

# C. N. Johnson, Journalist, Was Historian Of The Pineries

**Editor's Note:**—The following article was written by the late C. N. Johnson in 1934 from interviews he had with early-day settlers. Mr. Johnson, former publisher of the Lincoln County Advocate and Merrill Daily Herald, farmer, and superintendent of the Lincoln County Home, was an outstanding journalist and historian of the pineries.

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. It does not fix 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 supervisor and a register of deeds shall be elected, who shall hold offices 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 proportionate of all county property, monies, taxes, appropriations, debts and liabilities.

Section 4, provided that Marathon county shall render an itemized 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 21, 1874. The members were, G. W. Strobridge, H. A. Kyes and Chas. Sales. Mr. Sales was elected chairman. Among the first resolutions introduced and acted on was the designation of the county seat. Section 2, 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 this 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 bill was presented: Geo. Strickland & Co., \$167.35, for books and stationery; Ed. Elbert, justice fees, \$21.00; J. T. Adams, Mackinaw, \$9.00. 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 use the back room 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 com-



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pany's office building, located at 207 N. Second street, from where he printed the Lincoln County Advocate.

The committee to settle with Marathon county met on December 18, 1874, and adjourned to the next day.

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

## First Officers

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

During the winter of 1874, the county organization for Lincoln county was completed by the legislature, separating it from Marathon county for judicial purposes. And at the election, April 6, 1875, P. C. Wood was elected county judge and Chas. O'Neil was elected district attorney. A. D. Gorham was elected clerk of the court, and A. W. Cowell 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 Frederick Riebe. At a meeting of the board June 6, 1875 a petition was presented to build the proposed new court house.

At the general election of 1874, early lines were evidently not drawn. W. R. Taylor, democrat, carried the county for governor, but A. J. McMill, Republican, carried the county for congress by 43 votes over W. C. Cate. The Democratic candidate, E. L. Dunn had a majority of 52 over W. C. Silverthorn. Silver-

thorn was elected state senator from this district.

Lincoln county early showed its tendency to Democracy. In the presidential election of 1872, Tilden received 174 votes to Hayes 72 votes. Judges G. W. Cate, democratic candidate for congress, got 237 votes; T. C. Pineda, Republican, 70 votes. There was no contest for county treasurer. P. P. Matthews 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 133 votes, John McMill, 75, Robert Cray, 41, and Allan Spoon, 43. P. B. Champagne was county surveyor receiving 134 votes to D. A. Kline's 115. For county clerk Herman Beach had 182 votes to 123 for Z. Saxe.

When Lincoln county was created, territory extended from the south line of town 21 to the state 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 north line of Lincoln 41, ranges 2 and 3 were also included in Lincoln county.

In 1879, when Price county was created by Chapter 104, we lost several townships. In 1884, by chapter 74, townships 31 and 47, inclusive, ranges 2 and 3 were attached to Ashland county. In 1887, we lost townships 31 to 35, inclusive, ranges 9 and 10 to Langlade county; chapter 129, laws of 1888. That same winter the County of Oconto was created and we lost all of that territory between the Michigan state line and township 36. In 1875, by chapter 80 we lost some territory to Taylor county.

## Rebel Region

The territory of the new county, in 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 it made can be counted on your two hands. This water can count only six.

But we have the cities of the Wisconsin valley, Wisconsin Rapids, Marshfield, Stevens Point and Wausau. These are the lumbermen of Wausau. They have most of the profits from our timber resources, at 34 the other cities in the valley—Merrill, Tomahawk, Rhineland, Malet, Ashland and a great many villages and thirty communities, and a region of farms, factories, and what not. The region is still in its early stage of development.

The town of Rock Falls was first called Skarawan. The name was changed to Rock Falls at a meeting of the county board, April 14, 1877. At the April 23 meeting of the board,

it was ordered that \$2,000 be appropriated for the court house. At the May meeting \$20,000 was appropriated for plans and specifications for the court house, the cost not to exceed \$8,000. Later the plans and specifications of F. Dudley 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 17th, 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 submitted 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 306 votes for state senator, against 18 votes for Richard Dewhurst. At that election L. C. Tyner was elected sheriff; W. H. Canon, district attorney; Herrian Rusch, county clerk; A. D. Gorham, clerk of court; V. R. Willard, register of deeds; Tim O'Connor, county surveyor; and Martin Kersin, coroner.

Mr. Kerwin was a well known lumberjack, and was best known by the name of John C. Heenan. Few if any of the voters knew that 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., on October 13, 1878. It was proposed to give the railroad company \$50,000 in cash and \$50,000 in bonds. To extend the 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. 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. About that time the St. Paul, Milwaukee & Pacific railway company took over the Wisconsin Valley Railroad Co.

The first poor farm the county bought was located at what is known as Donovan's corner, about five miles east of Merrill, on County Highway C. 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 years ago in a local paper, when his mind was as clear as a bell, Mr. Smith said:

"No, I did not come to Merrill in an automobile or a pullman palace car. I hoofed-it all the way from Chicago. It wasn't the best of hoofing either. That was way back in 1844. I was working down in an Illinois town for \$5.00 a month. I threw up my job and started out alone and on foot for this country. It took me two weeks to make it. I didn't have a living on during that time wouldn't make a Sunday dinner for a small family. When night came on I wrapped

SCENE OF EAST MAIN STREET.—In 1934 look east from just beyond the Advocate Steam Printing Office which can be seen in the right foreground. In the left foreground is the old Lincoln Hotel which burned in 1897. Beyond the hotel is the old National Bank building which was destroyed by fire in 1905. The First National Bank building, at the present site of the Farmers bank, was designed by J. D. Ladd was cashier. The first mentioned bank was known as the Farmers bank.