

Portland Prairie - the Early Days

The first settlers to locate in the neighborhood of Portland Prairie appear to have been Freeman Graves, Everett brothers, George Carver, John Edger, Mrs. Jas. Robinson with her sons and daughters, and besides these there were a few other who did not remain long in the country. Freeman Graves was a native of Vermont, born July 10, 1809. He moved to St. Lawrence County, N.Y., where he married Betsey Billings February 6, 1833. He came to Wisconsin in 1846 and located in Columbia County, from which section of the state he came to the place of his settlement, Section 34, Winnebago township, March 15, 1851. After the government survey of the state line in 1852 he found that the most of the land he had selected lay on the Iowa side of it. He spent the remainder of a long life on his farm and ten children were born to the family.

James Robinson was a native of Antrim County, Ireland, born in 1797 and died in 1841. We do not know in what year the family came to America, but in 1845 Mrs. Robinson and family settled in Columbia County, Wis. In 1851 the family located on what is still known as the Robinson place on the southern border of Portland Prairie and on the Iowa side of the state line. Four sons in the family were named William, Henry, George and John. William only was old enough to make entry on the claim. The Fourth of July was observed by raising a log cabin, which in later years gave place to a commodious framed house. Another early settler was John Coil who located south of the Robinson place.

John Edger and three other Irishmen located in Section 32, Wilmington township, in 1852, where Edger broke 23 acres, but he soon moved his location to the southeast corner of Section 36 where he built a log cabin about 14 by 16 feet. None of the party remained long in the township ere they sold their holdings and left.

George Carver settled some distance to the south of where Eitzen now is, in 1852, and on the Iowa side of the state line. He was a native of the state of New York, born January 24, 1814. The sons of Col. Josiah Everett, as he was called, also settled on the Iowa side of the state line. The sons were named Josiah, Andrew, Franklin, Benaiah, and

Seth. Two daughters of the family were named Orra and Lucy. Some of the sons had settled first in Wisconsin, and came to what became known as the "Everett neighborhood" about 1853-4. All of the family were from about New Portland, Maine, a village about eighty miles north of the city of Portland. Possibly the Everetts gave to Portland Prairie the name that has come down from settlement days.

The first of the Norwegian settlers to locate in Wilmington township came as early as 1853. It was about that time that the government survey of the county was made to establish the corners of sections and quarter-sections. A land office soon afterwards was opened at Brownsville. The earlier settlers had to get their mail at Lansing, Iowa, or bring it out for several families.

In those years some small fragments of the Winnebago tribe of Indians lingered along the Iowa River and Mississippi bottoms, and small groups of them occasionally appeared at the cabins of the settlers to beg food or old clothing or to barter game for what they needed. An old Indian trail from the Iowa to Root river followed the watershed of the prairie and passed around the point of the ridge in its course northwesterly, keeping as conveniently as possible to high ground. The first road struck out across the prairie essentially followed the course already marked by the old trail. -

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