

# HISTORY OF CLARK COUNTY WISCONSIN

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## **CHAPTER XVIII CITIES AND VILLAGES**

Clark County has three cities, Neillsville, Colby and Greenwood, and nine incorporated villages, Abbotsford, Curtiss, Dorchester, Granton, Loyal, Owen, Thorp, Unity and Withee. There are also many hamlets scattered throughout the county, some on the railroads, and some inland.

### **NEILLSVILLE**

Neillsville, the county seat and metropolis of Clark County, is situated on the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railroad, and is the distributing center of an important agricultural dairying and stock-raising district. The city presents a most attractive sight nestled among the green hills and in the midst of wide expanses of fertile acres, where the dark currents of Black River tossing over the rocks mingle its murmuring with that of Placid O'Neill Creek.

On a railroad which brings three passenger trains each way each day—one each way a through train from the metropolis of one state to that of another—and with good, improved roads leading out in each direction, north, east, south and west, to stretches of fine farms, with its courthouse surmounted by the blindfolded holder of Justice's scales and its other public buildings outlined against the sky or against the background of encircling hills, with its blocks of busy marts and its streets of beautiful homes, Neillsville can take pride in the fact that it is a truly representative American city, which has a history of which it may well be proud, and a prospect for future growth and development which is its pride, boast and hope.

The main business section is Hewett street, named after James Hewett, one of the pioneer settlers. The city lies back nearly a half mile from the banks of Black River but O'Neill Creek runs nearly through the center of town circling from west to east, dividing it into the north side which contains the Catholic Church and school, the cemetery, the

ward school and some of the desirable residence blocks, and the south side which comprises the business streets, the county buildings, high school, new Carnegie library, and many new and very beautiful homes. There is a large armory for the use of the company of militia, which is also used for a theatre and hall for dances. This is owned by a local stock company. The city owns and operates the waterworks, procuring its supply from Black River, and there is an adequate system of sewerage, and the electric light and power is furnished to the city and private consumers by a subsidiary to a large company, the energy being derived from water power a score or more miles distant.

The most important business industries are the condensary and the canning factory, and there are a number of thriving minor enterprises. The three banks have sightly and modern buildings, and the churches are adequate and well built, all the leading denominations being well represented. The story of the early settlement of Neillsville has already been told. The village was platted by A. Boardman for James O'Neill on April 14, 1855. At that time, O'Neill's residence and mill, with Samuel Ferguson's bachelor's hall and his blacksmith shop, were the only buildings to be seen on the four acres appropriated to village purposes. Immediately the news of Mr. O'Neill's action had been promulgated, settlers began to come in, purchase lots and make improvements. The first of these was Robert Roix, who erected a tavern. Then James O'Neill erected two framed buildings for store and residence purposes. The same spring N. M. Clapp settled in the village and built a house on the present site of the post office, and Dr. L. M. Baxter put up a residence. The same year Frank Cawley came in, also W. K. Dickey, who built a wagon shop and residence, and that fall, Clinton & Quail brought a stock of goods from Black River Falls, and became the first merchants in the village, doing business in the building erected by James O'Neill. These were the arrivals and improvements of 1855.

The arrivals of 1856 include Richard Dewhurst and G. W. King, who were the first lawyers to settle in Neillsville; James Hewitt, who began operations by working on the first bridge erected across the Black River, W. W. Lemon, who settled in the town of Levis; Daniel Gates, first locating at the mouth of Wedge's Creek, but moving to Neillsville in 1861; Robert Douglas, who built a blacksmith shop; Miles Murry, who erected a residence and a blacksmith shop. James R. McCalep came in this year, and put up a little frame building, and Phillip Reissman opened the first furniture store. In May, James and Edmund Furlong, the former with a family; James Lynch and family and Orson Gates were accessions to the place. Anson Green purchased Roix's Hotel. Gustavus Sterns settled at Molin's Rapids this year.

The panic of 1857 worked material injury to the progress of the village, as also to that of the county. Few came in from this year until after

the close of the war. Financial stringency produced a practical suspension of the lumber interests, and consequent stagnation of business. There was comparatively no farming of consequence, and less trade. The value of farm products depreciated, and prices of commodities increased correspondingly. The effect of these anomalous conditions were perceptibly visible, not alone in Neillsville and Clark County, but also throughout this portion of the lumber district. Impoverishment, if not ruin, stared many in the face, and escape therefrom was only accomplished after trials no pen can adequately describe. To the close of the war, both increase in population and the number of improvements was nominal.

Neillsville, in the early fall of 1866, was a village of a few dozen buildings scattered around within a limited area. There was an old sawmill on the north side of O'Neill Creek, near where the old electric Light plant stands. The mill was an old-fashioned one, with an up and down saw, run by water power, but at the time mentioned it was out of commission. It was a year after that it was either rebuilt or repaired by Marville Mason, then of the town of Pine Valley, a good man and a good millwright, who long since has gone to his reward.

On the north side of O'Neill Creek, in what is known as the first ward of the city of Neillsville, there was a blacksmith shop, and not to exceed three or four houses in all of that territory—one of them being the home of James Furlong—that then stood on the same land, and near the site of the fine brick building, built by Gus. D. Hosely a few years ago. The north side was nearly all woods.

On the south side of the creek and on the same location as the present Merchants Hotel, was a dilapidated frame hotel called the Hubbard House, then kept by L. K. Hubbard.

Across the main street, or Hewett Street, as it is now called, and a little south of Carl Rabenstein's brick block, was a small two-story frame building, the upper story of which was occupied by a man by the name of Tim Roberts, who made logging sleds, at least, made the wooden parts. Below, on the first floor, was the store of Hewett, Woods & Co. The room was small, and the store then had no clerks, nor window trimmers. The one front window was of the two-sash, 8 by 10 glass variety, and incapable of being decorated very elaborately. The books, such as they were, lay on the top of an empty kerosene barrel that did duty as a desk, when such an article of furniture was required. About November 1866, the store was vacated and the goods removed to a building that stood on the corner where the Neillsville bank now stands. This building was a store and dwelling house combined, occupied by Chauncey Blakeslee and his family, and it was only a short time until a very large stock of goods were on the shelves.

Back of and to the north of the original store of Hewett, Woods & Co., and facing the north, and the creek, was the old frame dwelling house of James O'Neill, then occupied by James Hewett and his family, consisting of a wife and one son, then about a year old, and named Sherman F. Hewett. The son is the present county surveyor of the county, and more familiarly known as "Frank" Hewett.

All of the land on the east side of Main Street, including the first store building first mentioned, and the house occupied by James Hewett were the property of Mr. O'Neill, and there were no other buildings on the east side of the street from O'Neill Creek to the site of the present O'Neill house. On that corner Mr. O'Neill had built a two-story frame building for a residence, which he then occupied and, afterward for a time, ran a hotel there.

On the west side of the street, across from the Hubbard House, was a drug store, the proprietor being George O. Adams. He was a full-fledged Yankee from Nashua, N. H. He generally wore a long pair of rubber boots and always wore a high silk hat. He was a keen business man, but somewhat odd in his manner. One of his common expressions in conversation was, "I want to know." He died at Waukegan, Ill., years ago at a very advanced age. South of the drug store was a general store kept by Charles E. Adams, a son of the druggist. It occupied the site where the elder John G. Klopff for many years afterwards resided and had a saloon. It is the building now occupied by August Storm.

On the corner where the Neillsville bank now stands was the dwelling house of Chauncey Blakeslee, the lower part being used as a store for Hewett, Woods & Co. From that corner south, clear to the end of the block, was an apple orchard and garden.

Across the street on the east side was a printing office and post office, both one-story frame buildings, and to the south of these buildings was the wagon shop of W. K. Dickey. Dr. B. F. French had a house on the corner of Fourth and Hewett Streets, and south of that was the house of Lambert Miller. To the west there was a house on the old Ross place, and Samuel Ferguson and L. L. Ayers had their residence across the way. On the extreme east was the house of W. K. Dickey.

The first sidewalk in Neillsville was built on a Sunday morning in the spring of 1867. It was constructed by B. F. French, James Hewett and two or three others. It extended from where the Neillsville bank is located to the corner at Marsh's dry goods store. It was made of plank—laid lengthwise—and did good service for many years.

It was in the seventies that the first brick store building was erected in Neillsville. This was the store building of Hewett, Woods & Co., built in

1872, on the northwest corner of what is now known as Fifth and Hewett streets, the same building occupied at present by W. J. Marsh and the Masonic fraternity. A few years later George L. Lloyd erected a brick store building directly opposite on the northeast corner of the same streets. It was built of cream-colored brick brought from DePere, Wis. This building is now occupied by the Cash Hardware Company.

The store of Hewett & Woods was always called the "Brick Store." It carried a large stock of goods, and employed a number of clerks and office men, among whom were David R. Brown, Stanley F. Chubb, Frank S. Kirkland, John Duncan, Charles Deutsch, Tobias Johnson, who kept his jewelry goods there, Charles D. King and others. All of these men were more or less influential in politics or, at least, in getting votes, and when they started out for anything they generally succeeded.

With this beginning the city has enjoyed a steady and satisfactory growth, and its prospects for future years are of the brightest.

For nearly thirty years after it was platted, Neillsville was a part of the township of Pine Valley, and was governed by the officials of that township. At the first town meeting of Pine Valley, April 4, 1854, the following officers were elected: Supervisors—James O'Neill, James French and Hugh Wedge; town clerk—B. F. French; justice of the peace—Moses Clark and James Conlin; assessor—James O'Neill; constable—B. F. French; superintendent of schools—James O'Neill; overseer of highways—James Conlin, Conrad Dell and Elijah Eaton.

A tax of \$1,000 was levied, \$200 for a bridge across Wedge's Creek and \$800 for "bridging, widening and crosswaying" the road surveyed along the Black River, commencing at the south line of Town 23, Range 2 West, and thence up Black River to the north part of Town 26, Range 2 West. At a special meeting held Oct. 5, 1854, Edward Tompkins was elected supervisor in place of Hugh Wedge, and James O'Neill was elected superintendent of schools. It was voted to raise \$1,000 to open a road on the east side of Black River and \$200 for incidental purposes. School District No. 1 was designated by James O'Neill. Its boundaries, as given in the records, are indefinite, but it probably consisted of the south two-thirds of what is now Pine Valley.

In the late seventies the agitation for a separate government for Neillsville assumed encouraging proportions, and the necessity for such separate organization became imperative with the arrival of the railroad in 1881. Accordingly, the city of Neillsville was duly incorporated by an act of the legislature, approved March 28, 1882, to take effect the second Tuesday in April of that year.

Electric lighting was inaugurated in 1882, when a private electric light plant was put in, furnishing four or five arc lights. But the Neillsville Electric and Water Supply Co. was soon organized, a building was constructed north of the creek, and the city was supplied with good service for

street, business and residential purposes. In the fall of 1906, the plant was acquired by the city. In 1915 a contract was made with the Wisconsin-Minnesota Light & Power Co., and the local plant abandoned.

The waterworks system was originally installed in 1885, when a dam was built across O'Neill Creek, and a pumping station erected north of the creek. This building and the adjoining electric light plant are still standing, but are not now in use by the city. In 1890 the standpipe was erected on the hill, a few rods southeast of the court house. The system has been extended from time to time until it now covers the principal streets.

Aug. 23, 1895, the council decided to move the pumping plants to Lot 5, Schuster's Addition, and a few days later let the contract for the erection of a stone and brick pumping station. The plant was completed the following year. The old plant was sold to the Neillsville Electric & Water Supply Co. At a special election held Oct. 30, 1906, it was voted to erect a dam on Black River. The work was completed the following year. April 27, 1917, a contract was let for a new filtration system, and the work was completed in the spring of 1918.

For some years after the organization of the city, there were no public sewers, sanitation being achieved by private sewers and cesspools. From time-to-time short strips of sewers were laid, the first extensive inauguration of the system being in 1902, when sewers were laid on Seventh, Hewett, Court, West and Fourth streets. The system has since been continued so that the principal residence and business streets are now well provided with sanitation facilities.

The city has an excellent system of streets and bridges, well cared for. The bridges have been built at various dates as necessity has required. July 13, 1901, the city bought a rock crusher and Aug. 10, 1901, a stone roller. May 14, 1904, an appropriation of \$3,000 was made for macadamizing certain streets in the summer and fall. This work has since been continued until the principal streets are all macadamized and in the best of condition.

Neillsville Library Association was organized Sept. 23, 1879, by the election of H. W. Doming, president; Ira B. Jones, treasurer, and L. B. Ring, librarian and secretary, with H. N. Withee, C. Blakeslee and Mrs. A. White, trustees. The library was established in the office of the True Republican. March 13, 1897, the citizens of the city voted to establish a public library and reading room. The library was maintained at the High School until 1914, when the present Carnegie Library was erected. The preliminary steps toward the building of the library were taken in 1913. Nov. 14, 1913, the city council received a communication through Mrs. J. W. Hommell, stating that the Carnegie Corporation would contribute \$10,000 toward a library building at Neillsville, providing that the city

council would appropriate \$1,000 a year for its maintenance. The conditions were duly complied with, and after a consideration of various localities, the present site was selected, being paid for by a tag day contribution of \$417.13, and a subscription from various prominent citizens. The building is a sightly one, and the institution is well conducted.

The Neillsville Post office was first established as Clark Post office, May 31, 1855, with Samuel C. Boardman as postmaster. The name Clark was changed to Neillsville Oct. 6, 1856, and Mr. Boardman appointed a second year. Then followed George W. King in 1857; Chauncy Blakeslee in 1858; Wm. C. Tompkins, 1860; C. W. Carpenter, 1863; A. J. Manley, 1865; Wm. C. Hutchinson, 1867; J. W. Ferguson, 1871; Wm. Campbell, 1882; Isaac Carr, 1886; Fred Reitz, 1890, 1903; William Huntley, 1894; L. B. Ring, 1899. A. E. Dudley, 1906. He was followed by William Huntley, the present postmaster. When this post office was first established, 1855, mail was brought here from Black River Falls by Edward Markey.

Religious life has been a dominating factor in Neillsville life since the earliest days. All the leading denominations are represented here, and there are many sightly church edifices. There are Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist Episcopal, Episcopal, Christian Science, Catholic, Norwegian Lutheran, German Lutheran, and Zion Reformed churches here, and a Unitarian Church formerly flourished for some years.