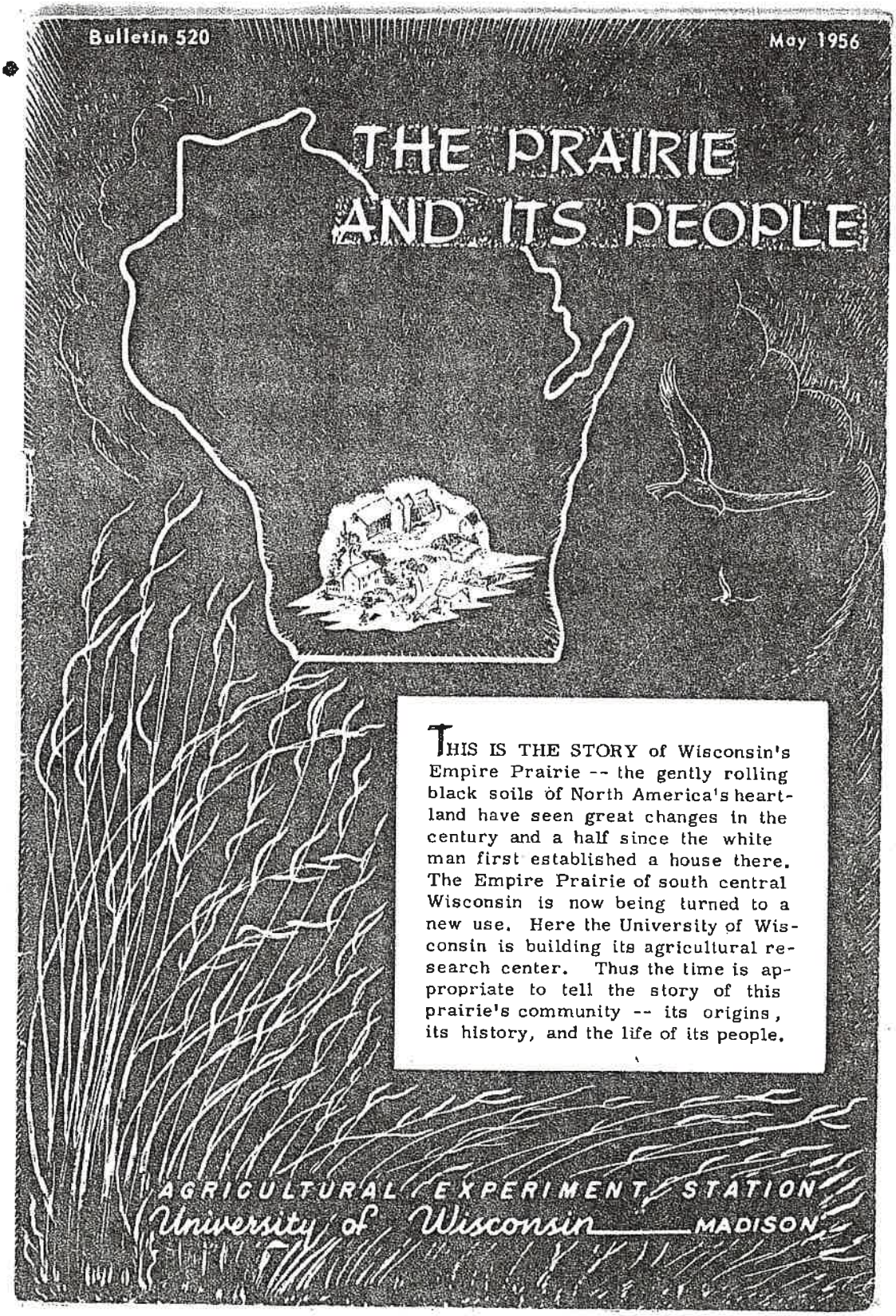
Mark Martin

Bulletin 520 May 1956

THE PRAIRIE AND ITS PEOPLE



THIS IS THE STORY of Wisconsin's Empire Prairie -- the gently rolling black soils of North America's heartland have seen great changes in the century and a half since the white man first established a house there. The Empire Prairie of south central Wisconsin is now being turned to a new use. Here the University of Wisconsin is building its agricultural research center. Thus the time is appropriate to tell the story of this prairie's community -- its origins, its history, and the life of its people.

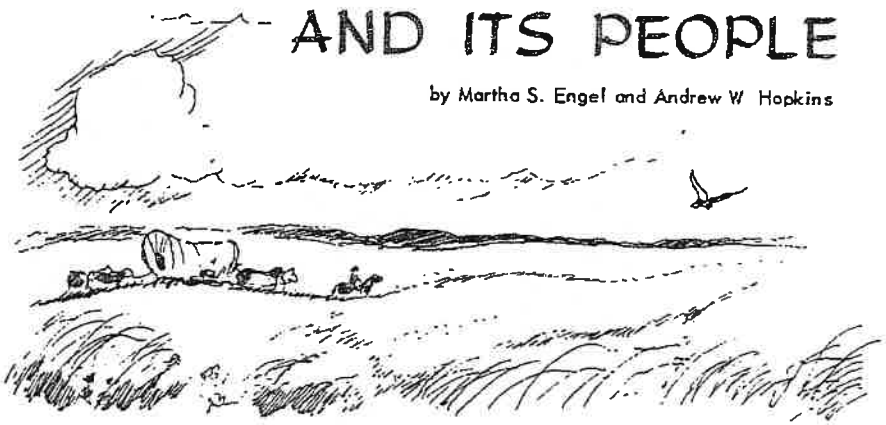
AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
University of Wisconsin MADISON

WE HAVE ENJOYED and greatly appreciated the help given us in the preparation of this manuscript. We are especially indebted to a number of people who have either lived upon the Prairie, are descendants of pioneer families, or are otherwise familiar with or interested in the area, its main industry, its life and its people -- among others, Mrs. Theodore Bakke, Stanley Caldwell, Mrs. Jennie Chipman, Harold Engel, Mrs. Frederick Dieruf, Walter and Wesley Hopkins, Mrs. M. Stitgen and Bernhard Wernick.

We also want to thank Vernon Carstensen, agricultural historian, for his valuable counsel on possible features of interest and sources of material; Emil Truog, soils specialist; Ernest Bean, former state geologist and Joseph Hickey, specialist in wildlife management, all of whom have rendered much service in checking the subject matter of the manuscript. We wish, too, to give credit for the excellent sketches illustrating the text to Byron Jorns, who has long been acquainted with the Prairie area.

THE PRAIRIE AND ITS PEOPLE

by Martha S. Engel and Andrew W Hopkins



ALTHOUGH much of Wisconsin was once covered with great forests, in the southern half of the state there were large areas of fertile prairies -- level, treeless lands that were carpeted with prairie grasses. While there were patches of prairie here and there over the state, there were really three large agriculturally productive areas not requiring land-clearing operations. The largest of these is Rock Prairie in Rock county. The others are the "big prairie" in Green county and the "high prairie" located in southern Columbia and northern Dane counties.*

From earliest times divisions of the high prairies have been known locally by rather descriptive names. So it was that the open country northeast of Madison early came to be known as Sun Prairie. At about the same time the area around the little settlement of Keyser in southern Columbia county gained the name of Spring Prairie, and the district directly southeast of the village of Rio was named Bonnet Prairie. Because many of its earliest settlers traced back to Wales, the uplands southwest of the village of Cambria were called Welsh Prairie.

Land lying immediately west and south of the village of Arlington has often been called Arlington Prairie. And in the township of Leeds settlers from New York (the Empire State) gave to their location the name of Empire Prairie. This name became a fixture when, as the years passed, it appeared on a crossroads store, and was in turn applied to other business places in the area. Still later A. R. Whitson and his associates in the Soil Survey gave the name Empire Prairie official recognition.

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, Vol. I, p. 15, 1914.

fertile lands come to be? Geologists tell us that beneath the loose, tillable soil of Wisconsin lies solid rock formed by the cooling of molten materials. And during the ages, this land was more than once submerged by water.

These rocks were broken down by weathering. From them, through action of heat and cold, rain and wind, floods and living things, the soil was formed. About 10,000 years ago, the last of the great glaciers moved over much of Wisconsin.

Empire and adjoining prairie areas then owe much of their rich fertility to the glaciers coming to them from the ice fields of Canada. Creeping irresistibly along, the glaciers ground finely the rock beneath them and carried on their surfaces or enclosed within their ice fine dust to be released and deposited with the melting of the ice. And these high lying prairie lands were further benefited by the organic matter left in the soil by abundant growths of prairie plants native to the area.

The chief area of such prairie soil, formerly called Carrington silt loam, now Parr silt loam, consists of about sixty square miles of prairie lying south of the village of Poynette and east of Lodi, reaching east for around twenty miles, and extending about an equal distance south into northern Dane county.

Records, kept for many years at the United States Weather Bureau at Portage, show that in the area the average annual rainfall (about thirty-one inches) is fortunately the heaviest during the growing season, and that the average length of this season is one hundred and fifty days. The mean temperature is 45.6 degrees, with the last killing frost on May third and the first on October fourth. The winters are rather long and sometimes severe.* There are few streams and springs but good water can be obtained at a moderate depth.

Early Peoples of the Prairie

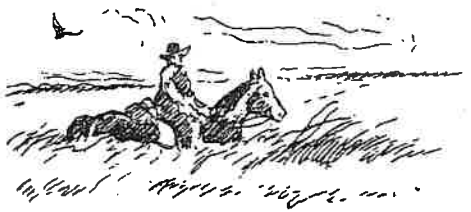
The early history of the population of Columbia county, like the history of all peoples, provides an interesting study of movement: migrations, wars, peaceful interludes, and again wars and migrations. Early records show that the Empire Prairie was peopled by the Maskoutenec or Mascouton Indians. Some authorities

* Soil Survey of Columbia County, Wisconsin, Whitson, Geib, Conrey of the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, and Taylor of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1916.

and therefore should be interpreted as "the prairie people." It is known that the Mashkoutons had numerous villages in the region now comprising Green Lake county, and that their hunting grounds extended into the Empire Prairie.

The Coming of the White Man

Columbia county was first visited by the white man in 1673, again in 1760, 1766, and in the early 1800's. Men such as Father Marquette, John Kinzie and Peter Pauquette, visited or lived in the vicinity of old Fort Winnebago. Peter Pauquette's father was a Frenchman, his mother a Winnebago. He was an honest, fearless fur trader and interpreter. The village, platted in 1837 on Rowan's Creek at Pauquette, through a clerical error in the Post Office Department, became the village of Poynette. Fort Winnebago, built by Major E. Twiggs, was completed in 1830. Traders, carriers, half breeds, a few Italians located at the portage of the Fox and Rock Rivers.



Contact with the outside world was made by stage coach from Chicago via Mineral Point, or by horseback from Galena. As late as 1835 there were no cross country roads. Henry Merrill made several overland trips to Chicago and Milwaukee. Of one such journey in 1834 he wrote: "We struck the prairie which to me was a beautiful sight. Here we could see a grass plot for four or five miles, and not a tree or bush on it. Then again as we passed on, we could see orchards, as it were, the grass up to our horses' mouths so that they would nip at it as we rode upon the jump."* And later he wrote: "We passed over some fine prairies. In many places they looked like cultivated fields. We could see an orchard in the distance, and before I knew it, I was frequently looking for the house, not realizing that there was none from fifteen to twenty miles of us. We arrived at Mr. Pauquette's farm at Belle Fontain on the twenty-seventh and got a fine dinner of fried venison and from here to Winnebago there was a good carriage road of twelve miles."**

Mrs. Kinzie crossed the prairie in 1831 from somewhere near the present village of Sun Prairie, traveling in a northwest direction through Leeds township. She wrote: "We entered upon what was known as the 'Twenty Mile Prairie,' and I may be per-

* From Memoirs of Henry Merrill in History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

** Ibid. 1914.

mitted to observe that the miles are wonderfully long on the prairies. Our passage over this, was, except the absence of sand, like crossing the desert. Mile after mile of unbroken expanse -- not a tree, not a living object except ourselves . . . Thus we went on, one little knoll rising beyond another, from the summit of each of which in succession, we hoped to descry the distant woods, which were to us as the promised land. 'Take courage,' were the cheery words often repeated -- 'very soon you will begin to see the timber.' Thus for hours. There were not even streams to allay the feverish thirst occasioned by fatigue and impatience . . . There, it was, at last, the woods. Our less practiced eye could not at first discern the faint blue strip edging the horizon, but it grew and grew upon our vision, and fatigue and all discomfort proportionately disappeared."* (Early settlers throughout the Midwest usually preferred wooded areas because of dependence on wood for fuel and building materials.)

There is a complete, colorful history of the portage area. Our interest, however, is in the story of the Empire Prairie to the south. In 1835 the military road was built. It entered the present Arlington township on Section 31 Township 10 Range 9E on the Columbia-Dane county line, and ran northeast to Poynette, crossing the western side of the Empire Prairie. The road was cut by clearing timber, cutting a track about eleven yards wide. In the prairie, milestones were set in mounds of earth or stones. Corduroy road was built over the marshes by crossing timbers and covering them with brush and earth.

By 1833, a large portion of the public land south of the Wisconsin River had been surveyed and listed in the Green Bay and the Wisconsin districts. The latter had an office in Mineral Point. Empire Prairie lands were placed in the Green Bay district and were offered for sale at a dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. No entries were made that year. In 1836, the southern portion of the Green Bay district, including the present townships of Arlington, Leeds, Hampden and Columbus in Columbia county became the Milwaukee Land District. Thus the stage was set for the arrival of the earliest settlers.

The Pioneer Settlers

The list of the first land entries includes Wallis Rowan (SE 1/4 NE 1/4 S3 T10 R9, June 6, 1836, Arlington); Clark Young (S1, Arlington, 1836); La Fayette Hill (S14, Leeds); John Dalziel (NW 1/4 NW 1/4 S26 T10 R10, October 3, 1844).*

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, Vol. I, p. 64, 1914.

Wallis Rowan, originally from Indiana, built on his claim a double log house, two buildings with an open space of ten feet between, all under one roof. It was known as Rowan's Hotel and served as an Indian trading post as well as accommodation for travelers. In 1842, Rowan sold it and moved to Baraboo.

Clark Young, born in Connecticut, later from New York, came to Wisconsin in 1838. He earned his living as general teamster, ran a stage coach, and carried mail between Madison and Fort Winnebago. In 1838 he made claim to land in the present Arlington township, and for six years was the only settler in that region.

La Fayette Hill built a log house on his claim on Section 14 of Leeds township, two miles east of the present North Leeds. During his absence in 1843 and 1844, this cabin was burned down by the Indians. Hill never rebuilt. He moved to De Korra where he built an inn known for years as Hill's Tavern.

The year 1844 brought a tide of settlers from New England. From Vermont, by way of New York came Oliver Chilson (1844), Asa Proctor (1844), and Charles Brown (1845); from Maine, Charles Brazier Thompson (1846); from Massachusetts, Frederick Curtis (1845); from New York, Jacob Townsend (1847), and F. L. Henry (1846). Of these, Chilson, Brown, and Thompson settled in Leeds township. These early English-American settlers gave the tone and undoubtedly the names to the region: Otsego for Otsego county, New York; Leeds and Hampden for the English cities of those names and in all probability Empire Prairie, for the Empire state.

News of the "cheap" land too spread across the ocean. Morris Roberts arrived from Wales in 1844. Ambion Erickson (1845), Andrew Fadness (1847) and Ole Underdahl came from Norway. John Caldwell arrived from Ayrshire, Scotland (1847).

Characteristics of the Early Pioneers

What kind of people were these pioneers? What conditions did they find in the Wisconsin Territory? As might be surmised, they were youthful, industrious, energetic and sturdy. There are many stories of their physical endurance. William R. Jones, for example, is said to have carried a hundred pound sack of flour for thirteen miles without once lowering it from his shoulders. Charles Thompson had such powerful lungs that his voice, on a still night, could be heard two miles away.

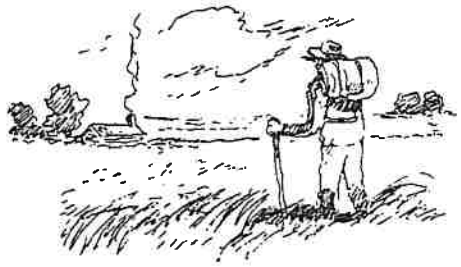
Those pioneers who came from foreign lands spent three or four months on sailing vessels, often experiencing storm, and even ship wreck. Vessels driven from their course by heavy winds,

were so delayed that food, furnished by the passengers themselves, had to be rationed or gave out completely before port was reached.

August Frederick Kleinert, in his memoirs, gives a detailed description of his passage from Germany in the year 1853. In Hamburg he laid in the following supplies for his family of seven: "five pounds of coffee, one sugar loaf of eighteen pounds, one case of red wine, two flasks of Conyec, eight measures prunes, mattresses, woolen blankets, and tin ware." Passage cost thirty-three dollars per adult, children under ten years at half price, and no charge for children less than a year old.

Illness and death came to families enroute. David Roberts' father died on shipboard and his body was brought to Milwaukee for burial. August Kleinert wrote: "We all got sick the first day. My wife could not hold up her head. The water was contrary and we were fourteen days getting through the English Channel. I got pneumonia. Our children also took sick and the youngest, little Amelie (less than a year old) died and was buried at sea. We were over two-hundred passengers. We had no potatoes the whole nine weeks. There was no doctor on board. The Captain acted as doctor. His medicine was Epsom salts . . . Altogether, on the voyage two adults died and twenty children."*

Most early settlers reached Empire Prairie from New York by way of the Erie Canal to Buffalo and thence by boat on the Great Lakes to Milwaukee or Chicago. From these cities, some, like William R. Jones, walked along Indian trails, paths about two feet wide. Jones led a cow from Milwaukee. Others traveled by train to Watertown, then by wagon or on foot to Lake Mills, to Sun Prairie and on to Leeds. Those who had the means could hire an ox team and wagon. Charles Brown went by wagon to Janesville and from there on foot to Columbia county. August Kleinert and his friends hired a wagon in Watertown so that the women and children might ride. Men walked.

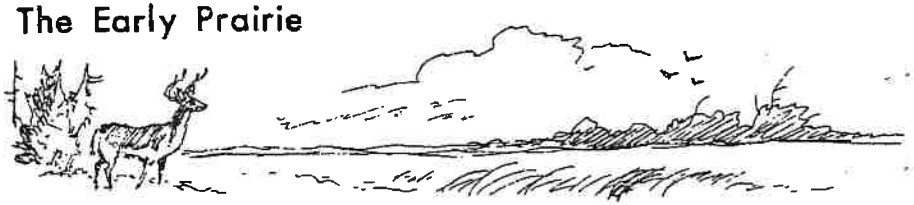


Of the trip across country Kleinert wrote: "The road was pretty rough and bumpy." And later, "We drove about ten miles and saw the prairie. I almost felt myself at home in the Fatherland** again, except that I could see no villages, and there were no church steeples, nothing except now and then a log hut."

* From the Memoirs of August Frederick Kleinert, written in German. This manuscript in the possession of Mrs. Frederick Dieruf of Madison, Wisconsin.

** Mecklenburg, Germany

The Early Prairie



They found the prairie a veritable flower garden. Wild grasses and sedges grew in profusion. In places the wild prairie had the appearance of cultivated fields of grain. Flowers bloomed yellow and purple, goldenrod, wild asters, daisies, black-eyed Susans. There were bright orange and purple milkweeds with their hairy stems. Here and there a brilliant Lobelia bloomed cardinal red, and stately prairie lilies raised orange red bells. Occasional clumps of gentian or Greek valerian showed blue.

The only forest growth was confined to the edges of the limestone hills and ridges which rose above the glacial drift. Such timber growth consisted of wild cherry, plum, oak, hickory and other hard woods. Here, in the spring, in the fringes of the woodlands, violets, adder's tongue, Dutchman's britches, Jack-in-the pulpits, anemones, trillium and wild columbine bloomed. Wild roses grew among the tall grasses. Tangled growths of hazelnut, dogwood, blackberries, and wild raspberries offered their beauty and riches to the hardy settlers. Berries were gathered by the milk pailful. Wild grapes festooned the trees and scrambled over the bushes.

Deer lived in these timberlands which edged the prairie. Rattlesnakes, foxes, rabbits, and wolves were common. (To "keep the wolf from the door" was literally a task of the early settler.) There were two kinds of wolves, the big black timber wolf and the smaller grey prairie wolf. It was practically impossible to keep small stock of any kind until the wolves had been exterminated. Hunger drove the beasts to recklessness. They came near the cabins where the settlers could easily shoot them. During the night their wild barking and yelping could be heard from all directions creating excitement among the dogs.

Panthers, lynx, polecats, wild cats, and catamounts too were troublesome.* In 1847, young John Caldwell, seventeen years of age, earned his first money by taking a spade, walking all day without dinner and digging to uncover a nest of wolf cubs. For the seven cubs he received a bounty warrant for fourteen dollars, or eleven dollars in cash. With this money he bought two yearling steer calves.**

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

** History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, Vol. I. 1914.

There was an abundance of wild fowl, partridge, quail and prairie chickens. Wild ducks and geese frequented the Goose Pond, the only sizeable body of water on the prairie.

Hunters and, in later years, men concerned with wild life management and conservation, have been much interested in Goose Pond as it is appropriately named. Writing recently one of these friends of wild fowl reported that Goose Pond had for many years been one of the best places for the observation of waterfowl during the spring migration. The pond, he says, is annually visited by classes and field-trip parties interested in these matters.*

"Every species of waterfowl, with the possible exception of a few deep divers like the old-squaw duck, can be seen each spring at Goose Pond. The pond carries from time to time small numbers of whistling swans, Canada geese, blue geese, and snow geese. On several occasions observers from the Madison Audubon Society have succeeded in identifying there the relatively rare European widgeon. Although never more than one of these widgeons is observed in this region at any one time, I think it quite likely that more records have come from this pond than from any other single place in the Midwest.

"The pond is also a marvelous place to see shore birds. In some years as drought conditions dry up the pond, shore birds become particularly numerous along the wide shorelines. Among the rare species which have been seen there are the marbled godwit and Hudsonian godwit."

In certain seasons, swarms of mosquitoes, the "gallinippers," made life almost unbearable for man and beast. Face and arms became smeared with blood and there was blood on a horse "oozing through his perforated skin. The atmosphere was literally alive with them."* Heads and faces had to be protected with gauze or mosquito-bar veils.

* From a letter by Joseph Hickey of the Department of Wildlife and Forestry, University of Wisconsin, November 1955.

Founding a Home

The first great problem was to build a temporary shelter. The covered wagon, or prairie schooner, served the purpose for those fortunate to have one. Those who came on foot had to find other shelter until a log cabin could be erected. The settler himself had to fell the logs in the woodlots adjoining the prairie and haul them to the desired site. Some pioneers, such as Ambion and Jorand Erickson, lived in a rude cellar dugout covered with straw. Others, like the Caldwells put up crude tents of poles and blankets.

The more primitive houses were mere huts, half faced, sometimes called "cat-faced" sheds or "wikiups," the Indian name for house or tent. The "claim" cabins were built of round logs, light enough for two or three men to lay. They were about fourteen feet square and roofed with bark or clapboards. The floors were earthen, or built of puncheon, logs split once, placed with the flat side up. Some had fireplaces at one end. They were made of earth or stones. Chimneys were of sod plastered with clay, or entirely of clay and sticks. The latter were called "cat-in-clay." The doors were boards put together with pegs. They were hung on hinges and held shut by a wooden pin inserted in an auger hole.*

Parlor, kitchen, bedroom store room were all in one. There was a pole ladder on which to climb to the low single room loft. This might be partitioned by hangings, quilts or blankets. It seems a mystery how the pioneer wife could stow away the number of people who came as travelers, emigrants, often with good sized families, and stayed sometimes a month at a time. Some like Clark Young put up in the cabins of other settlers until such time as they could build upon their own claims.

Since few pioneers could bring it with them, furniture had to be made by hand. Families slept on the floor until bedsteads, tables and benches could be made. This was the work for the long winter evenings and stormy weather. The furniture produced depended upon the ingenuity of the pioneer. Tables of split logs and three legged stools were easy to improvise. The door might be taken from its hinges and used as a table. After the meal, it could be rehung.

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

Beds were made by driving a forked stick into the ground diagonally to the corner of the cabin. Poles were placed on it to the openings or chinks between the logs of the walls. Boards were laid over the poles. On the boards, the housewife spread straw and a home made feather bed and lastly a white drapery or spread. Sheets or blankets might be hung over the walls for warmth as well as for decorative effect.

Settlers more gifted or trained, as for example August Kleinert, cabinet maker, traded their skilled work for help in other fields. His bedsteads were so well made that his grandchildren still slept in them many years after they had been made.

Then began the mighty task of clearing the land, preparing it for cultivation. Settlers loved to build their cabins in the shelter of the woodlands, but they liked the high prairie for plow land because it was well drained and did not need to be cleared of timber. Breaking the prairie was hard and trying work for both man and beast. The settlers' first garden was usually a small "truck patch" to supply the family with potatoes and vegetables.

Many settlers knew the work of the farm, but others had no previous experience. Clark Young was a hatter by trade. David Robertson bought and sold cheese in his native Scotland. Harvey Curtis was a saddler and upholsterer. Charles Thompson was a sailor.

A Yankee Brought First German Pioneers

It was through Thompson, that the German settlers first came to Empire Prairie. The Thompson family came from England years before the Revolutionary War. Charles Brazier Thompson was born in Maine in 1811. His father and grandfather were seamen and Charles followed in their footsteps. As mate, he sailed the seven seas, three times around the world, nine times around Cape Horn. There are many tales of his prowess as a sailor. He was a strong, broad-shouldered Yankee, six feet tall, weighing about 180 pounds. Though whiskey "was about as common as water," Charles was a teetotaler.*

At the age of thirty-five, while crossing the Atlantic from Hamburg to New Orleans, Charles met three young German girls who were on their way to Texas. One of these was Wilhelmine Lubiens, eldest daughter of Frederick George Lubiens. As the voyage progressed, so did the friendship. Within a few weeks after landing in New Orleans, the German girl and Thompson were married by a German-English divine. Charles took his bride to Boston to stay with his sisters while he made one more voyage. The sisters, at first, looked askance at the young girl whose language they did not understand, but Wilhelmine was an apt pupil and mutual understanding and love grew between the women. Wilhelmine soon learned to speak English fluently, but Charles never mastered the German language.

* From the Memoirs of the Thompson Family written by Lewis W. Thompson.

After his last voyage, the young couple came to Wisconsin. Charles purchased forty acres in Leeds township, part timber and part marsh, and built a log cabin with an open fireplace. A year later, 1847, Charles took up a claim on the open prairie with timber only eighty rods away. He built another and larger log house. He planted one-hundred and fifty apple trees, seventy-five plum trees, some locust trees and a windbreak of Lombardy poplars.

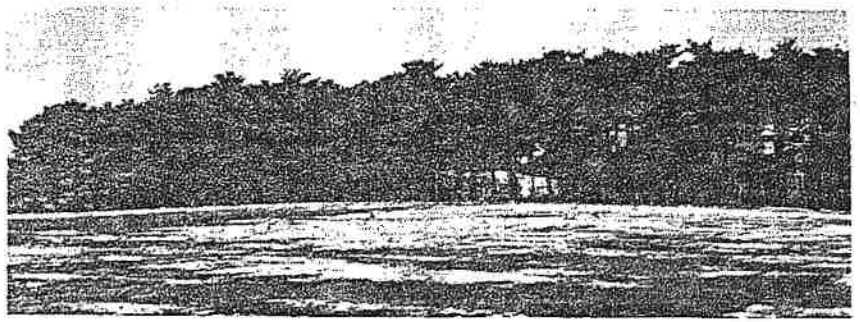
Charles wrote to his father-in-law in Germany telling him of the rich land. He said "it is a good place to bring up a family." This was of interest to Frederick Lubiens because he had eleven children. As a younger son, the German laws of primogeniture prevented him from inheriting the estate of his father, a well known physician and surgeon.* So Frederick became a baker's apprentice and eventually owned his own bakery in Pattensen, Hannover, Germany.

On receipt of Thompson's letter, Frederick turned this business over to his oldest son and, with his wife and nine children ranging in age from three to eighteen years, sailed for America. In 1849, they arrived in Columbus. By chance, Charles heard that a German family had arrived. He rode over to see them. Imagine his surprise to find his wife's family!

Frederick Lubiens filed claim to 160 acres of land adjoining that of Charles Thompson. For it he paid $200 on long time notes at seven per cent. The family moved into a deserted log cabin which had a trap door in front of the main entrance, probably built as protection against night raids by marauding Indians.

The cabin furnished close quarters for the large family. August Kleinert, cabinet maker by trade, helped out. He wrote in his memoirs: "My old friend Lubiens had watched my house building and since he was crowded with his family and his son Heinrich had started an addition to his house, he asked me to help finish his building. In the old country I had made windows and doors, but I would not have been allowed to build a house." In later years Frederick Lubiens built a house, the first frame house

* Dr. Lubiens carried on considerable medical research. His notes and papers later came into the possession of Robert Koch, famous bacteriologist and physician.



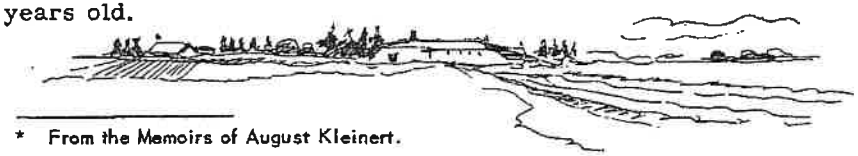
Early settlers upon the prairie planted spruce windbreaks to cut the force of winds which swept across the open country. Remnants of many of these windbreaks still stand bearing witness to the zeal and wisdom of the pioneers who settled these prairie lands.

on the prairie. He planted rows of white pine trees as windbreak. (Twenty-five years later in 1875, these same trees had trunks twelve inches in diameter.) As the years passed many settlers planted windbreaks on the north and west sides of their farmyards. Remnants of many of these windbreaks may still be found on farms in Leeds and Arlington townships.

The large family, six girls and three boys, made the Lubiens' home a center for the social activities of the community. It was also a rallying place for the Germans who came to the Empire Prairie. There was romance a plenty. A land map dated 1861 shows the names of settlers: Eduard Koch, in Arlington township; and in Leeds township, L. Bistrup, H. Selle, W. Kleinert, and Anton Engel, all of whom married Lubiens' daughters, and Quackenbush, whose daughter Arvilla married a Lubiens' son.

L. Bistrup followed the Lubiens family to Leeds. He was at the time thirty-eight years of age, a Danish mariner, chief chef on the boat on which the Lubiens family came to America. On the voyage he met Doretha Lubiens, then eighteen years of age. They were married in Leeds. Bistrup was a "loveable and obliging man. He lived to be only fifty-three years old, but he was a nobleman."*

Before 1875, all except two of the Lubiens' children had moved to Iowa, and a second group of German settlers had arrived. Frederick Lubiens and his wife then made their home with their youngest daughter Augusta, wife of Anton Engel. For many years they had their own little home at the end of the garden adjoining the old Empire Prairie store. Frederick lived to be ninety-nine years old.



* From the Memoirs of August Kleinert.

Two Decades of Statehood

In 1848, Wisconsin became a state.

The first decade of statehood brought many new settlers to the Empire Prairie and its neighboring townships. William Plenty arrived from England in 1856. Hugh Hall (1849) came from Vermont, and Clark Hazard (1849), Abial Greene, Alonzo Jones from New York. B. Bergum (1850), Baard Johnson and Peter Hellie (1857) arrived from Norway. The Germans who came during this decade were Frederick Lubiens (1849); August Kleinert and his sons William and Adolph; William Wernick, Heilfritz, Pribbenow, and Anton Engel in 1853; Martin and Christian Schmidt (1854); the Albrecht family, John Bohling, Charles Hahn, August Gundlach (1856); and Frederick Tempelman (1857). The Jonas brothers and their sister came to stay with their brother-in-law, August Kleinert, but they were tailors and soon found employment in Madison where in later years their store was well-known.

As vanguard of the Scotch settlers were Thomas and Archibald Sanderson (1849). John Caldwell (1850) followed his relatives, the James Wilsons and Thomas Robertsons. George McMillan came in 1851 and Allan Bogue and William Caldow in 1856.

In 1846, the Territorial Legislature had separated Columbia county from Portage county and organized it as a separate entity. Its boundaries were those of the present except for the northwest portion lying between the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers. The township lines differed from those of today. It was not until nine years later (1855) that the Town of Kossuth (except for sections 6, 7, 18, 19, 30, and 31) was organized and became the Town of Arlington.

Fred Lubiens lived many of his 99 years on the prairie. Many natives of Germany followed him to this fertile area.

Anton Engel in 1857 built the Empire Prairie Store, a trading center for farmers of the area.

Thomas Sanderson owned and operated one of the farms that the University is now devoting to research.

The Town of Leeds was organized in 1850 and attained its present area in 1855.*

The second decade of statehood brought more settlers and much activity on the Empire Prairie. Its close brought pioneering activity to an end. During these years Thomas and William Stevenson came from Scotland (1860). Robert Caldwell, brother of John, and James Binnie arrived in 1861. William Forrest came two years later (1863). From England came Thomas Sanderson, brother of Robert, and James Woodford. George Chipman came from Vermont, and Frank Lee Nelson came from New York in 1865. Among the Germans who came to settle in Leeds township during these years were Henry Kroncke (1860), Henry Lanzendorf (1864), Frederick Rennebohm (1859), John Bauers (1866), H. Brand, M. Winrich, M. Manthe, H. Hackbart. Descendents of a number of these pioneers still live in Leeds township today.

It is always interesting to learn why people came to America, to Wisconsin, to the Empire Prairie. What was it they sought? What was the final circumstance which sent them from their well-known, established homes to dangers and uncertainties in an unknown land? One unusual story is that of the fifty unemployed potters of Staffordshire, England.

Members of the Potters' Joint Stock Emigration Society and Savings Fund paid one pound sterling per week for each share of stock. Their goal was to establish a permanent colony in America. Hamlet Copeland, John Sawyer and James Hammond were commissioned to find a suitable site for this settlement having sandy soil, water and timber. They selected 1,640 acres in the Town of Scott in northern Columbia county. The land was surveyed into twenty acre plots, each to have its own house. Easter week 1847, fifty members chosen by ballot left England with their families, some one hundred and thirty-four souls.

Arriving in Scott township, they found only four of the houses begun. Undaunted, the men went to work to build cabins. The settlement was called Pottersville. Provisions were hard to get, even for money. Bread and potatoes were scarce. Butter was unknown. The sad plight of the settlers was forwarded to England in discouraging reports. Contributions failed. Then the settlement was opened to members of other trade guilds.

Among the settlers were John Sawyer and his sister Harriet, and Richard Hopkins whose parents belonged to the Glass Blowers' Guild. When Richard was twenty-six years old, he and Harriet Sawyer married. Richard's sister Mary Ann and her husband William Deakin lived on the Empire Prairie. He had seen the rich prairie land, and since his sister Mary Ann wanted to be nearer her parents in Pottersville, Richard bought from her the

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, Vol. I, 1914.

farm in section thirty-two, town of Leeds in November, 1866, and established a home on the land which is still owned and operated by his descendents.*

Changes Come to the Prairie

Within the period of twenty years, 1848-1868, the Empire Prairie changed from the early pioneer homestead to a settled agricultural community. Leeds became one of the important rural townships, chief of the forage towns. The first settlers "broke the land with wooden plows, sowed their little crops of grain by hand, harvested it with cradle and scythe, and threshed it with a flail on a wooden floor."**

Theodore Herfurth of Madison sold the wooden plows which had to be made to order. To break the virgin and stubborn soil the plows had to be strong and tough.

Before the wooden floors were used, wheat was threshed on the ground. First a space was cleared and cleaned. If the soil was dry it was wet and beaten to make it more compact. Then the sheaves of wheat were unbound and spread in a circle with the heads uppermost. Room was left in the center for a person to stand. It was his job to turn and stir the straw in the process of threshing. Then horses or oxen were kept moving around in a circle over the grain until the wheat was well trodden out.

After several "floorings" or layers were threshed, the straw was carefully raked off and the wheat shoveled into a heap to be cleaned. This was done by waving a sheet back and forth as the grain was dropped in front of it to blow the chaff from the wheat. A stiff autumn breeze simplified this task. Thus dirt was often present in the wheat and sometimes made the bread dark in color.

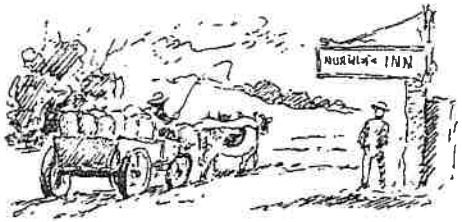
Then the grain had to be ground into flour. Sometimes the farmer's wife ground it in her coffee mill and baked griddle cakes of the coarse flour. For the most part the family flour was ground at the grist mill -- Loomis, Token Creek or Poynette -- about four times per year. Due to almost total absence of roads and bridges and the use of ox teams these were often long and weari-

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1914.

** From a letter written by Jennie Roberts Chipman dated July 28, 1955.

some trips. During the late summer weather the creeks and sloughs were dried up, but in spring when winter broke up, there were floods which made the journey troublesome and often dangerous.

To get stuck in a slough delayed the settler for hours. At the mill he had to wait his turn, at times as long as a week. This delay made the trip expensive, for he had to have food and furnish his team with fodder. Then too, the summer trips to the mill took the farmer from his work, sometimes for two or three weeks. At the mill he had to bolt (sift the bran from the inside of the kernel) his own flour, for in those days the bolting machine was not attached to the other machinery.*



Grain was taken by oxen to Milwaukee where wheat sold for forty-five to fifty cents per bushel. It was a long tedious journey, days going, days returning. Old time inns were crowded. One frequently had to sleep on the floor or in the stable. From such a journey one might return with but few groceries and perhaps a pair of boots as reward for the effort required to raise, harvest and market the crop.

There were instances where the expense of the journey made the actual cost of the grain more than the farmer got from it, and he had to borrow money to make his trip home. When the railroad reached Watertown, a plank road was built so that settlers could more easily reach the market, and later still, long strings of teams waited their turn at the elevator in Sun Prairie.

Though the homes were log cabins, many were now enlarged and made more comfortable and livable. One cabin on the forty acres owned by Mr. Heilpritz was prominent because it was roofed with white cotton. Later several cabins were thatched with linen as was the custom in some parts of Germany. If the cabin was on the prairie one frequently had to go as far as three miles to get fuel and often quite a distance to a spring for drinking water. Homes were lit by candles which the farmer's wife made from tallow in tin forms or molds.

Settlers kept one or two cows. In 1854, the cows sold for twenty-five to thirty dollars. Mr. Heilpritz bought one near Token Creek. He tied a rope around its horns to lead it home. The cow, unaccustomed to this treatment, ran away and could not be found. Poor Mr. Heilpritz had to return on foot three days later to get his cow.

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

"Milk was strained through a cloth into earthenware dishes or tin pans and put away in the coolest spot for the cream to rise. They skimmed it with a wooden skimmer. When they had the right amount of cream it was put into a wooden dasher churn and churned by hand. Sometimes this was a long, tedious job."* The butter was shaped into rolls, wrapped in a cloth, or put into little wooden tubs furnished by the local merchants or by the commission merchants who bought it and shipped it to Chicago. Butter was used as a medium of exchange for groceries or drygoods in the nearest stores.

"The settlers raised most of their own food, baked their own bread from flour ground at the grist mill in Poynette, Loomis or Token Creek. They needed little except sugar, salt, coffee. Arbuckle's coffee sold for ten cents per pound."** Sugar was used very sparingly. Mrs. Lubiens, for example, always kept her sugar supply safely locked away in a trunk.

In the nineties, a creamery, the Empire Creamery, managed by B. J. Dodge, was built. The building still stands today, but the creamery is no longer operated.

The Prairie Fires Often Occurred Annually

A very real menace which at times became a serious danger to the settlers was the prairie fire. Old timers have reported that such fires often occurred annually. Hugh Jamieson, who came to Poynette in 1849, gives an excellent description of prairie fires in his memoirs. "Early in the spring of this year (1851) I witnessed some of the largest prairie fires I have ever seen. The greater portion of the prairie south of where I lived (and which, if I remember right, was at that time known as the Town of Kossuth) was burned over and as there was no stock kept on this prairie at this time and the land being very rich, the grass grew very rank and heavy, and when dry in the spring, it required but the touch of a lighted match, or in some instances the burning ashes from a smoker's pipe to ignite it.

"Sometimes fires were set purposely that the young fresh grass might spring up earlier than it would if the old dry grass was left to cover the ground and prevent it from thawing out as the old grass would do if not burned off. When these fires were set purposely, it was generally done by some of the few people who at that time lived along the margin of the prairie or in the timber near it so that what few cattle they did have might find green grass as early in the spring as possible. And in many cases fires were set where people intended breaking up the land for the purpose of

* From a letter written by Jennie Roberts Chipman dated July 28, 1955.
** From a letter written by Walter Hopkins dated July 1955.

getting rid of the grass which, if not burned, was quite a serious impediment to the plough. And in fact, scarcely any land at that time on that prairie could be broken up without first burning it over.

"It was a tiresome journey when performed on foot to travel over this prairie in those days. Not even a drop of water was to be found except at a small pond called the Goose Pond near the center or about half the distance across, and as this water was surface or seep water, it was unfit to use only by cattle or horses. A fire on this prairie, however, at that time was one of the most magnificent sights I ever witnessed.

"I remember crossing it one time after night fall when a terrible fire was burning on both sides of the road. The fire seemed to have been set by some one or more persons and was perhaps upward of a mile in length. It had been carried east and west while the road ran north and south. The night was calm and still and the fire burned each way from where it seemed to have been set . . . Such fires, however, were quite dangerous and sometimes very injurious, both to those by whom they had been set and others who happened to live near them when they happened to get beyond their control, which frequently occurred.

"Sometimes if the wind began to blow a little, these fires would bound over the ground at a furious rate, and would sweep everything that stood in their way, houses, stacks of hay and grain, and even livestock were often consumed by them. The only safe way to save property was to plow furrows some distance apart around it and burn the grass between. If this could be done before the fire reached the property, it could most generally be saved."*

For many the open prairie was bleak and lonely. The first settlers clung to the wooded fringes and from these safe and sheltered vantage points reached out into the prairie itself.

As the cradle and the scythe gave way to the reaper, the binder and flail threshing to the horse power and then the steam engine, the dasher churn to the barrel churn, so changes came in other ways also.

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1914.

Two Main Highways Crossed the Prairie

Before 1838 no highways crossed the "twenty mile prairie." By 1868, two highways intersected it, the old Northwest highway and the Madison Portage highway now known as Highway 51. The latter was traveled by the stage coach which always stopped at Eagle Point near the Columbia and Dane county border where Jesse W. Helden owned and operated an inn. He was a Pennsylvanian who had fought in the Blackhawk War and in 1847 bought this land from William Lawrence.

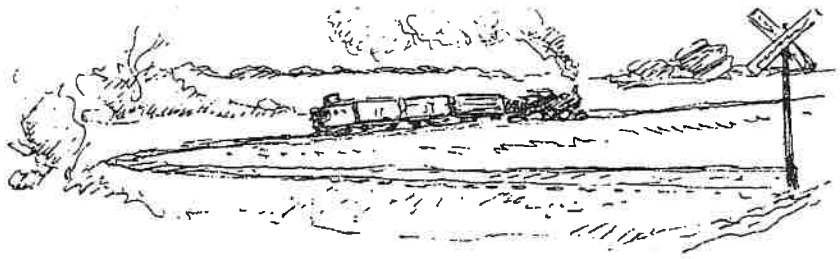
The stage coach also stopped at the Empire Prairie store in South Leeds. The roads were laid out along section lines. They were dirt roads, muddy in spring, dusty in summer, frozen and rough in fall and winter. With snow there was sleighing. For the most part the east-west roads were impassable. Farmers cared for the roads and so worked off their road and poll taxes. A road overseer supervised the work.

With the coming of modern conveyances, the automobile, the roads too had to be modernized. Many days of consultation and work were necessary to plan these highways. Farmers, among them William Chipman, and the Kleinert brothers, put their teams and plows to work to help grade and make new roads. Mr. Chipman worked with the State Highway Commission to locate Highway 51 through Leeds. One mile of pavement was laid experimentally to test the cost and durability of the material before the whole highway was finally built.

Railroads Missed Empire Prairie

Though the early settler hoped and expected that the railroad would someday pass through Leeds, no depot was ever located on the Empire Prairie. The Milwaukee and Watertown Company chartered in 1851, reached Watertown in 1856. It was then consolidated with the La Crosse and Milwaukee Road. Travel from the prairie then was chiefly via Watertown to Milwaukee.

In the spring of 1856, Congress made a grant of land to the State of Wisconsin to aid in building a railroad from Madison or Columbus via Portage City to the St. Croix river in northwestern Wisconsin. In 1861, the Legislature chartered the Sugar River Valley Railroad Company authorizing it to build a road from Madison to Portage City and from Columbus to Portage City. The rights to the land grant Act of 1856 of the La Crosse Milwaukee



Company were annulled and repealed. The latter had graded about twenty miles of track before its right was annulled.

In 1870, the Madison and Portage Railroad Company was organized and in 1871, the completed Madison and Portage City Railroad was leased to the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad Company which still operates this division for freight service. Citizens of Empire Prairie had to go to Arlington, Morrisonville, DeForest or Columbus to reach the railroad, and freight had to be hauled by teams to their stores and their homes on the prairie. Yet even this was a great step forward in the mode of travel.

H. D. Bath wrote in 1880 in an article entitled "Travel Then and Now" of a trip to Milwaukee: "The train, the colossal living monster, glaring with accentuated life, as in passing its hot breath steams into his (the traveler's) face. Amid the clanging of the warning bell, the shrieking of the whistle, the grinding of the brakes, the multiplied rattle of wheels, the voices of the conductor, baggage man and brakeman, and the gradual annihilation of trunks, words of goodbye, the thud of the fuel falling into the tender to replenish the red-hot man of the engine, he takes his seat in the cushioned car and is soon wrapped in comfortable unconsciousness, and is passively gliding, at the rate of twenty-five miles per hour toward the coming morning and his place of destination. . . .

"Our traveler arrives in Milwaukee just as the first murmur of business has begun to rise from the busy metropolis. He breakfasts liberally and has a full half day to attend to business before the next return train, taking which, he is home again the same day at 5 o'clock P. M.

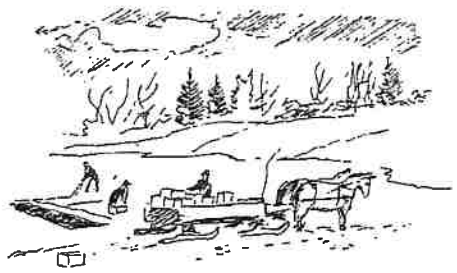
"This is the manner in which people in Columbus now reach the chief city of the state; but some of our residents remember when travel was a thing far different. It was quite another affair in 1844, when a visit to the county seat, then at Plover, was a horseback pilgrimage of many days duration, on which the solitary traveler guided his course through the wilderness 'by blaze'."*

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

Empire Prairie House

In the early days, at the intersection of the two highways in Leeds township, on the southwest corner of section twenty-one, stood an inn and tavern. The land map of 1861 gives the name of the owner as Mr. Kropp. Later it was owned and operated by Heinrich Deike who died in 1878. Frederick Schenk, a young German from Madison, then bought and managed the Empire Prairie House.

He was a tall, cheerful man, very musical. He played violin and cornet. During his ownership the building was enlarged and a dance hall was built. Mr. Schenk would send out printed invitations to dances and picnics and people came from far and wide. Sometimes Lueder's band came from Madison to play for both picnic and dance.



Mr. Schenk also built an ice house and during the winter, workers from the neighborhood or even from Madison cut ice at Token Creek, and later from one of the two mill ponds at Poynette, and hauled it to the ice house where they packed it in straw and sawdust for summer's use.

Travelers frequented the inn and in early days when the covered wagons stopped, Mrs. Schenk allowed the emigrants, who had their own food supplies, to prepare their meals on her kitchen stove. In wheat harvest time, workers came on foot from Reedsburg and Loganville areas and stayed at the inn while they were working in the fields.

During the seventies and eighties, hunters from Madison, the Fauerbach brothers, the Groves brothers, Adolph Menges, John Stock, Hannibal Lacher and others came to Leeds to shoot prairie chickens and other wild fowl. Anton Engel and Frederick Schenk often joined them in the hunt and they spent the night at the Empire Prairie House.

In 1893, the inn was sold to Hugo Baerwolf. During his proprietorship the building burned down. Later Louis Haupt bought the corner and built a combination dwelling and tavern on it. The tavern discontinued operation in 1913 or 1914.

Across the road from the Empire Prairie House was a blacksmith shop owned in the early days by H. H. Frisch. Today a garage occupies the corner.

Empire Prairie Store

In 1853, Anton Engel, born in the Province of Hannover, Germany, came to Leeds. He had spent three years in Buffalo, New York,

where he gained experience in American business methods. He was twenty-five years of age, well educated, spoke German and English. He had also had the opportunity to visit his uncle, Carl Engel, a well-known musician in London. Anton had completed his military training in Germany and had studied merchandising in all its branches from soap making to accounting. In 1857, he built the Empire Prairie Store on the northeast corner of section twenty-nine, Leeds township.

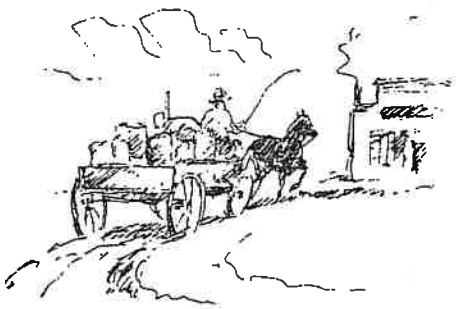
It was a two story frame building with an English basement. During the first years, the family lived in this basement, two living rooms, a kitchen and a store room with a cellar below the kitchen in which butter and milk were kept in cold storage. In 1886, Mr. Engel built a thirteen room house across from the store. This building still stands.

The store was the forerunner of the modern department store. The first postmaster on the prairie was Mr. Packard in 1848-49. In South Leeds the first post office was opened in 1854 with William P. Bradley as postmaster. He was followed by George Durkee, and then Anton Engel. Thus on the first floor of the store, to the left, was the post office. Mail was brought in by stage coach from Madison or Milwaukee.

After the coming of the railroad, mail was brought from Morrisonville in Dane county. The mail was brought on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. There was no free rural delivery until

Anton Engel built this store in 1857. He started a cross roads enterprise which has successfully resisted rural and urban competition. Although the building has been rebuilt and the business has changed hands, it remains to this day a community trading post of importance.

years later. All freight for the store was hauled from this depot. Mr. Engel kept a black horse named Tuckeho and a wagon for this purpose.



Farmers came to the store to get their mail and to exchange eggs, butter, dressed poultry (including turkeys), hides and rags, which were shipped to Chicago or Milwaukee, for necessary wares. They remained around the big stove to discuss the weather, neighborhood news, political affairs, even literature.

A small room to the left was a library. Toward the right was a room which contained hardware supplies, iron boot jacks, binder twine, varnishes, paints, handles and hinges for coffins which were made to order by a carpenter. There was a room for the display of wall paper, of boots and shoes and men's wearing apparel.

The pharmacy held a large stock of patent medicines: Wilson's Headache Cure and Corn Remover, at twenty-five cents per bottle; Kickapoo Indian remedies; a Vermifuge; Hamburg Brust Thee used to treat colds and coughs; Pain Killer; Downing's remedies, (made in Madison, Wisconsin); Ayer's or Hood's Sarsaparilla; Hoffman's Anodyne (for the ladies who swooned easily); and Hoyt's German Cologne (made in Lowell, Massachusetts).

Shelves in the store were stocked with yard goods (Henrietta cloth, cashmere cloth, poplin, turkey red prints), notions, glassware, crockery, china, lamps and lampshades, Rising Sun Stove Polish, sewing machines, horehound drops, rock candy and old-fashioned chocolate drops. Under the shelves, on the floor, were barrels of syrup, molasses, sugar, crackers and kerosene. There were one pound cans of Russian caviar and lobster and oysters in flat oblong tins.

On the second floor of the store building, were four bedrooms occupied by the family and a room for storage of ladies' bustles, muffs, trimmed hats, skirts and other feminine wearing apparel.

There were outbuildings: a barn, a granary, a storehouse, a well house, soap house, smoke house and summer bath house. On the roof of the bath house was a tub which could be filled with water. This would be warmed by the sun. To have a shower, one went into the house, and pulled the plug in the ceiling.

The soap house was near the granary. Green, white and brown toilet soap and laundry soap made there were advertised as "genuine Custom Made Soap, Centennial Brand made by Anton

Engel. Among his soap recipes is one made by the "fireless cold method" from lye, lime, tallow, palm oil, coconut oil and salt. It was called "Grained Soap." As much as five hundred pounds of soap were made at one time.

In a letter dated July, 1955, Walter Hopkins recalls from his childhood, Anton Engel, "a genial kindly spirit and good businessman. . . Be times when a boy or girl entered the store, the kindly keeper would hold up one finger and if the child did the same the reward was a stick of candy, taken from a glass jar from a shelf near the mail boxes."

Anton Engel died in 1890. For a short time his sons, Carl and Oscar, assisted by the very capable clerk, John Borreson, ran the store. In 1900, it was sold to George Schernecker. Later Sjur Reque bought it, and in 1910, it was purchased by Albert Wernick. On August 6, 1941, the old store was entirely destroyed by fire. A completely modern store and dwelling was built on the same corner by Bernard Wernick, a son of Albert who had died in 1940. This store serves the community in modern times as fully as did the Empire Prairie Store of olden times.

Dieruf's Store

William Dieruf was a capable young man employed by Charlie Walzinger, then the well-known confectioner of Madison. Mr. Dieruf married the daughter of Adolph Kleinert who gave the young couple an acre of ground on the corner in North Leeds on which to build a store. The North Leeds post office was established in 1858 with Humphrey McKenney as the first postmaster. In 1868 he was succeeded by William Dieruf.

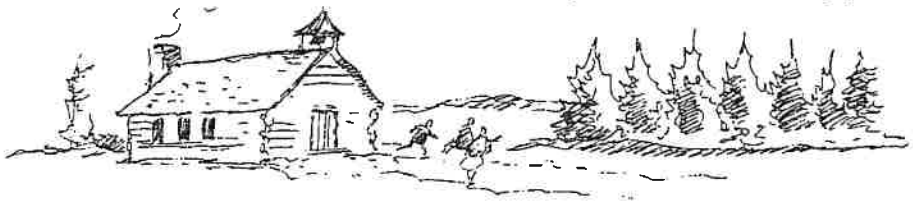
Mr. Dieruf recalls that "eggs were packed in barrels with straw or grain. Often the 'hen fruit' was not as fresh as it should be and when dug out of the grain, explosions occurred and the odor was like a stench bomb. There were no paper sacks in those days. They used brown or straw paper to wrap everything. Quite a job to make a neat package of such things as tea, rice, coffee, etc."*

Mrs. Dieruf worked in the store with her husband. She was a milliner and did a lot of knitting and crocheting which was put into stock and was sold.

Schools of the Empire Prairie

As always in the varied history of American colonization, some of the earliest activities revolved around the building of churches and schools. In 1848, Charles B. Thompson circulated a petition among the settlers for the donation of one log and one day's work,

* From reminiscences written by Mr. Dieruf in the possession of Mrs. F. Dieruf of Madison



or two logs and two days' work, etc., to build a log school house on the corner of the NW 1/4 of SW 1/4 of section fourteen.

In 1850, the log school house was built, but unfortunately, it burned to the ground the following winter. A stone building was then erected and served until 1878, when a good frame house was built. Until recently the families of Leeds township have largely been served by five schools. District Number Eight, located a mile south of South Leeds, North Leeds, Leeds Center, Keyser, and the Langlade School in the northeast corner of the township. At the present time (1955) a joint district including the North Leeds, Leeds Center and Langlade school is being created and a new school building is being erected.

The teachers of the schools on the Empire Prairie were often the children of pioneers of the neighborhood. Harriet Greene taught the first summer school. There were also Martha Taylor, who married George Chipman, and her sister Amanda who later became the wife of Mr. Kinney, a Baptist minister of North Leeds. There were Lucy Thomas, daughter of Sam Thomas, Nellie Stevenson, William C. Bonstil, J. D. Whitelaw and his sister Susan, Esther Bogue, Saidie Sanderson, Mike Miles, Frances and Jemima Waldref. Perhaps tucked away in an old Bible, or among letters and papers, one may still find beautiful reward of merit cards illustrated with flowers, birds, beasts, or children with the signature of some of these teachers. The cards were given to the children on the last day of school.

Salaries of teachers were, by our modern standards, very low. The teacher usually boarded around with the parents of the children. In 1849, a teacher's average salary was eleven dollars and seventy-five cents a month for male teachers and five dollars and thirty-nine cents for women teachers. The first State Teachers' Institute held in 1878 did much to improve conditions for teachers and salaries at that time were from fifteen to twenty dollars per month.

For most children of the prairie formal education was at an end with the completion of the district school work. A few went on to high schools at Poynette, DeForest or even Madison. Until 1900 it was the exception rather than the rule.

Of schools on the prairie Walter Hopkins has written as follows: "In district No. 8, as in the others, the school year was

fall and continued longer in the spring. For the winter term there was an influx of 'big boys' who came only for the winter months. Some of them came to study and learn, and some to make trouble for the teacher. Punishments meted out were archaic and ludicrous, but not of lasting injury.

"In the old district school the foundation of a good education was laid. The three R's were mastered. Geography, history and grammar were stressed. Every Friday afternoon was devoted either to a 'spell down' or to 'reciting pieces' which had been learned. Thus were boys and girls made good spellers and started life with some knowledge of poetry.

"Annually a spelling and 'ciphering' match was held between the four schools. District No. 8 always carried off the honors in spelling, and Leeds Center won in arithmetic, though they had to be good to do it."*

The school was a center for community social life. On March 6, 1888, for example, Mrs. Anton Engel wrote to her son who was at school in Madison: "Tomorrow there will be a grand exhibition at South Leeds School house. Entree 15¢ . . . with musical arrangements."

Books were scarce. Reading was, for the most part, limited to the Bible and newspapers: the Fox and Wisconsin River Times (1850), the Wisconsin State Register and the Columbus Reporter (1853), and the Badger State (1855). The first German newspapers of the region were the Columbia County Wecker (1874) and the Rundschau (1886). A few settlers subscribed to Chicago or Milwaukee papers. The farmers received among others, the Drover's Journal, Rams Horn, The Advance and the Youth's Companion.

Anton Engel of the Empire Prairie Store had a considerable library including many volumes of scientific books, the complete works of William Shakespeare in English, one of the first sets of the works of Charles Dickens, a fifty-five volume set of the last personally edited edition of the complete works of the German poet, Goethe, the works of Jean Paul Richter, a copy of the complete works of Josephus and others.

In his will Engel left a sum of money to District Number 8 School. The Wisconsin Journal of Education dated November, 1891, gave the following item: "Anton Engel, a farmer at Leeds, in Columbia County, left by his will one hundred dollars to be expended in purchasing a library for District No. 8 in the county.

"The example is noteworthy and will result in giving this district an excellent start in building up a library."

* From a letter written by Walter Hopkins dated July 1955.

The church was also a great force in the life and history of the people of the Empire Prairie. The first preaching on the prairie was in Arlington township when the Reverend Henry Maynard of Lodi preached during the summer of 1845 in the house of Clark Young.

The first Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran congregation was organized in March, 1847, by the Reverend I. W. C. Dietrickson. The first services were held in the house of Sjur Reque in Otsego township. Members came from Leeds, Hampden, Otsego, Lowville, Arlington and De Korra. The church was later divided into the Spring and Bonnet Prairie congregations, with another group at Norway Grove in Dane county.* The large church in the town of Leeds was built in the extreme southeast border near the Dane county line. It was often called the Haage church.

In 1853, the Germans living in Leeds township established the German Evangelical Lutheran Church. The first building on the old Northwest Highway was almost completed when on June 26, 1875, a tornado tore down most of the structure. With true pioneer spirit, the new church was built right on the foundation of the first. In 1940, on Easter Day this frame building was burned down. A new brick church was built in 1940 and a parsonage was completed in 1954. The early church was served by pastors Braun, Duburg and Liefeld from Columbus. The first resident pastor was the Reverend S. Opitz called in 1867. Of this church Walter Hopkins writes: "It was a rallying center for all of the Germans of the Empire Prairie. Only the German language was spoken and the religious thinking of the Fatherland was taught. Customs and usages of the old country were encouraged and fostered both in the church and in the adjoining parochial school. Eventually, however, this church and its people became more and more Americanized. The influence for good is still felt in this part of Leeds township."**

Mrs. Jennie Roberts Chipman recalls that "the church had a steeple and belfry with a nice sounding bell. Every Saturday evening at sundown the bell was tolled to remind the people to be ready for services the next day. The tolling of the bell could be heard for miles around for years, until the church was destroyed by fire."***

* The Spring Prairie Lutheran Church was destroyed by fire March 27, 1956.

** From a letter written by Walter Hopkins dated July 1955.

*** In a letter written by Mrs. Jennie Roberts Chipman and Walter Hopkins dated July 1955.

The old parochial school was moved and remodeled. It has become the foundation framework for a modern home now situated south of Morrisonville.

The Congregational Church was established on the open prairie on January 20, 1862. It began as a Sunday school which met in the first Leeds Center School house and later in the South Leeds School. The Sandersons, Roberts, Morrisons, Hopkins, Woodfords, Wylies and Stevensons were active in building the church on a parcel of land donated by Francis Woodford. It was a sister church of the Windsor congregation, the same pastor serving both. Mr. Hopkins writes concerning it: "It never was regarded as a strong church, but it stood as a beacon light, a force of righteousness for miles around."*

The Presbyterian Church was formed in 1854 when the Reverend T. Lewis of Lodi preached in the house of A. P. Smith. John Caldwell (who married Elizabeth Caldow and lived on the prairie in Arlington township) was reared in the strict observance of Presbyterian doctrines and was one of the organizers and builders of the Presbyterian Church in the village of Arlington.

Health of the People Generally Good

Upon the whole, the health of the people on the Empire Prairie was good, in the light of the early days. The climate, dry and invigorating, was especially conducive to good health. Indeed, emigrants like August Kleinert spent as much as sixty-three days of travel with resultant illnesses, chiefly respiratory ailments, were told that "with care, some wine (two glasses daily), the boy will recover when he reaches the prairie."**

The earliest reports on diseases of the region come from Fort Winnebago in 1838. The records show that the white people of the portage area suffered chiefly from respiratory and digestive diseases. Causes given were "bad bread, and bad whiskey, salt meat, and poor dietary table gave rise to a condition sometimes called 'land scurvy.'"*** As living conditions improved so did health and the early large mortality rate among children gradually decreased.

The health of the prairie people was watched over by a number of men whose devotion to their work, and whose calls led them to the homes of the ill through all kinds of weather and all conditions of roads. There were Dr. Squires in Leeds Center, and Dr. Strong and Dr. Joseph Faerber who lived on the prairie. The last was a Viennese doctor, formerly a surgeon of the Dutch Navy.

Dr. Charles E. Woodford also lived on the prairie. He was a homeopathist. He gave his patients tiny, white, sweet tasting "pills," thus treating the disease by giving minute doses of a drug which would produce in a healthy person symptoms similar to those of the disease. Dr. Bell from Token Creek, Dr. Reagles from Arlington, Dr. Russell and Dr. Binnie of Poynette also served people on the prairie.

* From a letter written by Walter Hopkins dated July 1955.

** Mr. August Kleinert in his Memoirs of his early days tells how the Viennese doctor who examined the emigrants on shipboard in New York wanted him to take his sick children to a hospital in New York. When he refused to do this, the doctor told him that his oldest son would recover if he reached the prairie. One daughter died within a few days, in New York City.

*** History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

Cemeteries on the Prairie

Before we leave the early history of the first days on the prairie, we must look at the three cemeteries where have come to rest most of the pioneers whose names we have told.

The cemetery at Leeds Center is a beautiful place, its tall, stately arbor vitae trees and quiet peace, a fitting resting place for those who sought, loved and lived on the Empire Prairie. There we read family names: Roberts, Woodford, Chipman, Morrison, Chilson, Hazard, Scott, Ives, Oathoudt, Waterhouse, Skutley, Wood, Severson, Russell. Henze. On this cemetery stands a monment to the eleven boys of the Empire Prairie who died in the Civil War.

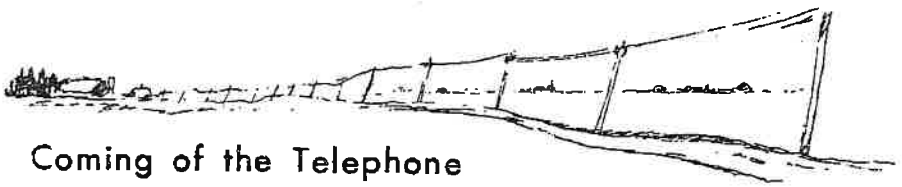
The largest of the three cemeteries is in North Leeds, the Greenwood Cemetery. Here lie many of the German settlers as well as some of the earliest English-American pioneers. In close proximity are the graves of many whose close relatives still live on the prairie. We find such names as Tempelmann, Kampen, Kleinert, Junge, Laun, Lubiens, Koch, Whiteman, Selle, Engel, Thompson, Bahr, Krier, Peeper, Lanzendorf, Klenow, Schultz, Steltner, Habel, Heisig, Winrich, Deiter, Priem, Wernick, Dieruf, Brand, Albrecht and Rennebohm.

A study of the dates and epitaphs on the stones set in their memory yields many an interesting connection. One for example, is the story of one family. Here lie Henry and Elizabeth Albrecht (who came from Pattensen, Germany in 1856) whose daughter, Johanna, married Brand. Johanna's daughter Julia Brand married William Rennebohm, whose son Oscar was born on one of the prairie farms and became one of Wisconsin's outstanding governors.

The third cemetery lies on the Lodi-Columbus Road. A plot of land was given to the German Evangelical Lutheran congregation by one of the early settlers, Martin Schmidt. As was the German custom, burials were made in rows in order of death, adults in one row, children in another section. Later additional land was purchased from the Manthes and in the new portion family lots were sold. The names found on the tombstones in this cemetery are German: Schmidt, Reddeman, Bucholz, Stiemke, Kurraser, Manthe, Pribbenow, Haupt, Wendt, Hahn, Tranp, Mielke and others.

Before these plots of ground were set aside as sacred soil, burial of the dead was on the pioneer's own land. In his memoirs, August F. Kleinert tells of the birth and death of twins in August, 1854. "During the night, the first was born at about one o'clock, and the second was stillborn at six A.M. I made a coffin for the baby. My sister prepared it and dressed it for burial. The first boy died a week later. Both babies rest in one grave on the farm near my dwelling under an oak tree. We had no cemetery in the town of Leeds at that time. My oldest son William made the grave."

After the churches were built funeral services were held either in the home or the church. In early times a lumber wagon served as a hearse.



Coming of the Telephone

The beginning of the twentieth century brought new inventions to the farmers, both as aids in their work and in increased family comfort. An important development was the organization of the Leeds-DeForest Telephone company. William Chipman, Erick Johnson, the Erickson brothers, and the Wangsness brothers were instrumental in bringing this to pass. Farmers helped in setting the poles and stringing the wires. The cost of the telephone was six dollars per year. The first exchange was in the Erick Johnson home. Later the Hinkson-Poynette Telephone company came into DeForest from the west and joined the Leeds-DeForest exchange.

Recreation on the Prairie

In the earliest days on the prairie recreation was chiefly in visits with families of other settlers. Birthdays among the German pioneers were special occasions of celebration. They called for a serenade and refreshments. Weddings, too, were all day affairs

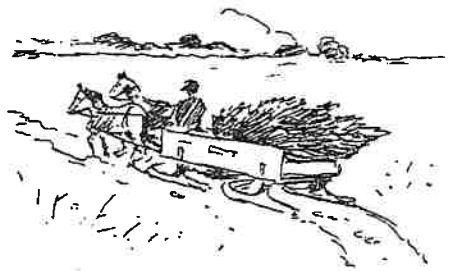
which ended with a charivari, a mock serenade with tin pans and plenty of noise. The groom would at last pacify the serenaders with money or refreshments. In 1896, Oscar Engel and his bride watched their own charivari from the vantage point of the Empire Prairie Store while the serenaders marched around the dwelling house across the road. Some of the men who enjoyed playing cards met perhaps once a week to play euchre.

Until the coming of the automobile and the development of commercialized entertainment, Prairie families got much of their recreation from neighborly visiting and from home made and local enterprises. Nor did either the young people or their elders seem to long for distant scenes to visit or custom-made entertainment to view. For a large part they were content with pleasures in which there was general participation of both young and old.

Picnics at graduation time, on the Fourth of July or at the close of the harvest season afforded opportunity for friendly community effort. Not infrequently these events were enlivened with athletic contests: baseball games, tugs of war, and other means of asserting and measuring the physical prowess of the zealous contestants.

At Christmas time a pine, a fir, or spruce hauled from Pine Hollow became the center of community interest. These gatherings were often held in local churches, school houses or halls. The day of the Christmas Tree was spent in installing and decorating the tree. Strings of cranberries and popcorn were draped from the branches and ruddy apples and golden oranges were hung about the tree to add color and give pungent odor.

To the tree were taken many of the individual presents and much care was taken to see that no child went away without having heard his name loudly called by merry old Santa.



Lawns, made gay with long strings of Chinese lanterns festively stretched between the trees, were often the setting in summer for neighborhood ice cream socials. Home-made ice cream and deeply frosted cake added greatly to the attractions of these occasions.

In winter these community events moved indoors to fill a school house, the basement of a church or a lodge hall. Often these gatherings took the form of box socials. At these, ladies, young and old, vied to bring to the "social" attractive lunch boxes or baskets. These would be auctioned to the highest bidder, by

the most persuasive talker in the community and always with much bantering and merriment.

Merry times too, and some vocal improvement, were made possible by singing schools organized for the winter season. Among the leaders in this worthwhile movement was Watson Clark, a genial farmer who possessed a rich bass voice and a most genial nature.

There was of course some travel for recreation to more distant places. Agricultural fairs with their complement of side shows and hawkers always gained patronage from the prairie area. Such fairs were the Lodi Valley Fair held at Lodi, and the Columbia County Fair held at Portage. The more venturesome would occasionally journey "afar" to Beaver Dam to "take in" the Dodge County Fair, regarded as one of the best in Southern Wisconsin.

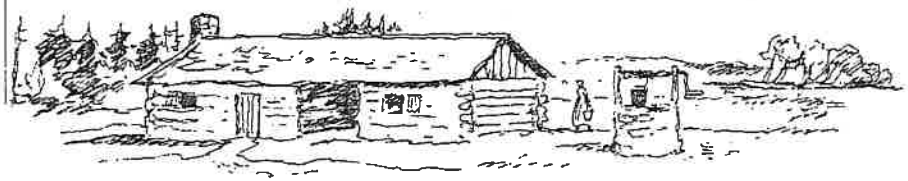
Another away-from-the-prairie entertainment was afforded by Monona Lake Assembly held annually on the south shore of Monona, Madison. Not infrequently prairie families would make camp for the week or drive back and forth daily to enjoy the inspiring and entertaining sessions of this great Chatauqua.

Some of the old-timers on the prairie can still recall having heard in the great Monona Lake Tabernacle, such noted speakers as T. Dewitt Talmadge, Russell H. Conwell, Thomas Dixon, Jr. and William Jennings Bryan. Nor were the offerings confined to platform orations, for from this noted stage were heard some of the outstanding bands and orchestras of the day. Who can measure the influence of this organization and this great movement?

Mighty changes, of course, have been made not only in the farming methods being followed on the prairie but as well in the community life of the area. Something may have been lost, valuable to our chosen democratic way of living. It is well at least to record some of the customs and events of the earlier days of these Prairie areas.

Many Changes in Prairie Agriculture

As changes came to the Empire Prairie in living conditions, in homes, in transportation, so changes came also in the agricultural economy. One hundred and seventeen years ago the men who came and settled, looked for and found land which reminded them of their former homes. The first crops were for subsistence



and depended upon the speed with which the soil could be broken. The first year, for example, might be (as was August Kleinert's first crop) "four acres of oats, ten acres of wheat, four acres of corn, one half acre of potatoes, besides onions and other garden produce" for family consumption. Then came the effort to establish markets.

The rich virgin soil of the Empire Prairie, like its first pioneer settlers, was young and fertile. It yielded so abundantly it seemed that the soil must be inexhaustible. Straw was burned, manure wasted. As crop after crop of wheat was grown, the yield became less and less. By 1880, acres whose yield had been thirty to forty bushels per acre could not be depended upon to yield ten to fifteen bushels.*

Wheat, which was king, then bowed to other crops. The prairie became famous for its apples. In 1878, Leeds township had 3,076 bearing apple trees. Farmers, among them Allan, Roberts, Chipman, Norman, Stiemke and others, developed fine orchards. Today only one of these remains, the orchards on the farm owned by the Hazard family.

The Civil War caused a demand for farm produce. Grain, still harvested by hand, became increasingly important. At that time the cost of cutting, binding and stacking fifty-three acres of wheat and oats was seventy dollars, or an average of about one dollar and thirty-two cents per acre.** Wheat which had been marketed in Milwaukee, Chicago, Portage, Columbus or Sun Prairie, rose to a dollar, two dollars then three dollars per bushel. At the close of the war prices fell. Wheat then sold for one dollar per bushel. In the mean time, oats and barley had become important crops with yields up to seventy-five bushels per acre.

Of the special crops, tobacco became the most important. The yield was from one thousand to sixteen hundred pounds per acre. It first appeared as a commodity of transportation in 1871. Most of the first crops were shipped to Baltimore and Philadelphia. It sold for two and a half to fourteen cents per pound, depending upon the quality and the market conditions. Tobacco was often grown in the same field for two or three years, then usually followed by corn, potatoes or beans.

Though Columbia county grew hops during the "hops craze" and it became a staple crop, Leeds township did not raise hops in

* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

** History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1914. From Memoirs of Mr. Hastie.

[illegible] were shipped to Milwaukee and to the East, but by 1880, Leeds had only five acres of hops.

By 1880, Leeds township was especially noted for its fine sheep. Alonzo Jones was one of the first breeders of sheep. He bred imported Spanish merino sheep and he had a fine flock. Later Shropshires also were bred on the prairie. Poland China hogs and Shorthorn cattle, too, were bred.

The Leeds farmers also knew horse-flesh. A number of tales are told of their prowess in a horse trade. It was classed as a high art. "Woe be to the man who considers himself the better judge of horse-flesh and the more experienced in a trade. Orin Powers was good hearted honest citizen of Lowville, and was possessed of a horse valued by good judges at $125. One day he made up his mind that he would take that horse over to Leeds and make a little by trading him to some one.

"He was advised by a friend not to go, but the advice he considered an insult. The idea of his being taken in by those Leeds men! He would show them that he knew what he was about in a horse trade. So over to Leeds he went."* The story goes on to say that at even-fall Orin returned home with a bridle and two cows worth not over twenty-five dollars. The horse he had taken in trade fell down in a fit as he was riding him home. He took off the bridle and left the horse to die. Orin wished he'd taken his friend's advice.

By 1916, Leeds had over one fourth of its area in hay, chiefly red clover and timothy. With the changes in population, changes came also in the farm crops, cabbage, canning peas, hybrid corn. With the new crops came the pea-vinery and the hauling of peas to canning factories in Arlington, DeForest, Sun Prairie and elsewhere.

In 1880, Mr. H. H. Giles of Madison wrote: "It may be doubted if in the history of the world any country was ever peopled with the rapidity of southern and eastern Wisconsin."* The increase in the population brought increasing land prices. In Leeds township, claims made on government land had sold for one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. By 1850, land there sold for nine dollars and fifty-eight cents; in 1860, for sixteen dollars and sixty-one cents; in 1880, for nineteen dollars per acre.

With the increased value of land, an improved system of husbandry which would restore and prevent the soil from deteriorating was necessary. W. W. Danniells of the University of Wisconsin pointed out in 1880, that this could be accomplished either by returning manures and fertilizers to the soil or by adapting a system of mixed husbandry, raising stock and by judicious rotation of crops. He said: "Such a system is sure to come. Indeed is now slowly coming."* These methods today are taken as a matter of course.

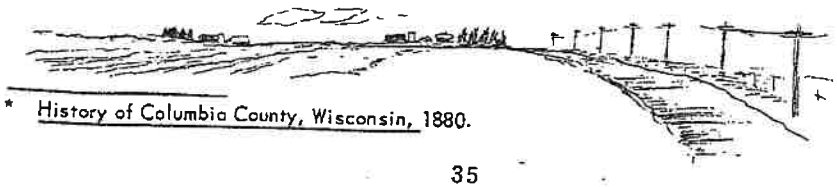
* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

All that remains of what likely was the first silo in the prairie area. This pioneer structure was made by nailing siding to the studding inside and out. The building was then covered with metal sheeting.

One of the first silos built on the Prairie was built inside of the barn by William Chipman in 1893. One end of the barn was lathed off and plastered. There were two parts or rooms with a passageway between. One side was used as an ice house, the other for ensilage. Mr. Chipman got the idea from the agricultural department of the University at Madison. The whole procedure was looked upon with scepticism and suspicion by other farmers, but with the Babcock milk tester, the farmers developed new methods and new crops. Through the intelligent, well continued efforts of the farmers and their families and their successors, these men created modern farmsteads and comfortable homes.

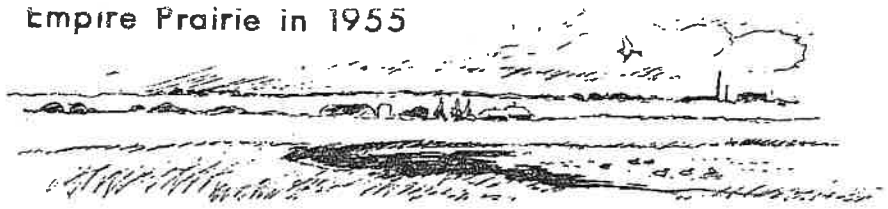
To further promote growth and development of agriculture, two societies were founded, the Columbia County Agriculture Society in 1851 and the Union Fair Society in 1875. The first fair was held in November, 1852. Receipts of the venture were fifteen dollars and seventy-five cents and disbursements, eleven dollars and eighty cents.

The years 1855 to 1955 have shown a tremendous change in every manner of labor saving devices on the farms of the Prairie. From the well nigh primitive working conditions of 1855 to the highly mechanized development of today, more progress has been made than in all previous centuries. Tractors have all but eliminated horse power. On many of the farms, electricity has taken over lighting, cooking, refrigeration and the chore of milking. There are the combines, crop harvesters, corn pickers and trucks, not to mention the automobiles.



* History of Columbia County, Wisconsin, 1880.

Empire Prairie in 1955



Today, a new era has come to the Empire Prairie. By the end of 1955 the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents had purchased on the Empire Prairie well over one thousand acres. An average of something over three hundred dollars an acre has been paid. Funds for the purchase of this land came from the sale of the University Hill Farm in Madison. Much of the University's research with soils, crops and livestock will in the future be centered here on Empire Prairie.

Part of the land on the Empire Prairie has a history aside from that of its first settlers. At the second session of the First Legislative Assembly of the Territory, held at Burlington in 1837, Congress urged by joint resolution an appropriation of $20,000 in money and two townships of land for the use of the University of the Territory of Wisconsin. The money was not appropriated, but 46,080 acres of land, part of it lying in the Empire Prairie, was granted and set aside for the use and support of a University. This was the fundamental endowment of the University at Madison. The seventy-two sections of land were selected in 1845-46.

At the second session of the State Legislature in January, 1849, school districts were organized and an act passed relative to the sale and superintendence of the school and University lands, prescribing the powers and duties of the commissioners (the Secretary of State, the State Treasurer and the Attorney General) put in charge of these lands and of funds arising from the sale of the same. Owing to the short-sighted policy of the State in locating without due care, and in appraising and selling the lands of the original grant at the average price of three dollars and fifty cents per acre, the fund produced was entirely inadequate to support the University. As a result the final payments on such lands were delayed so that (as in the case of William Kleinert, section twenty-nine, Township ten, Range ten E, south half of northeast quarter) land claimed as early as 1849 was not fully paid for until 1890.

Today, some of this prairie's rich lands are being transferred from private to public ownership. These transfers mark the closing of one epoch in this land's use and the opening of another. For more than a hundred years the lands of the prairie have been tilled and cropped by practical, sturdy farmer folk who

have worked effectively with sun, seed and soil to produce in abundance, to feed, clothe and in other ways to benefit themselves and those who bought their products. In the future these lands will be set aside and devoted to searching for means of improving products of the soil and methods of producing.

The University of Wisconsin which through the years has helped the settlers make the Prairie a useful part of Wisconsin's agricultural economy may now use the Prairie to develop even better methods of agricultural production.