

Swift County Organized in 1870

History of Districts, Townships Given

SWIFT COUNTY

When Chippewa county was organized by the act of the legislature Feb. 20, 1862, the present county of Swift was included in its boundaries.

A new county, Swift was organized on Feb. 18, 1870 to be named in honor of Henry Swift, governor of Minnesota.

Three citizens C. E. Foster, A. W. Lathrop and Iver Knudson were selected to serve on the first board of commissioners. The first session was held in A. W. Lathrop's store on Jan. 3, 1871.

The county was divided into three commissioner districts.

The first district was organized into the town of Fairfield and the first meeting was Jan. 23, 1871 at the home of Charles E. Foster. The minutes of the first meeting recorded was at the home of G. B. Smith in April 1872. Officers: D. Tupper, chairman, John Wilson and Thor Olson, supervisors, Joshua Martin, clerk; B. Arnold, treasurer and Nick Kepner, justice.

Camp Lake included the townships on the east end. The first annual election of which there is mention was held on March 2, 1872. Officers: Hans C. Hanson, chairman; Ole Thorson and Andrew P. Carlson, supervisors; Ole Paulson, clerk; Iver Knudson, justice; Andre Carlson, constable; Oscar Abramson, assessor.

The township of Benson included the present central townships. The first meeting was held in Benson House in Benson village with the following officers: Halvor Dahl, chairman; John Olen and Ole Bronniche, supervisors; A. W. Lathrop and Ole Jacobson justices; George Knight

From these three were organized the other townships.

March 30, 1872 the town of Phelps was organized in the honor of the first settler, Addison Phelps. This township included the present Appleton and Edison. The first meeting was April 20, 1872 at school district 4. Later in 1872 Mr. Phelps requested that the name be changed to Appleton, in honor of a city in Wisconsin.

On Sept. 3, 1872 the three most easterly townships were organized under the name of Kerkhoven. The first election was held at the home of N. O. Broten.

Petitioned by Ole Bronniche and others the town of Swenoda (the present Cashel, Swenoda and West Bank) was formed. The name selected is a composite one, the first syllables of Swedish, Norwegian and Danish — the first settlers in that section. The first meeting was at the home of Halle Larson on April 7, 1873.

M. P. Moran and others in 1875 petitioned for a new town which was granted by a two to one vote. But the board became convinced that the new town had not the required number of voters and rescinded its action. In April 1875 the commissioners agreed to another town (the present Dublin and Kildare). It was named Moransville and the DeGraff station house was the first meeting place on April 20, 1875.

A petition by J. P. Jacobson and others in January 1876 for a new town to be named Pillsbury in honor of John S. Pillsbury, governor of Minnesota was granted. The store of J. P. Jacobson was designated as meeting place, Jan. 22, 1876.

On March 23, 1876 the commissioners granted the petition of Ole Hegstad and 32 others to form the town of Hegbert (the present Hegbert and Shible). The first meeting was held at the home of Ole Hegstad on April 8, 1876.

The settlers in the southern part of Hegbert under the leadership of Samuel Akey drew up a petition with 23 signatures asking for a town of Shible to be formed. The petition was granted and at the home of S. Akey was the first meeting on July 8, 1876.

John H. Reardon and 27 others petitioned for a town to be given the name Clontarf (the present Clontarf and Tara). The request was granted and the first meeting was held at the Clontarf station house on January 16, 1877.

On March 1877, the commissioners granted a petition to John M. Bergstrom and 36 others to organize a town of Hayes named in honor of Rutherford B. Hayes, president of the United States. The first town meeting was held at the home of John C. Carlson April 7, 1877.

The commissioners granted on July 16, 1877 the petition of B. F. Day and 29 others for a town named Dublin in honor of the capital city of Ireland. The first meeting was set for August 4, 1877 at the home of Mr. Day. There are no records previous to March 12, 1878 when the citizens assembled at the home of Daniel Murphy.

Six Mile Grove was organized at the same time as Dublin and was named for the grove located about six miles from Benson. Olaf P. Newhouse and 23 others had petitioned for this new township. The voters met at the home of Olaf Homme Aug. 4, 1877.

On March 5, 1878 two new town governments were provided for, one named Cashel in honor of Cashel, Tipperary county, Ireland. The organization of Cashel was perfected at the home of Michael O'Reilly.

In Prairial or Prairieville the voters assembled in school district No. 8, March 23, 1878. In 1881 the Polish settlers successfully petitioned the legislature to change the name to New Posen. Later in 1889 the town was named Edison in honor of the famous American inventor.

A petition of July 19, 1878 drawn up by C. J. Norby and 27 others asked for a town to be formed called Springdale. It was granted, but the name was changed to West Bank. Though the home of C. J. Norby was designated as the place for the first meeting planned for Aug. 3, 1878, the first election seems to have taken place at C. O. Johnson's home on March 11, 1879.

On December 2, 1878 the commissioners granted a petition which asked for town government in Ridgeville, so named because of the hills. This was later changed to Tara in memory of a hill in County Meath, Ireland. The first organization meeting was held in schoolhouse of District 20 on Dec. 21, 1878.

By 1878 the number of legal voters had increased (800 votes) had been cast in the last election) that the commissioners decided on Dec. 2, 1878 to re-district the county to provide two additional members on the board. District one was to include Hegbert, Shible, Appleton, Prairial, and Springdale. District two — Fairfield, Ridgeville, and Clontarf. District three — Six Mile Grove, Benson and Benson village. District four — Swenoda, Cashel, Dublin and Kildare. District five — Camp Lake, Kerkhoven, Hayes and Pillsbury.

At the January 8, 1879 session two additional governments were created — St. Joseph and Moyer. St. Joseph was soon changed to Marysland by its Catholic Irish immigrants. The first town meeting was held at the home of John Gallagher on March 11, 1879.

Moyer's first town meeting was held the same day at the home of Jacob Mason.

The last town government to be formed was that of Torning receiving its name from a village in Denmark. The commissioners voted it an organization on March 18, 1877 excluding the territory already organized as the village of Benson. The first town meeting was held on April 5, 1879 in school district No. 11.

The oldest settlement in Swift county was at Monson Lake in Hayes township. There Anders and Danie Broberg settled with their families. The Homestead law was not passed until a year later so they could not file on homesteads.

They settled on land which they purchased and was covered by military warrants granted to war veterans, buying their first land in 1866 from Anselmo Garcia who had served in the Mexican war.

The Broberg brothers and also a few other families were brutally killed in the Indian massacre on Aug. 21, 1862.

Most County Villages Are Founded in 1870's

APPLETON

In 1872 the Lathrop Brothers pulled up stakes at Benson to assist in the organization of a new village. The mill built in partnership by a Mr. Clark and the Lathrop Bros. was completed the same year and began to grind flour.

In 1881 Appleton, named after a town, was incorporated as a village. In 1873 the population was about 100 and the Lathrops had opened a store.

The first school was taught in 1873 by A. M. Uffer in the schoolhouse built at a cost of \$1,000. Appleton was created an independent school district in 1880.

In 1874 the Library association was incorporated. At that time the village contained one store, one hotel, one blacksmith shop, one mill and half a dozen dwellings. The post-office was established in 1873 with William Lathrop as the first postmaster.

In the fall of 1879 the track of the Hastings and Dakota railroad reached Appleton. The erection of two elevators the same fall added to the importance of the village.

The first religious services were held in the house of C. E. Foster, by Rev. T. G. Crump of Litchfield, an Episcopalian. The first church organization was effected in 1875 and was Episcopalian. The Methodists held their first meeting in 1879 and the Congregationalist organized that same year.

Appleton Lodge No. 137, A.F. and A.M. was organized under charter April 1, 1880.

CLONTARF

Clontarf was first named Randall, but was renamed Clontarf by Bishop Ireland in honor of a suburb of Dublin.

The bulk of the early population came from the east.

The first church services were in the section house by Rev. John McDermott in 1871. The first school was taught in the Catholic church in 1878 by Kate Shinnick.

The first business done was a lumber yard by D. F. McDermott.

KERKHOVEN

Kerkhoven was named after one of the stockholders in the railroad company and the first settling was in 1870.

Growth continued until 1877 when a disastrous fire wiped out nearly all the business buildings. In 1880 the census showed Kerkhoven having 94 people and 20 business places.

In 1881, on March 3, Kerkhoven received a village charter, but the place was named Pillsbury because it was situated in the township of Pillsbury.

The township had been named after Gov. Pillsbury who had donated \$500 for a park. This is the present Pillsbury Park. Two years later the name was changed back to Kerkhoven.

DANVERS & HOLLOWAY

In 1886 surveyors had started work on a proposed Watertown road connecting Benson and Appleton with Watertown, S. D.

By the spring of 1887 the Great Northern had the construction work completed.

Two additional railroad towns were platted: Danvers named after a village in Massachusetts and Holloway (first called Norton) but renamed by the Great Northern officials in honor of a neighboring pioneer farmer.

Business activity in Danvers had its beginnings in a 12x16 foot store managed by A. N. Mattheison. The 1900 census showed a population of 112 and about 20 business interests. By 1910 the population was 215.

Danvers was incorporated on Jan. 19, 1900 but was not separated from the township of Marysland until April 9, 1906.

In Holloway the first store was managed by T. B. Boyle. It was incorporated as a village on Feb. 14, 1903. In 1910 the population was 215.

One of the most disastrous fires in the history of the county occurred at Holloway in January 1907 wiping out a whole business block - a bank, three stores, the post office, and a saloon.

MURDOCK

S. S. Murdock, former manager of the St. Paul Harvester Works and owner of some 3,000 acres of land in the vicinity of the present village, was convinced that there was room for another trading center between DeGraff and Kerkhoven.

Murdock and Joseph Schaaf of Carver laid out the townsite. The idea was laughed at and the railroad refused to build a depot.

By 1880 the village had 23 business interest, including two lawyers, a photographer, a bank, three hotels, three general stores, two elevators and a furniture store.

SWIFT FALLS

Swift Falls received its name from the waterfall. J. M. Danelz, its founder, came from Sweden with \$9 and in 1870 came to Benson to stake out a claim in section 10, Camp Lake township.

Detecting the presence of a waterfall he became interested in the site and purchased it from the railroad. In 1872 work started on the mill, financial assistance to the sum of \$6,000 having been given by his partner, Theodore Hansen of Benson.

The first flour was produced on June 9, 1873. The farmers for many miles hauled to this mill, waiting several days for their flour. Danelz started a store in 1880.

DeGRAFF

DeGraff was platted in 1875 and named after Andrew DeGraff of St. Paul, the railroad builder.

It was colonized by Bishop Ireland. In the following two years 17 houses were built, 65 carloads of lumber having been shipped in to be used in the village and on neighboring farms. The citizens were convinced of a big future.

Among difficulties in colonizing was the grasshopper plague. In the very first year of DeGraff colony in 1876 the area and other parts of the county were swarmed by these pests. The harm wrought by them did not discourage new settlers from coming.

Father F. J. Swift, the first pastor, will always be remembered for his self-sacrificing services to the Swift County settlers.