

THE WAUPACA POST
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The Village Forty-one Years Ago – Its Location – General Features

Just forty-one years ago the first day of last November your reminiscencer entered Waupaca having been all day coming from Meiklejohn's. He had been six days on horseback, and had driven three cows from Green Bay, the destination of all being Waupaca, "that new place out on the Indian land".

From New London the road was simply a blazed trail, the autumn leaves having effectually covered all traces of any occasional team.

The youngster road slowly down the hill on the eastern side of the stream, then called To-morrow River as frequently as Waupaca, and carefully scanned the first evidences of civilization seen after a long day's ride.

The woods extended to the river. There were but few habitations, not more than five or six, a rickety saw mill, a worse dam, an unsubstantial bridge, almost interminable piles of pine logs, a chill evening air, a weary horse, a tired boy, and the picture of the eastern side of the river is complete.

The bridge crossed, not the one where Longfellow stood at midnight and held his musings while the clock struck twelve in the old gray tower, but a bridge the earliest settlers had constructed when money was scarce and men were few.

The bright rays of the setting sun were changing steadily to a golden brown, and these in turn gave way to a crimson gray with darkening hues, as the great luminary sent behind the tree-capped top of Mount Tom or the western side of the town. The gray twilight crept up from the east, and the sun went down, while the cold frost began to nip the grasses and leaves.

As he crossed the bridge in the chill evening air, he stamped upon the tablets of his memory a picture of the scene. To the right, on the site of the present grist mill was the original, the pioneer mill built by the Lord brothers. A long flume, built on stilts and holding water like a wounded sieve, led from the leaky dam perhaps fifteen rods up stream. The dam had been built of poles and brush, and even in less than two years existence was yielding to a bad attack of decrepitude. It was a curiosity in its way, and the waters seemed to enjoy sporting with its raggedness. The flumes were fit companions. They twisted and sagged and the water poured out from numberless cracks and holes and apertures most scientifically constructed by two winters of frost and cold. The grist mill, about 30 x 40 in dimensions was the largest structure in the village, and its floury look tallied well with the cold, gray twilight, and the gathering gloom.

A steep hill up to an old shell of a barn built on jutting rocks on the hillside, and an unpainted double house with a quaint sign announcing the

WAUPACA
A
VANDUZEE
HOUSE

Greeted the vision. The old (only one year old) sign swung and creaked like the board of an ancient English inn, and seemed to beckon, as well as call the tired and hungry boy both to shelter and to food. In its construction it was possibly the intention of the proprietor to have the two middle lines of his sign in a smaller letter than the outer ones, but native talent is proverbially not to be balked in its rush for artistic work. The artist knew best, according to his own estimate at least, and by his blundering work added something to the famed "old tavern" of 1853.

The youthful horseman alighted, and having secured his cows in the rickety barn, went into the "hotel" and asked for supper. The landlady was not accustomed to see hungry boy strangers, much less to have them ask for supper. She beamed on the youthful comer with a look that Dore might have searched the world through for and found it not, then gave the following polite answer in a voice that could have been heard three blocks, on the key of upper G when out of tune.

“Now you git out o’ here, an’ dunt yo’ dare to kum aroun’ askin’ fur nuthin’ agin, nor orderin’ nuther. We’ve had all the supper we’re goin’ to git in this ‘ere house tonight. Scat.”

The lad scatted, and seeking among the half dozen buildings in sight, a store, invested in crackers and cheese.

At a later hour, through the courtesy of the storekeeper, who was at the same time the postmaster, as well as Captain Scott, he secured a lodging for the night. The next day the sweet souled mother-in-Israel who had so lovingly embraced the pale-faced boy while her upper G tones were on a tear, found that he was the son of the new-comer who had leased her premises for a year.

On that place where the old inn stood – it is gone now, burned up – there could be seen from the four-foot-square balcony on the river side as fine a view of wild woods beauty as an artist’s pencil could ever desire to sketch. The stream spread out below the falls and rapids, which seethed and bubbled till they reached the bridge, then dashed into the great basin filled with deep pools and eddies, where tradition says the Indians were wont to enjoy their baths.

Just below the eddies, on the eastern side of the stream, was an island of about an acre and a half in extent rich with trees of a century’s growth. Great butternuts drooped their heavy branches over the banks, and in the seasons following this first view, the waters beneath these trees were crowded with boys diving for the nuts shaken from the boughs above. There is not a tree on the island now – only a few shrubs – and a factory has taken the place of a companion grove on the strip of land below.

There was no other island. The one now in existence in the stream north of the POST printing office had its beginning in the summer of 1854. The youngsters who were learning to swim drove a barrel stave into the bottom at about the middle of the stream, not daring to venture clear across. Some brush lodged against the stave, silt accumulated, a spray of grass became lodged and being kissed by the sunlight, began to grow. Accretion followed accretion, until the second island was formed with the prospect of an early junction with the main land. So moves the world along.

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