

Marinette County: The Townships and Communities

In 1879, when Marinette County was formed from the eastern and northwestern portions of Oconto County, only two townships were designated. The Town of Marinette extended 75 miles upstream on the Menominee River, and included what is now Florence County. All of the western part and the northern half of Marinette County comprised the Town of Peshtigo. The initial county board had three members: A.C. Merryman, representing Marinette; W.J. Shepherd from Peshtigo; and the county clerk, who was empowered to vote in order to break a tie. Shepherd served only two months, and was succeeded by W. A. Ellis. Three years later, in 1882, Florence County separated from Marinette County.

According to an early Oconto County census, in 1853 Marinette had a population of 478, more than half of whom were Indian. There were only three permanent dwellings: the homes of Queen Marinette, John B. Jacobs, and Dr. Hall. The economy of the area, however, had already turned to lumbering, and sawmills were in operation at the mouth of the Menominee River. By 1885, the first city directory for Marinette showed eleven incorporated companies, and a wide variety of businesses to serve the growing community. In 1887, Marinette obtained a city charter.

That same year, the Town of Porterfield and Wausaukee were set off from the original townships of Marinette and Peshtigo. Wausaukee's first representative to the county board was R.G. Brown. The mainstay of the town was lumbering. John S. Monroe had come there in 1880, taken up a homestead and built a log cabin in the middle of virgin forest. He was the first to take out cedar, and he established a post, mill, and later a blacksmith shop. Monroe owned 160 acres and three teams of horses; he was also a shipbuilder.

By the early 1900's the cutover lands of the new townships proved good for general farming and stock raising. Clover, timothy grass, corn, oats, rye, potatoes, peas, beans, and all sorts of berries and small fruits became an important source of income. The first sugar beets were planted in 1903. Wausaukee's telephone exchange extended to connect with long distance companies, and the Wausaukee Independent was considered to be "one of the brightest newspapers in the state." Incorporated as a Village in 1924, Wausaukee has been the site of the Marinette County Fair since 1931. Wausaukee means "river among the hills."

At the close of its first ten years, Marinette County consisted of these four township: Marinette, Peshtigo, Wausaukee and Porterfield. In 1890 Amberg achieved township status. Because of the plentiful fish and game, profusion of herbs and berries, abundant grasslands and verdant forests, this area had long been a favorite Indian campsite. The Indians called it "CA-she-men-na-doo-ten-skee-wen," which translated means "God's country." The early settlers named it Pike, for the river teeming with this fine game fish. From the 1860's to the end of the century, many logs from this ample timber supply were sent down the river to the mills in Marinette and Menominee. The railroads reached here in the 1880's, and the area became a supply center for lumber camps.