

The Town of Williamstown
by
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The earliest records that I could find begin in 1888, when Carl Steinbach was the chairman for the town. This chairman and ones after him had a large area in their jurisdiction. The Town of Williamstown like other towns in Wisconsin had originally contained thirty-six sections (a section is an area of 36 square miles, an area that is six miles square). The area encompasses in today=s thinking from Highway Z, south to Raasch Hill Road, and on the east side from Sunnyview Road west six miles to the approximate center of the Marsh. The Town of Williamstown existed before the City of Mayville or the Village of Kekoskee and the City of Horicon. By 1848 Mayville was a city and Kekoskee stayed as part of Williamstown until it incorporated as a village in 1957. At the end of the fiscal year 1892, the Town has a balance of cash in hand in the amount of \$15.16. In 1893 the Town had a bridge fund and a poor farm fund. The minutes of the meetings really did not say that much. It was mostly paying bills then normal business was held.

H.W. Schellpfeffer became the chairman in 1893 and held the office until 1897. In 1897 Lorenze Rhodes became the chairman. The Town had no town hall. The meetings for the most part were in the clerk=s office or better known as the clerk=s home or George Engel=s office. There were not any large happenings as such.

The beginning of the new millennium started with August Bosin being the chairman until 1904, when Adolph Rhode took over, (Adolph Rhode lived on the corner of Hwy. Y and Main Street. I can remember Rhode=s house when I went to grade school, era 1940-49, we knew him as part of the Rhode-Kapelle Construction Company. They had apple trees on their property and the school kids could pick the apples that were on the ground. We also would roller skate down the sidewalk in front of their house and tear up their lawn where we tried to stop. Needless to say they were not too happy about that).

Most business was conducted at the annual meeting where the first order of business would be:

1. The polls would be open from 9-5:30. The annual town meetings were held on the same day of the Spring Election. This continued way into the 1970's, when the town meeting was held on the second Tuesday in April.
2. At 2:00 the clerk would read the annual report.
3. Transaction of such business that comes before the meeting. This included things like any pauper that claims the Town as his residence, but was no actual residence and no support by the Town shall be taken to the poor house. The poor house was in Juneau and apparently run by the County. The name @Poor House@ is sometimes used to this day. It was a place for people to live if they had no other residence. Now it would be Clearview at Juneau.

In 1892 a resolution was passed stating, @Whereas the excessive steepness of the so-called Marohl road (being west of Zwiig= bridge) makes it very dangerous and burdensome for teams (horses) passing up and down said hill with loads and whereas it could be greatly improved to the benefit of two-thirds of our Town=s men. Therefore one hundred dollars be appropriated out of the Town money to be expended in cutting down said hill, said work to be done during the months of May-June 1902. Rather interesting little resolution. By looking through the annual minutes, one could tell by the resolution to fix a certain road meant that the man making the resolution also lived on that road. Politics already.

Annual meetings were usually held in Burkhardt=s hall and the presumption is made that the voting took place there also. In 1911 a resolution was passed that no saloons could be opened within a mile of Mayville. The annual meetings were attended by more than one hundred people. Much different from today=s annual meetings. This was a place for all the town=s men to gather once a year. I imagine that Burkhardt=s hall was used for it was the only place large enough to have that many people at a gathering. Notice this was just for the town's men.

In 1913 a resolution was voted on to pay \$2.00 for eight hours per day highway labor. A total of \$770 for the improvement of the Kekoskee-Mayville Road was also passed. The road south of Mayville to Iron Ridge (called the Plank Road) was also passed. More roads were the Mayville-Theresa Road, and the Horicon Road all were allotted \$400 starting at Mayville and going as far as the money went.

In 1916 a special tax was raised for the Mayville-Fond du Lac Road, now known as Highway V.

This road was to be improved monthly as far as the funds were available. The Kekoskee-Mayville Road was the same.

In 1917 the Upper Horicon Road was improved. That road is now called Highway TW, south of Mayville.

Petitions were served to the Town of Williamstown from the City of Mayville and the Town of Hubbard calling the attention to the Town of the deplorable condition of the road from the City to Hubbard, and the Town should take some action to gravel and put the road in good shape.

Annual meetings usually were in Burkhardt=s Hall, and town board meetings sometimes were held in George Engel=s office, or the Rhode-Kapelle Office.

In 1921 the Town Board gave permission to Val Tschury to build a tavern and dance hall.

Leon Clark was the Town Chairman from 1926-1934. Authority was given in 1926 to build a new bridge in Kekoskee, by a vote of 50-3. Now we must remember that vote came from Williamstown, for Kekoskee was not incorporated.

Adolph Rhode again became the Chairman from 1934-1938.

Victor Mayer became chairman from 1938-1947. During this time the town residents voted to purchase a lot from Hugo Schwartzmiller for a town hall for \$150. The school building was located just south of the brick schoolhouse in Kekoskee. The building was moved by the Rhode Kapelle Co., who also made the cinder blocks to rest the building on. There wasn=t much they could not do. The building still stands there to this day. It is now a small home.

Armand Schaumburg became the town chairman in 1947 and held the position until 1959.

Hilbert Dobberpuhl was the chairman from 1959-1969.

Jerry Clark became chairman in 1969 and held that position until his death in 1988.

Roman Roll became chairman in 1988 and held that position until his death in 2000.

Vernon Brummond became chairman in 2000 and held that position until his death in 2004.

Don Hilgendorf became chairman in 2004 and holds that position as to date.

As far as I can tell Donald Roll was the longest sitting clerk, holding that position from 1971-2013, a period of 42 years. The clerk and treasurer have been put on referendums 3 times to make those two positions appointed ones. Having the clerk and treasurer being an elected position could put the Town in a very serious situation if we would have someone from the Town who is not capable to handle these positions.

The system was such that no one person could decide on things for the town. That is in effect to this day. The town board is made up of the chairman and two supervisors. These are the people that can decide most of the things that need to be done in the town.

The thirty-six square miles or thirty-six sections that was originally the town, has been deeply eroded. After removing the City of Mayville and the Village of Kekoskee, that leaves thirty-two sections and removing the marsh acreage or fifteen sections, leaves about seventeen sections that the town has jurisdiction over. A big difference from the original thirty-six.

From the time the town officially became a town, the elections of officers were done in a unique way that served the town very well over the years. One must remember that the town was mainly rural, communications were not that great, and traditionally a nice reunion was at a town function. The Town held a caucus in January of the odd numbered years. A caucus was a time when the candidates for the upcoming April election would be nominated. In order to get on the ballot a willing candidate would have someone nominated to the office. A second to the nomination would have to be made and the name was potentially ready to be put on the ballot. Many times another person would be nominated so that would make the Spring election. If a third candidate was nominated for an office, the members at the caucus would then vote as to whom the two candidates would be. Sometimes a group of people could stack the caucus so as to eliminate a candidate. After the caucus a lunch and free beer were set to be paid for by the winning candidates in the Spring Election. It wasn=t until the 1990's when it was decided by the residents to switch to nomination papers. The elections still take place in the odd numbered years.

Information from memory over my life time will probably cover more than the written history that was available. My early memories are living in the country and trying to tell people where we lived. It was always the first farm on the right, about one-half mile east of Kekoskee. The road had no name nor did we have any fire numbers. All directions to some place involved going by the number of miles or taking a turn

after the number of farms after something else. The County took over some of the main roads and gave them letter names. Blacktopping of the roads did not take place until the late 1940's or early 50's. The records did not tell us when the State or County Roads were laid out. The Horicon Road or Highway 28 was built originally going around the east side of the marsh. This six miles of road had six-ninety-degree curves in it. The road had its share of fatalities. It was way past its time before it was rebuilt.

Not everyone knows that the huge blast furnaces were right at the edge of Williamstown and Mayville. The blast furnaces were located in the area where Mayville Implement was located near Ernie Von Schledorn's car sales. I think many people remember the slag pile that was a part of the blast furnaces. The slag was a waste product that came from the making of iron out of iron ore and lime. The slag pile was later used as a small airport for a few people from the area owned planes. Years later it was used for putting a base under the railroad ties.

The marsh has had many changes over the years. At one time it was privately owned by the public, including many farmers. Another portion was owned by people that wanted it mainly for hunting purposes. A dam was installed at Horicon to dam up the water so the marsh was then known as Lake Horicon. Barges containing grain were hauled to Kekoskee to have it ground into flour. The mill in Kekoskee was run by water power from the dam that still exists to this day. The mill continued to grind grain into the 1940's. I can remember when the mill was used for farmers to grind the corn and oats for them and then put it into bags so they could feed it to their cows. Later the mill was removed and the tavern was remodel. Now Lechners use the water wheel to produce electricity.

After some years the marsh was again drained and became the Horicon Marsh once again. There were several court battles to finally settle the argument whether to be marsh or lake. All that was solved when the State and Federal purchased the land. The State wanted the entire marsh, but found out the resources for purchasing it were not there. The Federal government purchased the northern two-thirds of it and has jurisdiction over that portion. Many farmers lost good producing land through the threat of condemnation. Good land was purchased for forty-dollars an acre.

With two entities owning and controlling the marsh has made for some unusual happenings. The State allows hunting and fishing on their portion, while the Federal does not. Some years the Federal will allow hunting. Both the State and Federal continue to purchase more land as it becomes available.

In the 1950's the Rock River was abundant with many species of fish, the greatest number being carp. In winter people were allowed to actually use a dip net to catch the carp. It was nothing for a person to harvest a pickup load and haul it to Kekoskee where a large truck was available for the fishermen to sell the carp. If I remember correctly, the fishermen would receive about fifteen dollars for each load. To catch the carp, the men would cut a hole in the ice about five feet square. They would then have a dip net about four feet square which they placed in the hole. When they thought they had carp swimming through they would lift the net and capture the carp.

It was also in the 1950's that the upper pond in Kekoskee was drained. Some vast amounts of fish were found including a large gold fish, which was kept in a water tank in Eddie Lechner's tavern basement. People would fish mainly for bullheads above the dam and mainly for northern pikes below the dam. Every spring the carp would want to climb the dam for spawning purposes.

The Villwock Bridge on Dike Road and the Dohrman Bridge on Dohrman Road were originally the tall overhead braced type bridges. The bridges were narrow and could not allow two cars to meet on the bridges. Bridge inspections over the years resulted in the bridges not being safe to carry the weight. Both bridges were replaced in the 1970's and 1980's with the help of the Federal, State and Local governments. The Town has never had a large tax base due too much land being in the marsh. Roads were blacktopped when money was available. Usually one major town road would be blacktopped every year.

In 1996 a new contract was reached with the Superior Glacier Ridge Landfill. This agreement had Superior pay a host fee for all garbage that went into the landfill. This had a large impact on the Town. The Town has been able to maintain the roads and blacktop others.

A new town hall was built in 2001. This new building at last allows a comfortable atmosphere. The old hall did not have any plumbing and was an old schoolhouse that was probably built around the early 1900's. There is nothing in the records that states when the building was built.

