

The Early Years

In the 1860 Stockton Census most every head of household is listed as a farmer. Malcolm Rosholt in his book Our County Our Story states “ The majority of the earliest Yankee settlers as well as some of the newcomers from Europe were not farmers by profession, but by choice, who were to learn the art of farming by experiment.” Turning the soil for the first time was difficult. Many of the settlers from the East were not accustomed to such hard labor and in time had moved on. As the migration continued others took up residence in their place.

The natural terrain in Stockton alternates between flat prairie fields, hilly ranges known as the east and west bluffs as well as other, at times breathtaking, glacial remains scattered throughout the town. Rosholt further states, “The main crop across the southern townships in the 1850’s and into the mid- 1860’s was wheat followed by oats, barley and corn, but a little rye.” Although most farmers had a few cows, grew some potatoes along with a scant supply of turnips and beans for their personal use, dairy farming and selling potatoes as a cash crop did not happen until much later.

Some farmers raised sheep and were able to sell the wool for cash. But after the Civil War the demand for wool decreased some. Rosholt found the Waupaca Woolen Mill’s advertisement in the Pinery Newspaper for purchasing wool as well as making specific items for customers on request.

One interesting crop grown by numerous farmers during those years was Hops. Hops are the dried ripe flower cluster of the hop vine, used to flavor beer and other malt drinks. The vine was trained to wind around a pole as it grew. Rosholt writes “The development of the hop industry spread rapidly throughout most of the county and farmers hurried to build hop houses where the green flower of the hop vine could be dried. The hop house was actually a form of kiln.”

The Stevens Point Journal also informs us as to how the hops were harvested. An article found in the September 12, 1874 newspaper reads:

Did you ever see them pick hops? No? Well this is the way it is done. A large box, divided into four apartments is made. Each apartment holds seven bushels. The pickers are usually divided into gangs of four. A man or stout boy cuts the vines a short distance from the ground, pulls the poles out and carries them to the boxes. Here they are stripped by the pickers, each one of whom has his or her apartment in the big box. The poles are then stacked. The price being paid this year for filling one of those boxes, or picking seven bushels of hops is twenty cents and board, or thirty cents is the picker boards herself. When the hops yield well, a fair picker can probably average three or four boxes per day. An extra good one can do some better. There are about forty pickers at work in Mr. Clements’ yard, who are probably averaging about fifty cents per day each, and board. The work is light and gives remunerative employment to a large number of children who are not able to do much else, as well as grown up girls. The latter usually prefer hop picking to housework, as they get better pay for it and do not have to work so many hours. Besides, the opportunity to trip the “light fantastic toe” which is given them each evening by the proprietors of many of the yards, is something that is never lost sight of the to feminine hop-picker.

The writer of this article is referring to D. R. Clements farm of Stockton. The farm, consisting of a total of 480 acres, was visited during that harvesting season. The D. R. Clements farm was located in Sections 30 and 31 along today's Highway 10 (south side) and County J (west side) a little south of the town's northern boundary.

Rosholt writes, "Many hop houses were built with a lean-to on the side where a dance floor was provided and here every night, the young people gathered and danced, usually to the tune of a fiddle or two. This was the famed hop dance; actually a form of the square dance, and apparently out of this developed the "hop waltz" favored by the Polish people of Sharon.

In the early 1870's the hop louse, active in the western states in the 1860's, finally made its way into southern Wisconsin and spread northward. As there was no insecticide to combat this insect, which made the flower of the vine wither, hop raising declined rapidly after 1880."

Sue Stremkowski – 2005