pump to operate the newly installed water works for fire protection. The Shaws gave permission to have the fire pump installed in their tannery. The fire pump was connected to the main pipe of the boiler which would supply steam to operate the pump in case of fire.

The Shaws owned a great deal of land in and around Perkinstown. They had the town surveyed and platted in 1891 and again in 1898. They sold the lot the town hall stands on to the Town of Grover in 1892 for fifty dollars. The exact date the present town hall was built is not known as there is a gap in the meeting minutes of a year but it

probably was built in the summer or fall of 1892. The first mention of the town hall was April 10, 1893, when new lamps were purchased for the town hall from C. S. Suits for \$6.00. The jail, which stands behind the town hall, was probably built the same year. Second Avenue was full of saloons and it would have been convenient to have a jail close by. In 1897, the Shaws sold the land used for the Perkinstown cemetery to the Townships of Grover and Cleveland for one dollar.

In 1900 U.S. Leather bought the Shaw properties and permanently closed down the Perkinstown tannery. New methods of tanning leather had been developed with synthetic acids and hemlock bark was no longer needed. Tanneries could be closer to the supply of hides.

Eventually after the lumbermen had exhausted the supply of trees and the tanneries had closed, the land supported the settlers in farming. From the stump-riddled, cut-over land left by the lumber men, these settlers were able to transform the land into family farms and prove that the soil could grow something other than giant pines and hemlocks.

In 1933, CCC Camp 1692 opened in Perkinstown. It provided work for young men during the depression. The Civilian Conservation Corps did many public service jobs involving reforestation and conservation. They planted thousands of pine trees, built shelters in parks and recreation areas, built bridges and dams, fought forest fires, and built fire lanes. The Perkinstown CCC Camp helped build the Mondeaux Dam and Recreation Area. They also helped build the Winter Sports Area south of Perkinstown. Wisconsin and most other states had many permanent projects done by "Roosevelt's Forest Army."

The Perkinstown Winter Sports Area was built in the late 1930's. It was one of the first winter recreation areas in the state. The CCC's originally ran it, but when World War II started, the CCC's were disbanded, the men went off to war, and the area was abandoned. Several local groups attempted to operate the area during the 1940's, but because of gas rationing and the shortage of help, they were not successful. In 1951, the Hannibal High School FFA (Future Farmers of America) under the direction of Ken Brager took over the operation of the area. They ran the area for twenty-eight years. At that time, the area had a toboggan chute and downhill skiing. In 1979, because of the high cost of insurance, the area was forced to close and the equipment was sold at auction. Eventually, the county reopened the area for tubing and cross-country skiing.

Written by Mary Schultz
January, 2010

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