

HISTORY  
OF  
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COUNTIES

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[Excerpts]

CHAPTER XVII.

NEW HAVEN TOWNSHIP.

This is one of the most heavily wooded tracts in southern Minnesota. Two principal forks of the middle branch of the Zumbro river flow through the town, and the surface is much broken by the bluffs which always line the streams of this state. The timber, consisting of oak, maple, black-walnut, elm, linn, poplar, etc., which clothe the whole surface, was in great demand for building purposes on the first advent of the white settlers—railroads being then unknown and undreamed of here; and the numerous powers afforded by the South Middle Zumbro were speedily employed in turning sawmills, one of which is still standing and does occasional service. The North Middle takes a turn for a mile or two through the adjoining town of Pine Island, Goodhue county, where it turns saw and grist mills at the village of Pine Island, which forms the business center for a large portion of the residents of New Haven. This town is described as T. 108, K. 15 W., 6th P. M. It lies in the northwest corner of Olmsted county, and is bounded by Pine Island on the north, Oronoco on the east, Kalmar on the south, and on the west by Milton, Dodge county.

A considerable portion of the territory embraced in the township is owned by residents of the prairie regions surrounding, and yet it is quite thickly populated by a hardy, intelligent people. While many sought the open prairies for farms, others thought they could not live away from timber, and struck into the heavy woods; so that many fine farms are now seen where was once the virgin forest.

The settlement of this town dates from a very early period in the history of the county. In the spring of 1854 M. C. Van Horn came up from Iowa, and visiting the site of Oronoco village, then just started by Hodges, Clark & Collins, struck out thence along the north bank of the river into this township and soon found his present location, on section 11, which he at once pre-empted. He built a cabin during the summer and brought his family the following fall, and has ever since been a resident.

Soon after Van Horn's arrival, Park Amsden settled on section 35. On August 7, 1854, Samuel Brink removed from the Little Cedar river, in Iowa, to this town, bringing with him eight teams and eighteen men, of whom only one, J. N. Palmer, now remains. All took claims to timber land, and sold out to Brink. All hands at once set to work to get out material for building a sawmill. A stock of merchandise was part of the outfit and was placed in a log building as soon as it could be erected, and the new town of "Durango" was soon established. This was at what is now called New Haven, where the Rochester & Northern Minnesota railroad crosses the river. A dam was placed across the stream and a sawmill erected, which was set in motion in the fall of 1855. During the last-named season settlers had come in very fast, and the demand for lumber was active. The first boards turned out were used in the houses of Daniel Sally and Abram Clason. The former arrived and settled on section 36 on June 14; the latter arrived on June 8 and settled on the same section; both still occupy their original locations. Previous to this time the Kilroys, John and William, and Philo Phelps had settled a little farther west.

The locality last above referred to was called Center Grove, which name still clings to it, notwithstanding it is the site of Douglas Station. Here occurred the first wedding in the town, that of John Holmes and Diana Phelps, which took place at the residence of the bride's father, Philo Phelps, on March 23, 1855; the ceremony was performed by P. H. Bucklin, Esq., of Rochester.

During the summer of 1855 the citizens of the locality desired to have a school, and so clubbed together and put up a small log structure to be used for school purposes on section 36. Ann Losinger, a miss of fourteen, was employed to train the young ideas. This was probably the first school in the county. On the organization of school districts subsequently, the Center Grove schoolhouse was located on the opposite side of the road, in the town of Kalmar, where it still remains. Miss Losinger married R. L. Emerick and lives at Minneapolis.

The first white child born in the town was Bertha E., daughter of William Kilroy. This birth took place March 17, 1855. Miss Kilroy grew up and married John A. Senn, and now resides at Sauk Rapids.

In August, 1856, Mrs. Helen Madison, wife of Henry Madison, died of fever, in the northern part of the town. This was probably the first death that occurred within the limits of New Haven. Mrs. Madison was less than twenty-one years old at the time of her decease. She was attended by her only female neighbor, Mrs. Samuel Campbell.

The settlement of the town during the year 1855 was very rapid, and it would be impossible to name all the arrivals. Many of the original settlers have moved farther west. John B. Bassett filed a claim on a quarter of section 34 in October, 1851; and his son, Joshua B., took a quarter of the same section in May, 1855. This was the first land in the town on which a patent was issued by the government. The instrument bears date of December 1, 1856. Owing to an error in the survey, the lands in New Haven could not be patented until a long time after their settlement. Mr. Bassett happened to be the first to patent his claim after it came in market. Joseph and John Cornwell, brothers, entered claims in May, 1855. In September of the same year Cornelius White, claimed the quarter of section 31 on which he still continues to reside. James Button, now a leading citizen of Rochester, located on section 14 in 1855, and continued to reside thereon for many years, taking an active part in the development of the town. In 1858 he bought the sawmill on section 27, built two years previously by Baker & Madison, which he still owns, with four hundred acres of land in the vicinity.

## NEW HAVEN.

At one time the village of Durango promised to make a large commercial center, as so many new towns often promise, only to prove like the fruit of Sodom and Gomorrah. After Brink's sawmill was set in motion, numerous people were employed by him in its operation. In partnership with John Holmes he opened an extensive store and supplied a large tract of county with necessaries. It is said that the first nails driven in Rochester were purchased here, and that many came from what is now the commercial center of the county to purchase drygoods, etc., in the winter of 1855-6. Early in 1855 a man named Birch opened a "dry and wet" grocery, and some wild carousals were held here, after some shooting had been indulged in, in which the proprietor seemed to be the chief target, the place was closed and its keeper disappeared. Brink & Holmes sold out to Charles Nye in 1856, and Brink decamped the following spring, leaving Holmes in the lurch. All of the latter's real estate was absorbed in paying the debts of the firm, and he had to start anew. His defaulting partner subsequently died in an almshouse. Nye died in 1857 and the property fell into the hands of Daniel Heany. In the spring of 1858 Heany opened a large store and continued also to operate the sawmill till 1864. At this time the development of rival towns, where better powers were afforded by the Zumbro, had deprived New Haven (this was the name taken in 1858, when the state and township were organized) of its prestige, and the village rapidly fell into decay. The sawmill was operated in a small way by one Ambler for four years longer, at the end of which time it fell down and the dam has since disappeared through neglect. Three residences now constitute the hamlet. The building at first occupied as a store is doing service as a stable. A postoffice was established here about 1861 or 1862, with John H. Hill as postmaster, but was discontinued some years since. Considerable sport was made with Mr. Hill by his democratic friends over his degradation in being compelled to accept an appointment from a republican president! The honors of emoluments of the office were never such as to be sought after, but the office was accepted by its incumbent as a neighborhood accommodation.

## GENOA.

In the summer of 1857 Barker & Frycke built a dam across the south middle Zumbro on the extreme south edge of the town, and erected a sawmill, which was driven by the power thus secured. This dam was washed away the following spring, and another dam was put in lower down the stream at Genoa, and the present village began to spring up. It is located on the S.  $\frac{1}{2}$  of S.W.  $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec. 34, land taken from the government by John B. Bassett, and the present village was platted by him in 1865. In 1858 the first school was opened here, Mr. Bassett donating the use of a building for that purpose. He also erected several buildings for the accommodation of families called here by the growth of business. In 1860 John Kilroy and Leonard Kilbourn built a steam sawmill on the left bank of the river opposite Genoa. This was burned and rebuilt in 1864, but has now disappeared. In 1870 the mill built by Baker & Frycke, at that time owned by Charles Hurd, was washed away with the dam, and that was the last use of waterpower at this point. In 1869 Joshua Bassett built a steam sawmill on section 33, half a mile west of Genoa, and operated it till 1879. The building is still standing.

A postoffice was established here in 1872, with Hiram Miller as keeper. The office still supplies mail to a large number of people, many of them farmers of the vicinity. The village numbers about 150 souls. There is a general store which does a thriving trade.

A postoffice was established in the winter of 1862-3, on section 31, and christened Othello. This was supplied from Mantorville, on condition that the patrons of the office carry the mail without expense to the government. David Rowley was employed under this arrangement to go after the mail once a week. A. O. Cowles was postmaster for ten years. He was succeeded by Cornelius White; and the office was shortly discontinued. On the establishment of a post-route between Rochester and Faribault in 1879, the office was reopened, and is supplied with daily mail.

## CHURCHES.

The town of New Haven contains no church edifice, but religious services are held in several of its schoolhouses, and many of its people are members of societies in neighboring towns. A large share of the people in the western part of town are communicants in the Roman Catholic church at Pine Island; and a society of Second Adventists, with headquarters at the same point, is known as the New Haven church, as it had its origin in this town, where its meetings were formerly held, and many of its adherents reside here.

The first religious organization in town was a class of Episcopal Methodists, formed in the fall of 1855 by Rev. S. A. Wing—then a resident of Oronoco—in a log schoolhouse on section 36, where Daniel Sally's garden is now located. This society numbered seven members, with John Lowry as class-leader, and N. Bowman, steward. A Sunday school was organized the following spring, and S. A. Wing acted as superintendent, chorister and secretary. This society was called the Center Grove society, and existed until quite recently. Services are still held at irregular intervals in the Douglas schoolhouse.

A Baptist society was organized at Genoa in the spring of 1868 by Revs. Howard Hamlin and Hiram Miller, and the latter was installed as pastor. George Welker was chosen as deacon, and G. N. Henton as clerk. Services were held in the schoolhouse for about three years, and the class, being weakened by deaths and removals, went out of existence.

Early in 1871 a class of Wesleyans was formed at Genoa by Rev. Henry H. Walker, who ministered as pastor. George Welker was the first class-leader, and Sidney Ottman, steward. Services are still held in the schoolhouse by this sect.

Mr. Walker also organized a class at Othello in the spring of 1872, of which Charles S. Frost was class-leader, and James Olin, steward. This organization has lapsed, but services are still held occasionally at the schoolhouse.

The organization of a Baptist church at Othello dates June 9, 1872. Russell Bentley and A. O. Cowles were the deacons, and Allen Reed, clerk. Rev. Horton, of Mantorville, organized the class and was its first pastor. Services were held in the schoolhouse alternately with the Wesleyans. Both the last-named societies were organized after a series of joint revival meetings, and both have been broken up by mutual disagreements and lack of interest.

#### ORGANIZATION.

The town of New Haven was organized, in common with others in this section of the state, on its admission in 1858. This was the only town in the county to vote against the loan of \$5,000,000 state bonds to aid in railroad construction, at the election on the question held April 15 of that year.

The first regular town meeting was held in Daniel Heany's store, at New Haven, on May 11, 1858. At this election eighty-one votes were cast, of which Daniel Sally cast the first.

The following officers were elected: Supervisors, John Lowry, chairman, Daniel Sally, Thomas McManus; clerk, John Cornwell (this office has been filled by the same incumbent ever since, having been re-elected from year to year); assessor, J. H. Hodgman; overseer of poor, Arnold Hunter; collector and treasurer, A. N. Bowman; justices, A. B. Chapin, L. S. Howe; constables, Charles Osborn and A. N. Bowman.

The following are the supervisors who have served since the first election, in every case the chairman being named first:

- 1859—John Kilroy, Dan'l Salley, Sam'l Campbell.
- 1860—J. M. Cornwell, D. Salley, J. H. Hodgman.
- 1861—D. Salley, E. B. Speed, Aaron Hamlin.
- 1862—D. Salley, Russell Williams, Kewell Bascomb.
- 1863—Russell Williams, O. S. Vreeland, Harrison Douglass.
- 1864—D. Salley, M. C. Marvin, O. S. Vreeland.
- 1865—J. M. Cornwell, H. Douglass, John H. Hill.
- 1866—E. D. Wilcox, Russell Williams, Jerome McManus.
- 1867—E. D. Wilcox, H. Douglass, L. L. Mutchler.
- 1868—E. D. Wilcox, L. L. Mutchler, Nathaniel Bowker.
- 1869—Same.
- 1870—L. L. Mutchler, H. Douglas, T. V. Phelps.
- 1871—E. D. Wilcox, H. C. Packard, A. Hunter.
- 1872—E. D. Wilcox, H. C. Packard, H. D. Cornwell.
- 1873—Thomas Cornwell, H. C. Packard, A. O. Cowles.
- 1874—Thomas Cornwell, H. C. Packard, J. C. Smith.
- 1875—Thomas Cornwell, L. L. Mutchler, George Fryer.
- 1876—J. M. Cornwell, T. C. Farrell, H. G. Wetherbee.
- 1877—J. M. Cornwell, W. Jillson, L. L. Mutchler.
- 1878—J. M. Cornwell, H. C. Packard, Martin Flick.
- 1879—J. M. Cornwell, L. L. Mutchler, Patrick Kennedy.
- 1880—H. C. Packard, P. Kennedy, William W. Button.
- 1881—J. N. Cornwell, P. Kennedy, W. W. Button.
- 1882—Thomas Cornwell, Patrick Kennedy, H. C. Packard.

The following are the town officers elected in the spring of 1883: Supervisors, Thomas Cornwell, chairman, Thomas T. Van Dolah, Patrick Kennedy; clerk, John Cornwell; treasurer, Abram Clason; assessor, Frank Conrad; justice of the peace, Henry Hamlin; constables, Marshall Hickok, Hugh Hammel. Abram Clason has been town treasurer for the last ten years.

The leading political parties have usually been very evenly divided in the choice of New Haven voters. In the presidential election of 1880 the republican electors received 103 votes, and the democratic 89, a total of 192 ballots. In 1881, at the gubernatorial election, three tickets were in the field, democratic, republican, and prohibition. The former received seventy-seven votes, the latter three, and the other seventy-one. The vote of 1880 is the closest index to party divisions.

The population of the township has shown very little increase in the last five years. In 1860, at the first United States census, it was 423; in 1870 the number had increased to 860; five years later had grown to 1001, and at the last census the roll showed 1011, a gain of ten since 1875.

New Haven has the honor of erecting the first iron bridge in the county. This was erected at New Haven village by H. E. Horton, contractor, in 1875. There are now three iron bridges and one wooden one erected at a total cost of \$4,500.

The proposition to vote a bonus of \$5,000 to the Rochester and Northern Minnesota railroad, on condition of establishing a station in the town, was rejected by the voters, an act of which many citizens feel proud.

The war record of the township is also something of which her people may be proud. On the 20th of August, 1864, at a special town meeting, a tax of \$5,000 was voted, fifty-seven to fifteen, to pay bounties at the rate of \$300 per man for volunteers in the country's service. On the 17th of January following, by vote of nineteen to seven, the sum per volunteer was increased to \$500. On the 11th of March, 1865, a further tax of \$2,000 was voted, twenty-six to twelve, to be used for bounties, but the immediate close of the war rendered the use of this sum unnecessary.

Many hardships were endured by the pioneer settlers of this, as of all new regions, and their present sturdy independence is the result of their experiences. Very few of their descendants, who will people the country under its improved condition, will be able to fully realize the extent of their fortitude and perseverance. A few of the incidents related of early times in the history of the town may not be out of place here.

A. O. Cowles took a claim in his own right, in addition to a purchased claim, and was obliged to live upon the former a part of the time in order to hold it. On one occasion, in the summer of 1856, himself and wife went to the little cabin late at night and proceeded to retire.



On rolling back the clothing from the bed, a huge rattlesnake was disclosed comfortably coiled up beneath the cover. His snakeship glided out between the logs of the wall, which was unchinked, and left Mr. Cowles and wife to enjoy their rest undisturbed. On another occasion, in the same cabin, Mr. Cowles held an umbrella over his wife all night while a furious storm raged, as the "shake" roof afforded very little protection.

During the winter of 1854, John A. Bassett found himself one Sunday morning without provisions or money, and set out, with gun in hand as usual, from his lonely cabin for New Haven, in hopes to make some arrangement whereby he could secure something to eat. As he was passing near the river, a deer struggled up the opposite bank and was shot by the lucky hunter. Dressing the animal, he took the hams to New Haven and exchanged them for groceries; and with these and the remainder of the deer's carcass, he found himself again supplied for some time to come with eatables. Shortly afterward he discovered a "bee-tree" containing 150 pounds of honey, and with his store trade thus secured fancied himself extremely rich, and rich he was, for he had a quarter-section of good land, and provision to last him till he could hope to produce something from the ground.

There were no bridges in the early days, and the treacherous Zumbro was often crossed with difficulty. In April, 1856, Joseph Foster attempted to cross the stream near where Othello postoffice is now located, with an ox team and wagon, his object being to take his sister, Mrs. A. O. Cowles, across with her baggage. When in midstream the box floated off and the oxen returned to the bank whence they had started. By using his seat for a paddle, Mr. Foster succeeded in rowing his impromptu boat ashore, and found himself on the same side with his team. By attracting the attention of friends on the opposite side, he got a line thrown across and attached it to the oxen so they could be led across ; then tying the wagon box down, he again launched from shore and succeeded in making the passage safely.

During the snow blockades of the winters of 1855-6 and 1856-7, the stores were often out of provisions, and people able to purchase the same were almost in a starving condition because they could not be procured. During the latter winter Thomas C. Nye's family was three weeks without flour. At last a supply arrived at Brink's store, only a mile away, but this had been wet and would hardly be given to swine now. It was, however, relished very highly by many people who had been some time without. It was during the same winter that John Kane's family ate hoe cake without salt for several weeks, as the supply of that simple but essential condiment had been exhausted at the stores. There were no roads in those days, and a snow blockade was much worse than now. Those people who thought themselves extremely unfortunate in being deprived of mails for a week at a time during the winter of 1882-3 have but a faint idea of the trials of those living here in 1856-7. During this winter John Cornwell entertained some friends who were out of provision with bread made from buckwheat flour, beans, honey and tea, and was voted a prince of entertainers.

In the summer of 1855 Joseph M. Cornwell slept with his family under a tree on his claim while his cabin was being erected. One cool night an infant son, Frank, rolled from beneath the cover, and when discovered by his mother was nearly chilled through.