

LINCOLN COUNTY ORIGINALLY WAS ONE OF WORLD'S RICHEST REGIONS

FOREWORD

In the following narrative, the writer has made no attempt to write a history of LINCOLN COUNTY. Rather he has set down the salient facts of its early settlement. The data used were related to him personally, while the men and women who made this history were still in the possession of their full mental vigor. The persons named are persons who came here in the early days and became permanent residents here.

No one can tell the future of Merrill and Lincoln County in the years or ages to come. Merrill may come to be a city of wealth, with a million people. But whatever the future holds in store for this community, the children may be as interested in reading the names of the early pioneers, as American children are interested in reading the names of the Mayflower, who landed on Plymouth Rock, December 21, 1620.

This writer has not attempted to touch upon anything pertaining to the history of Lincoln county than the late seventies, leaving to the editors of The Merrill Daily Herald the task of carrying on the story in more complete detail from 1880 to the present day.

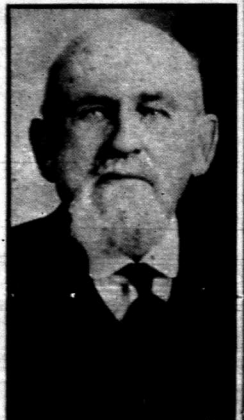
Respectfully submitted
C. N. JOHNSON

On March 31, 1874, Chapter 123 of the Wisconsin Statutes creating Lincoln county was published. The chapter provides that all that territory of the County of Marathon lying north of the correction line on the southern line of Township No. 31, north, be detached from Marathon county, shall be known and called the County of Lincoln. Except that for judicial purposes it shall be attached to Marathon county.

Section 2 of the act provided that the town clerk of the town of Jenny shall not later than the first of October, next, call an election for county officers. At this election, a county clerk, a county treasurer, a county superintendent of schools, a county supervisor and a register of deeds shall be elected, who shall hold office for two years, from the first day of January following; and they shall enter upon their duties as soon as qualified after their election.

Section 3, provided for the board of supervisors of Marathon and Lincoln Counties, for the proportioning of all county property, monies, taxes, appropriations, debts and liabilities.

Section 4, provided that Marathon county shall render an item-



GUSTAV KOEHLER, now deceased, is another of Merrill's early artisans, and respected citizens, conducting a wagon-making and blacksmith shop on lower Center avenue just west of the present high bridge.

"JENNY HOUSE"



The above illustration represents the old "Jenny House," which occupied a position at the corner of Main and Poplar streets, where the American Bank building now stands, and was successor to previous hostleries erected at or near the same location, which were destroyed by fire.

History records briefly as follows: The first hotel was built by Alex Watson, Jr., in 1854, near bank corner, and its opening in 1855 was a great event, at which a turkey dinner was served. In 1856, it burned, and in 1867, Cy. Strowbridge built the hotel on the Poirier corner, and called it the "Watson House."

ized bill for all expenses whatsoever for judicial purposes within said counties of Marathon and Lincoln. And the taxes for said expenses were to be assessed on all property in the two counties.

First County Board

The first meeting of the county board of supervisors for the new county of Lincoln convened October 24, 1874. The members were: G. W. Strowbridge, H. A. Kyes and Chas. Sales. Mr. Sales was elected chairman. Among the first resolutions to be introduced and acted on was the designation of the county seat. Section 12, town 31, range 6 east, village of Jenny, was designated the county seat. Also another resolution, naming all the territory outside the village of Jenny to be known as the town of Jenny. The board then adjourned to November 9. At the November meeting a committee to canvass the election returns was appointed. But no record of the election of 1874 appears in the records of the county board. A finance committee to settle with Marathon county was also appointed. This committee was to consist of members of the county board, county clerk, county treasurer, and register of deeds. The board at that meeting also fixed the salary of the county treasurer and county clerk at \$1,000 each per year. The salary of the county superintendent of schools was \$100 a year.

At this meeting the first bills were presented: Geo. Strickland & Co., \$167.55, for books and stationery; Ed Kluetz, justice fees, \$21.01; J. T. Adams, blacksmithing, \$9.60. The board then adjourned to December 11. At that meeting a contract was entered into by M. H. McCord and the county board, letting the said McCord the use of back rooms of the county building as a printing office. The county building, or the court house, then in use was the second story of the T. B. Scott Lumber company's office building, located across the street south, from where now is located the Citizens American Bank.

The committee to settle with Marathon county met on December 7, 1874, and adjourned on the next day.

The members of the Marathon county committee were: Jacob Paff, D. L. Plummer, and A. N. Schmidt. The Lincoln county members were: Chas. Sales, Z. Space, V. R. Willard, H. A. Kyes and T. P. Mathews.

First Officers

The first county officers were: Z. Space, county clerk; T. P. Mathews, county treasurer; V. R. Willard, register of deeds.

During the winter of 1875, the county organization for Lincoln county was completed by the leg-

islature, separating it from Marathon county for judicial purposes. And at the election, April 6, 1875, F. C. Weed was elected county judge and Chas. O'Neil was elected district attorney. A. D. Gorham was elected clerk of the court, and A. W. Crown was elected sheriff over John T. Adams. A new county board was elected. On April 8, the new county board met and organized. The new board consisted of D. A. Kline and Fredrick Reibe. At a meeting of the board June 6, 1876 a petition was presented to build the proposed new court house.

At the general election of 1874, party lines were evidently not drawn tight. W. R. Taylor, democrat, carried the county for governor, but A. S. McDill, Republican, carried the county for congress by 48 votes over G. W. Cate, the Democratic candidate. E. L. Bump had a majority of 52 over W. C. Silverthorn. Silverthorn was elected state senator from this district.

Lincoln county early showed its tendency to Democracy. In the presidential election of 1876, Tilden received 174 votes to Hayes 72 votes. Judge G. W. Cate, democrat, carried the county for governor, but A. S. McDill, Republican, 79 votes. There was no contest for county treasurer, T. P. Mathews was unanimously elected. So was A. D. Gorham, clerk of court, and David Finn, county superintendent of schools. There was a spirited fight on for sheriff; J. T. Adams received 153 votes, John McInnis, 75, Robert Truax 44, and Allan Space 43. P. B. Champagne was county surveyor receiving 134 votes to D. A. Kline's 115. For county clerk Herman Rusch had 152 votes to 133 votes for Z. Space.

When Lincoln county was created, its territory extended from the south line of town 31 to the line of Michigan and Lake Superior on the north. East and west it included ranges 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10; on the south line of township 41, ranges 2 and 3 were also included in Lincoln county.

In 1878, when Price county was created by Chapter 103, we lost several townships: 13-13C, by chapter 74, townships 41 to 47, inclusive, ranges 2 and 3 were attached to Ashland county. In 1888, we lost townships 31 to 35, inclusive, ranges 9 and 10 to Langlade county; chapter 456, laws of 1885. That same winter the County of Oneida was created and we lost all of that territory between the Michigan state line and township 36. In 1875, by chapter 60 we lost some territory to Taylor county.

Richest Region

The territory of the new county, for its size, in 1874, was probably

the richest region in the world, excepting the diamond region of the Transvaal. YOU HAVE NEVER THOUGHT OF THIS, HAVE YOU? Here stood the most magnificent pine timber region which ever grew under the sun. Its iron deposits in the Ashland and Iron county region have already yielded millions of dollars worth of iron ore. How much iron ore or other minerals remains is unknown. The pine timber has been ruthlessly destroyed.

So far as the timber is concerned no great fortunes have been accumulated. The millions of dollars made can be counted on your two hands. This writer can count only six.

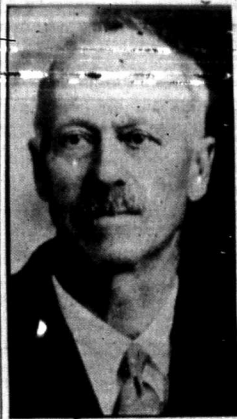
But we have the cities of the Wisconsin valley, Wisconsin Rapids—much of our timber was manufactured there; Stevens Point and Wausau likewise—the lumbermen of Wausau have reaped most of the profits from our timber resources; as did the other cities in the valley—Merrill, Tomahawk, Rhinelander, Melien, Ashland and a great many villages and thrifty communities and a fine region of farms, factories and what not. This region is still in its early stage of development.

The town of Rock Falls was first called Scanawan. The name was changed to Rock Falls at a meeting of the county board, April 14, 1877. At the April 28 meeting of the board, it was ordered that \$2,000 be appropriated for the court house. At the May meeting, \$25,000 were appropriated for plans and specifications for the court house, to cost not to exceed \$6,000. Later the plans and specifications of P. Dancy Allen were accepted, but for some reason the board paid Mr. Allen \$50.00.

At the meeting of the board June 30, 1877, the bid of M. H. McCord to build the court house for \$5,700 was accepted, and on July 7th, the contract with McCord was completed to build the new court house, now the Lincoln County Normal school building. At the next meeting July 17, the board passed a resolution postponing the building of the court house for one year. Subsequently McCord sublet the contract to David Finn, who built it.

In the fall election of 1878 E. P. Ellis, of Milwaukee, Greenback candidate for governor, received 169 votes; Smith, Republican, 27 votes; Malory, Democratic candidate, 15. Though a Republican T. B. Scott received 366 votes for state senator, against 18 votes for Richard Dewhurst. At that election L. C. Tyner was elected sheriff; W. H. Canon, district attorney; Herman Rusch, county clerk; A. D. Gorham, clerk of the court; V. R. Willard, register of deeds; Tim O'Connor, county surveyor and Martin Kerwin, coroner.

Mr. Kerwin was a well known



HAN ACKERMAN, is a worthy citizen, who after many years of residence in the county and city, is still vigorous, and is spending his declining years on his homestead on Riverside avenue.

lumberjack, and was best known by the name of John C. Heenan. Few if any of the voters knew what they were voting for the lumberjack Heenan. He did not qualify for the office. H. B. Huntington who owned large tracts of pine timber in the town of Pine River, and David Finn, were candidates for superintendent of schools. Finn was successful.

Aid Railroad

The first railroad aid voted by Lincoln county was to the Wisconsin Valley Railroad Co., October 15, 1878. It was proposed to give the railroad company \$50,000 in cash and \$60,000 in bonds to extend its road from Wausau to Merrill. The vote stood 307 for the railroad and 10 against it. For some reason the railroad never pushed the matter and the county never appropriated the money, nor issued the bonds. The record on this transaction is not very clear.

On June 20, 1879, another railroad proposition was submitted to the people of Lincoln county. This time it was \$55,000 in bonds. The vote on the question stood 319 for and 16 against. The \$55,000 of bonds were issued to the Wisconsin Valley Railroad Company for \$55,000 of the company's stock.

This stock was sold to T. B. Scott, January 31, 1880 for \$4,700. Evidently the Wisconsin Valley Railroad company's stock was not worth much.

When Lincoln county was set off from Marathon county in 1874, in the financial settlement, Lincoln county was given \$17,400 worth of railroad stock of the same company. This stock Lincoln county sold first to H. B. Huntington for \$1,300, but later the resolution to sell the stock to Huntington was rescinded, and the stock was sold to M. H. McCord for \$2,700. About that time the St. Paul, Milwaukee & Pacific railway company took over the Wisconsin Valley Railroad Co.

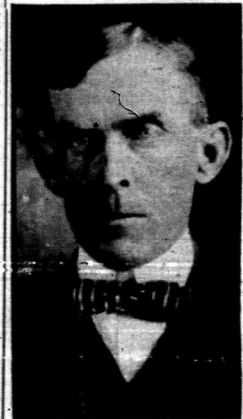
The first poor farm the county bought, located at what is known as Donovan's corner, about five miles east of Merrill, on County Highway G. The county paid \$4,500 for it, and later sold it to John Dereg for \$1,500. John Robertson, member of the county board, was the man who sold the land for \$4,500 to be used as a poor farm.

The court house, now the Lincoln County Normal school building was completed May 10, 1882.

O. B. Smith

Mr. O. B. Smith, father of Fred Smith, 508 Spruce Street, is the first white man to come to this region and remain to help build up this section.

In an interview, published many (Turn to next Page Please)



ROBERT POSEY, born at Grandfather Falls, December 20, 1864. Mr. Posey is the first white boy born in that then northern section of country.