

A HISTORY OF GLEASON

Centenary celebrations afford a natural occasion for comparisons of the old and the new. A glance backward may also reveal some things which are of more than antiquarian interest. Many who contemplate the past (and who does not do so occasionally) go to one of two extremes. Some accept uncritically the modern faith in progress and assume that everything was pretty backward until it came along, while others reverse this attitude and succumb to homesickness for the good old days. I believe a history of Gleason should not be simply a parochial account of local events of interest to the old timer, but it should also be stimulating to all of those now living in this locality.

Because of the lack of time and data available, these matters will be discussed hesitantly to the village of Gleason. I am not unmindful of the fact that both Bloomville and Dudley are older villages than Gleason and much of the history of any one must, of necessity, be tied-in with the others; nevertheless, I shall endeavor to record only the historical events pertaining to Gleason.

Salem Gleason, after whom this village was named, came to this vicinity in the year 1880 and homesteaded much of the land which now comprises the village. Val Josten and his wife, who came here in 1882 and 1884, respectively; Robert Cumming located in this vicinity with his parents in 1880; Mrs. Emma Behrens, daughter of Salem Gleason, came with her parents in 1880 and Dan and Jack Flynn and Wm. D. Rice all moved here with their parents in 1884, and these are a few of the very early settlers still living in the immediate vicinity of Gleason.

Gleason's birthright dates back to 1901. The four years which followed witnessed an era of the greatest building activity in its history. Businesses were established, dwellings erected, the village was platted, and from general appearances these early settlers were laying the groundwork for a big metropolitan center. Timber was abundant on every side. The Marinette, Tomahawk and Western Railway had come to town; the Wm. Bradley interests were becoming established here and proposed to make Gleason grow; Dr. W. H. Baver began his medical practice here; a bank was opened in the present Western Brothers store building, a saw mill was built on the banks of Prairie; Gleason was given a name and a post-office, the present Town Hall was built, the community school was moved to the location of the present school, churches were established and religion was interwoven into the fiber of this young and thriving village. A saloon, blacksmith shop, wagon shop and several other business enterprises sprung into existence overnight, and still more dwellings were built and several buildings were moved here from Tomahawk by the Bradley interests. Hang onto your hats, everyone, Gleason was growing at a merry clip.

After the C. M. & St. P. R. R. came to Gleason about 1903, Gleason also became a bustling railroad center. Gravel trains in and loz trains out, all hours of the day and night. It was not uncommon for four or five trains to be moving about in the yards all at one time. Railroad crews and their trains headquartered here—a depot, coal shed and water tower were constructed, and combined passenger and freight service was established from Merrill, on a daily schedule—who doesn't remember "Old 800"?

Then a hotel, more stores, dance hall, another saloon or two, a livery barn, another blacksmith shop and so it continued on an on—each new business and building helping to make Gleason look bigger and better. All this within the short span of four years—from 1901 to 1905. Yes, Gleason was really off to the races.

Business was brisk for everyone. The railroad construction and logging camps brought hundreds of men into the community. Gleason was the center of activity. Gleason was the metropolis in this frontier settlement. Lots were bought by intended residents, well-located business corners were rapidly picked up for future business enterprises, real estate prices soared in the mad scramble to get in on the ground floor. Yes, Gleason was established and was destined to grow, but not at the mad pace it had set those first four years.

Then things slowed down to a normal pace. More gradually, and perhaps with greater caution, new businesses were established and the village stretched as older businesses expanded and either enlarged their former building or built a new one. The building trend changed as times and conditions changed. Lumber yards sprung up. Smith Brothers sawmill was built on the west edge of town, a potato warehouse was erected, another hotel, a telephone exchange, a combined creamery and cheese factory, a barbershop, bulk oil stations,

a bank, shoe repair shop, garages, filling stations, general repair shop, cattle buying stations, machine shop, locker plant, theater, electric shop and bowling alley. In fact, every type of business necessary to make a little village complete.

As the logging and timber resources became depleted, farming rapidly developed on the fertile, virgin soil which had so nobly nurtured the forests of pine and hardwood which surrounded the village. And in the short span of forty six years Gleason has been transformed from a frontier village in the heart of the timber, to the thriving farming center it is today.

Our roads have been improved and are well maintained. Our daily tasks have been made lighter by the advent of electricity, and in every way Gleason has progressed with the times. The buildings are kept well painted, the residents take pride in their lawns, the village is always neat and clean and ready for inspection. People are happy here and really enjoy living in Gleason. The spirit of co-operation is unsurpassed anywhere, business is good for everyone, and although the building boom of the early days has slowed down somewhat, every year sees a few more dwellings and a few new businesses being established here. Gleasonites are proud of Gleason and are made happy when strangers remark that "this is a pretty nice little town." We certainly agree with them.

And so Gleason has grown from the awkward tree in the woods which it was forty-five years ago to the streamlined, modern young man it is today. It is truly "tops" in the 1947 class.

And now may we test our memory in regard to some of the changes which have taken place here since those early days. Perhaps the younger generation will marvel at some of these notations and shake their heads in doubt, and surely the old timers will disagree with the dates.

The Marinette, Tomahawk and Western Railway came from Tomahawk to Gleason in 1901 and extended its track south to Doering in 1902. About 1903 the C. M. & St. P. R. R. was extended from Heineman to Gleason, and bought the holdings of its predecessor, thus becoming the only railroad in the locality.

Salem Gleason, who's home was located approximately at the location of the present Glen Welch home, passed away in 1916.

Wm. Levia opened a saloon at the present location of the David Wedler tavern in 1902, and shortly thereafter he built the building now standing and added a hotel, then a livery barn and a dance hall and finally a blacksmith shop, all in that immediate vicinity. Mr. Levia passed away in January, 1916. John Orient then became proprietor of the business from 1916 to 1922; John Kalns from 1922 to 1924; Robert Miller and Robert Bloom from 1924 to 1927; Frank Fuller from 1927 to 1937, and then Jess Wedler and Chas. Jensen, Jess Wedler and Dave Wedler, and finally Dave Wedler.

The present Town Hall was built in 1904.

Philip Breivogel opened a blacksmith shop at the present location of the Ratzburg tavern and locker plant in 1903. Wm. Breivogel and

Lewis Herwig became proprietors in 1906; in 1909 Wm. Breivogel was sole owner and he sold to Paul Krusper and Julius Dehorn in 1912; from 1913 to 1916 Wm. Breivogel and Julius Dehorn were the village "smithies" and in 1916 Conrad Strobel took possession. He operated the shop until it was destroyed by fire in 1927 and then erected the present building which housed a tavern, dance hall and picture theater. In 1940 this property was bought by Henry Ratzburg and in 1944 he converted the theater portion of the building into a frozen locker plant.

The Bradley interests bought the land upon which the present Western Brothers store building stands from Salem Gleason in June, 1901 and erected the building, as it now stands, in 1902. Following the withdrawal of the Bradley Company from the village the building was sold to Sig Heineman and W. C. Wers who operated the business until 1912 when it was sold to A. W. Manthey and L. A. Miller. This partnership continued until 1916 when A.

W. Manthey became sole proprietor. Following his death in 1925, his sons Robert and Edward continued the business until December, 1927. In 1929 Wm. A. Smith and Harry G. Doering bought the building and soon thereafter they sold it to Henry Hackbarth and Albert Zietlow and this partnership was dissolved in 1930 when Henry Hackbarth took over the business and conducted a general mercantile business until he sold to Western Brothers in March, 1946.

The log building still standing on the George Patterson farm was the first schoolhouse—built about 1881, and it served this purpose until 1896 when a frame structure (which later became the barn on the Cap Wyant farm in Gleason) was erected at the present school corner. The log building then served as a Town Hall until better quarters were provided and the new Town Hall was built in 1904. In 1914 the grade school portion of the present building was built and enlarged in 1930.

Fred Beyer operated a wagon



Here are Henry and Ben Bessey, both over ninety years old, early residents of Heller, husking corn on their farm in the Town of Schley.



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