

Fifield

a history by Douglas Severt

In 1673 Wisconsin was called Meskousing, meaning "Red Stone". In 1683, it became known as Misconsin, meaning "Strong Current". Then the name Wees-konsan was shortened to Wisconsin about 1700. The Chippewa word Wees-kon-san means "gathering of waters".

The town of Fifield was first known as Flambeau, and was then located in Chippewa County.

In 1879, a new county was established and named after William T. Price, thus Price County. At the same time the town of Flambeau changed its name and became Fifield, named after Sam S. Fifield of Ashland, Wisconsin, who owned much of the timber rights at that time.

In the early 1800's, Fifield was known as having some of the fightingest men in the middle west. The lumberjacks and others were known all over this area as the roughest and toughest men ever to hit the United States.

In the early 1900's, Fifield became headquarters for vacationers, hunters and fishermen from all over the Midwest. At that time there were hotels to accommodate many travelers. Many homes also took in men who came to hunt and fish in the thick forests, where game was abundant, and in the many lakes, rivers and streams where some of the largest musky, pike, bass, trout and other fish were recorded by sportsmen and took many blue ribbons or trophies.

Although there are still a few restaurants in Fifield, all of the hotels are gone. There are still some taverns and a grocery store, but most other places of business have vanished throughout the years.

VOTE SWITCHED IN TOWN ELECTION

Reprint from April 2, 1878 Phillips Bee

A high state of tension hung in the atmosphere today as the town of Worcester elections were held at the Campbell building on Block 4. The important problem which came up at the meeting was whether the town government seat should be at Phillips or Fifield to our north. The northern village has been growing with leaps and bounds and wants the seat changed.

Fifield was strongly represented at the election. A special train came from the north, bringing 126 voters who reportedly were recruited from Butternut, Fifield, North Fork and Wauboo. Each of the voters who came on the train, which had been paid for by W. H. Hinz, had the Fifield ticket printed on a red sheet of paper ready for the ballot box. However, between the time of the arrival of the train at 10:00 a.m. and the time of the voting, Editor F. W. Sackett of the Times had printed a similar colored sheet but with the Phillips ticket on the sheet. In some manner or other, prior to voting, the Fifield tickets were replaced with the Phillips tickets

Much of the skull- duggery was done when the Fifield boys were in the saloon. As a result of the switch voting, the entire Phillips slate was elected.

There has been plenty of excitement on the streets of Phillips all day, and the constables have been busy stopping fights and taking care of celebrants. The train which left the city of Fifield tonight is said to have been totally wrecked inside by the returning voters. The conductor, Tom Mitchell, reports that he locked the doors of the car and did not attempt to collect a ticket. One of the men is reported to have been thrown out of a car window. All seats and windows were broken by the time of the train's arrival in Fifield.

Logging

in early Fifield history

History of Fifield region Logging operations told by William A. Spearbreaker, a longtime resident and veteran of WWII.

Coolidge was set up as a flag station for the Wisconsin Central Railroad in November, 1886. When Boyington and Atwell of Stevens Point built their sawmill at the site known as Fifield, Coolidge had a population of 500. The mill operated until 1891 and had a pine cut of over 80,000,000 board feet.

Jack Felch was the woods boss and A. C. Weist and John Mason worked at the mill during the summer and in the woods in the winter months. These three men came to Fifield in 1891.

All that is left of Coolidge today is a pile of stone in the clearing that was once the company's vault. Near this same stone pile stands a huge spreading lilac bush that blossoms every spring, as if in memorial to the past. William Ehmke was born at Coolidge and later became section boss on the Wisconsin Central as was his father before him.

1892: Van Dusen and Sherry built the Fifield Manufacturing Co. sawmill and operated it until 1896. The mill had a cut of 50,000 board feet. The mill was located at the sorting works dam. Van Dusen built the large home known locally as the "Old Mansion".

Liebelt and Landgraff constructed a mill just south of the Fifield site where the present Fifield Lumber and Supply Co. now stands. They sold their holdings to Henry Ocker, and the mill was partially destroyed by fire under Ocker's ownership. He sold his interests to Patterson Brothers, and the mill continued to operate until 1929. Estimate of the cut from 1900 to 1929 was 50,000,000 board feet before the mill was dismantled and moved.

1913-1924: Bean and Maxwell erected the Central Lumber Co. mill on the west bank of the Flambeau between the milk plant and the new state hwy. 70. The engine foundations of the mill can still be seen. This mill ran eleven years and cut 30,000,000 feet of lumber.

Another mill, the Hales mill, operated at Pike Lake from 1921 to 1928. The cut was hardwood and hemlock. Lumber and ties were hauled to Fifield and to the Coolidge spur by a steam hauler. Cut at this mill was estimated at 50,000,000 feet.

Following 1928-29, there was a slump in sawmill operations in the immediate Fifield area or until the late 40's when Liebelt and Fandrey built the Fifield Forest Products Co.

LOGGING METHODS: Logging methods had changed greatly during this period covered in this history. During the pine days the transportation was mainly via lakes, rivers, and creeks.

In the hardwood and hemlock days, the transportation was a sleigh hauled over iced roads and logging railroads. During the present, more modern pulp era, the entire haul is by truck. This era also brought in the bulldozer, the truck equipped with logging jammer, the swede saw and the power chain saw. Skidding and road making have also been simplified by the use of modern machines.

The most significant happening during the late years has been the growing prominence of our national forest and the entry of small jobbers into the logging economy.

In the early days of logging in northern Wisconsin, the logs were decked on the banks of streams and lakes that had outlets to rivers. They were hauled by means of oxen and horses pulling large, two- wheeled skidders, with wheel and axle high enough off the ground to clear the many stumps in the roadways. The wheels on these big skidders were ten feet high. Logs were fed into the river from tributary creeks, and these creeks were often harnessed by a series of dams to control the flow of water.

LOGGING DAMS: Many of these dams are still very much in evidence. The Flambeau River (south fork) had outlet at Pike Lake, a stake dam at the north of Riley Creek, a gate dam at Sugarbush and another at the sorting works at Fifield.

Sailor Creek had a series of dams: a roller dam at the mouth of Sailor Lake, a gate dam just east of Sailor Creek bridge at Hykinski's farm, and another gate dam was just east of the railroad bridge. The early pine-day dams were constructed by augering and driving wooden pegs to hold the timbers in place. At a later date, drift pines and spikes were used. The Gradey dam was rebuilt and maintained by Fifield with the flowage extending east to the Hascher road.

LOG DRIVES: The start of any log drive in the spring called for great organization because of the diversified equipment necessary.

The drive in itself was quite a spectacle with all its special gear and equipment among which were large French type Bateaus (river boats) and tents. And no drive would be complete without a Wannigan (a floating bunk and cookhouse), among Jacks it was better known as the "bug house".

Runners who carried messages from headquarters to the crews and reported the progress of the drive to headquarters were employed. Joe Traenkle was a runner from the headquarters' end.

The last year of the big drive, the "bug house" cast away from its crew on July 6, 1906. The high swift water caused it to rampage all the way to Ladysmith before its mooring ropes could be secured. A Wannigan was built on the lines of an Ohio river flat-bottomed, keel boat. It was built in four sections and put together by means of wooden pins. The walls were also constructed in sections. It was propelled by large oars and steered by means of a stem sweep. A Wannigan could sleep a hundred men.

Logging roads followed low, leveled ground as much as possible. Where they had to cross soft or swampy ground, these stretches were corduroyed (a road made of logs laid to fill the low spots). At a later date, cuts and fills were made as the road making improved until finally there was a network of logging roads. The corduroy road is a hand-me-down from colonial pioneers.

Logs flowed down the Flambeau by the thousands, or came in on wagon or sleigh, depending on the season. Dams were built on creeks and streams to float logs to the river. Families and loggers came from all parts of the U.S. and Canada. Some weekends found as many as fifteen thousand humans crowded into the village. Saloons and stores did a land office business, and streets were jammed with teams of snorting, stomping horses, wagons, buggies, and carts.

The town was now called Flambeau and was located in, what was then, Chippewa County. In 1878, a railroad was extended from Westboro to the town of Prentice by the Central Railroad Company. In 1879, Price County was established, and the town was renamed after Sam S. Fifield, who owned most of the timber rights in that section. Now W. F. Huitz, who ran one of the mills, was elected as chairman to the new town of Fifield.

Some Indians still lived on the bank of the river, although many had moved and the village was growing smaller. Game was becoming scarce since the white men come, and the food shortage caused the Indians to move eastward. Someone had built a cabin south of the river, and a small foot bridge was erected for crossing. A large building was erected beside the Indian village, which later became a sporting house. Henry Ferguson had built a cabin south of the river beneath the tall pines that still stood. One hundred yards south of the Ferguson home and deeper in the woods, John Rivers also built a cabin and moved his family there.



Fifield School



The first Fifield school was established in 1887 in a warehouse owned by Bud Spalding. Carrie Goodell, sister of the station agent, became the first teacher. The first actual school building came in 1880 and was soon sold as a drugstore because it was too small. Another was erected and known as the North school on the northwest corner of Linden and Balsam street. Then in 1889 a larger school was built on Spruce Street north of Linden, which brought students from around the north country; later it was replaced by the new brick building in 1923.



The Last Graduating Class of Fifield High School (1962)

Julie Erickson

Mary Jill Johnson

Frank Baroka

Gene Kellog

Claudette Wagner

Mary Plyer

Ronald Baroka

Douglas Severt

Her People

