

PORTAGE COUNTY POOR FARM CEMETERY REINSTATED

By: Alice Loberg

The old Portage County Poor Farm cemetery has been reinstated. Located north of Lake Emily, the one acre lot is now surrounded by a chain link fence. Fabyan Wysocki, chairman of the Portage County Conservation Committee, said that a marker will be installed, the marker to be donated by the Haertel Monument Company, Stevens Point. He also said plans are underway for an additional marker, identifying the 23 known persons buried there with birth and death dates. "It is hoped," he said, "that the County will set aside a designated amount of money for perpetual care."

The cemetery, adjacent to the "Poor Farm" had been abandoned and plowed into a corn field. Wayne and Alta Guyant, Waupaca, of the Wisconsin Old Cemetery Association, have been very active in researching

old cemeteries. Investigating this plot, they found no signs of markers. One marker had found its way to the home of Aileen Alm in Nelsonville. A counselor from a nearby Boy's Camp, found it and delivered it to the Alm residence. It said "Phebe Wing Quimby, born July 21, 1872, died Dec. 10, 1911." Guyant is North Central Regional Director of the Old Cemetery Association and Mrs. Guyant is Waupaca County Coordinator. They have recorded all known burials in the cemetery from court house records.

The Portage County Farm became known as the "Poor Farm". It was originated in 1900 and for many years was a productive thriving business.

In 1918 the County Poor Farm consisted of 400 acres with 160 under cultivation. There were 45 cows and 15 hogs. H.A. Kankrud was superintendent at that time, and a quote from Portage County History said, "... a

thrifty producer and a credit to all concerned in the management. It's operation also tends to conserve the good health of all the inmates of the Home, who otherwise might be real charges upon the County". Inmates, who were able, contributed to work on the farm.

Pigs were raised for pork, the receipts of dairy products above the consumption of the Poor Farm inhabitants amounted to more than \$1,300. During the year 1918, \$3,118 had been received from potato sales, with 1,000 bushels unmarketed. During the season, 2,000 bushels of oats of such fine quality that after some of the grain had been exhibited at the County Fair, 1,000 were sold to various firms for seed. The County Farm raised fine crops of forage, four acres of the land given to common alfalfa and a smaller tract of the Grimm variety clover and mixed hay were cultivated.

Meetings were held at the Farm during those years. The Amherst-Nelsonville Cow Testing Association was held there on August 8, 1918. The program opened with numbers by the high school orchestra, state senator Everett Roene, and editor of the Wisconsin Farmer, Professor Delzell of the Stevens Point Normal and U.S. Senator Wilcox were speakers.

Maynard Nelson, a frequent visitor at the home during those years recalls that one winter night during a howling blizzard, Dr. George Dusenbury was called to attend to the needs of an ailing inmate. As he left the room, he complained of having to get out on such a night. Fred Stubbs, an inmate said, "Well, Doc, if you had saved your money like us guys did, you wouldn't have to get out on such a night."

It all came to an end, however, on the morning of Feb. 15, 1920, when "the large brick building on the County Farm was practically destroyed by fire". When Kankrud discovered the fire, flames were shooting through the roof. There were 18 old people housed in the structure, three of whom were bedridden, all upstairs. They were all evacuated safely and taken to an old frame structure nearby, which was originally the farm house, until they could be placed in "more comfortable circumstances."

"The inmates were then moved to the Amherst Junction Village Hall and other convenient warm places. Here they were served food by the ladies of the village and the best care given them. Dr. Dusenbury, the Home physician, was present to render such medical aid as was necessary. The old people are still quartered in Amherst Junction (as of Feb. 20, 1920) and probably will be for a time to come."

The County Board decided not to rebuild the Home. The decision was made in April when "... the County Board decided it inadvisable to build at the present time, as it would cost better than \$30,000 to replace the burned structure. To rebuild within the walls standing it was estimated, would cost over \$25,000, and this without the installation of a lighting system."

A committee consisting of V.P. Atwell, M. Mersch, Stevens Point and in conjunction with the County Farm committee, sold the north half of the

farm about 220 acres. This included the buildings left standing on the farm. The gravel pit along the Soo Line right of way was retained as well as all land south of the Soo Line tracks, and in case new buildings were erected they will be constructed on a new site to be chosen later."

A resolution was passed that all

towns, villages and cities be required to care for their charges until such time as a home would again be built for them in the County.

The Portage County Home in Stevens Point was built in 1931.

Ernest Ostrowski now farms the old Poor Farm land near Lake Emily. He bought the land in about 1945.

A Pretty Residence Street, Amherst, Wis.



Christ Halvorson's home on Mill Street. Picture taken around 1910.

ANNOUNCEMENT:
CLYDE'S COFFEE CUP

Amherst

Now under new management
New menu coming soon.



Bring this ad in for FREE coffee
and a doughnut
and give us your ideas
on how we
can serve you
better.

ATTENTION
HUNTERS
We'll be open
at 5 AM
weekends
during deer
season