CHAPTER XVII

PITTSVILLE

Pittsville, an incorporated city, with three wards, is located on Yellow River, and on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, in Sections 25 and 34, Wood Township. It is 18 miles northwest of Wisconsin Rapids and has a population of about six hundred. The city lies in the heart of the clover belt and of the corn silo, and is in the exact center of the state as designated by Wisconsin University. The soil in the vicinity is a variety of clay loam and is especially adapted to the raising of small grains, corn, potatoes and clover seed, and crop failures are practically unknown. Improved farm land in the vicinity are worth from $90 to $150 an acre and unimproved land may be obtained at from $20 to $25 an acre.

Pittsville has three churches of different denominations, a well organized bank, two lumber yards, a farmers' co-operative cheese factory, a creamery, a grist mill, a Heintz salting station and a potato and cabbage warehouse; also three general stores, two grocery stores, a millinery, two hardware and implement companies, three garages, three hotels, an eight thousand dollar theatre, a good drug store which also keeps a stock of the most popular magazines, three restaurants, a shoe shop and other business houses some of which will be more specifically mentioned.

There is a good high school and two parochial schools, one Catholic and the other Evangelical Lutheran, the Catholic School being a large building which cost $35,000. A weekly newspaper, the Pittsville Record, is published here, and four or five fraternal societies have lodges or camps in the city. The city can also boast of a brass and reed band of 45 pieces, for which a large band stand has been provided. The roads passing through are well constructed and cement sidewalks are the rule. The water supply is obtained from wells. The principal shipments are farm products, lumber and wood.

Pittsville was named after the Pitts family, who were the first settlers in the locality. A letter from Mrs. Susie E. Niles, of Friendship, Wis., to the editor of the Pittsville Record, dated Oct. 24, 1921, contains this information in the following words: “My parents, Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Wright Pitts, were the first of that name to settle in that part of the wilderness which is now your thriving burg. J. Wright Robinson, World War soldier, well known in your vicinity, is his grandson and namesake. Following him, in the fall of 1858, came my grandfather, Luke Noble Pitts, bringing his family, among them, Luke William Pitts, who recently died in Buckley, Wash. The two families lived together in a huge barn-like structure which stood on the bank of the river in the southern part of your town not very far from your printing office. This big comfortable house it boasted two fireplaces—was used as a stopping place for the pinery men coming up from as far below as the mouth of Yellow River, and before the War of the Rebellion the place was known to them all as ‘Pitts' Mill.’ (See biog. of Joseph Robinson). The transition from ‘Pitts' Mill’ to ‘Pittsville’ was an easy one, and probably occurred as soon as the place assumed the appearance of a village.
Oliver W. Pitts and family arrived here in 1856, and for two years Oliver ran a saw mill. The father, Luke Noble Pitts, soon afterwards bought the mill property and also considerable land in the vicinity. When he, with his wife Louisa and family arrived on the site of Pittsville in 1858 the only people then here were Oliver W. Pitts and wife, Wallace Potter, William Baker and Elijah Vroom. J. Q. Severn had resided here for several years but had gone away and had not yet returned, and L. A. Houston lived some three miles south.

Another member of the Pitts family was Thomas Woolcott Pitts, born in Springfield, Bradford County, Penn., Feb. 17, 1844, son of Oliver Wright Pitts. He accompanied his parents to this place and subsequently became a lumber manufacturer in Pittsville. In 1859 he taught the first school ever taught in the town of Wood. In 1867 he married Susie M. Edic, previously of Waukegan, Ill. He owned a large farm, also timber lands, mill property and village lots in Pittsville, and served in various public offices, such as town clerk and justice of the peace. He was also postmaster of Pittsville for some years, taking that office in 1877.

Luke W. Pitts, with his brother Oliver W. (born in 1831) built a shingle mill which, after having conducted it for several years, he sold to A. J. Webster & Co. of Menasha. He also in 1876, built a hotel, which he conducted for a number of years, and was engaged in lumbering and farming. In 1874 he married Mary E. Reed of Necedah, Wis. After the breaking out of the Civil War Thomas, John and Oliver Pitts enlisted in the army, and John, who was in the "Iron Brigade," died of wounds received at the battle of Chancellorsville. Thomas and Oliver served in the Eighteenth Wisconsin Regiment, being members of Company G.

The real life of the community began about forty years ago, at which time some mills were erected for the manufacture of hardwood lumber. The hardwood manufactured being cut into barrel, wagon and beer keg stock. There was never much pine in the vicinity, though some was cut and floated down the Yellow River to Kilbourn, Germantown, and Necedah, where for the most part it was manufactured. There were one or two small mills near Pittsville, however, which for a while turned out a little pine lumber.

L. A. Houston built a steam saw mill a mile or more south of Pittsville for a man named Hurlburt, and soon after that he bought a saw mill three miles south of Pittsville and operated it by water power. The hub and spoke factory of A. J. Webster & Co., was operated by Mr. Webster for about ten years, at the end of which time he sold out to his employees, among them his brother, also R. H. Boynton, Joseph Kraus, L. W. Pitts, Jr., and a son of Mr. Boynton. They failed, however, to make a success of the mill and soon went out of business. About that time there were two firms engaged in the manufacture of barrel stock, one being the firm of Doud, Son & Co., and the other Harmon & Son. Both operated for a number of years or until the timber was exhausted, when they moved away.

The first store in Pittsville was kept by a man named Goodsell, who sold out to Thomas W. Pitts. A store was started in 1878 by A. B. Cotev, in partnership with George A. Coniveau, and was carried on by them together until 1881, when Mr. Cotev bought out his partner. After that he conducted the store alone until 1902, when he sold out. He was again in mercantile business in Pittsville from 1908 to 1912.
Charles Houston, son of L. A. Houston, entered mercantile business here in 1879, his general stock including drugs and medicines, so that he was the first druggist in town. His brother Thomas was associated with him. They met with ill success, however, and in March, 1885, their stock of merchandise was sold at sheriff’s sale, and was bought in by P. N. Christensen, who rented the building of Charles Houston, the latter still holding possession of it until Mr. Christensen could put his own. The latter was a two-story double store on the corner of Second and Main Streets, which was a better location, in fact, the best for that business in town. Mr. Christensen remained in Mr. Houston’s building until about July 4, 1886, holding a great Fourth of July celebration in his building that year, free for all the surrounding country, and gaining a big trade by it. Mr. Christensen remained in business in Pittsville until 1888, when he quit, selling his stock to Frank Hiles, and later selling the building to Leslie L. Doud. Hiles became partner with a man named Armstrong who conducted the business for him.

The railroad, constructed about 1883, gave an impetus to the growth of the village.

In 1880 Charles Heuer came to Pittsville from Milwaukee and opened a general store, the stock of which included drugs, and which he conducted for ten years, or until 1890. He then bought out the hardware store of L. L. Doud, and established the Pittsville Hardware Company, Inc., with which he is still connected.

The R. B. Salter & Sons’ general store was established by Richard B. Salter in 1908, he having previously, in 1904, been one of the organizers of the Pittsville State Bank. The first harness shop in Pittsville was established in March, 1888, by Carl A. Ludewig, who came here from Juneau County. It was he who erected the Ludewig Hardware Building, which he had for his shop 33 years, subsequently enlarging the building by establishing a department of hardware and farm implements, and later building a garage. In 1899 Charles J. Schriner opened the shoe shop he is still conducting. The flour and feed mill operated since 1910 by Joseph Tyeski was previously owned and conducted by George Schlagel, who built it about 1890.

The site of Pittsville was surveyed March 31, 1883, by H. W. Remington, under the direction of George Hiles, of Dexterville, and Lawrence Ward, of Pittsville, and it was recorded July 12, 1883. The site was described as the southwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 27, and the north half of the northwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 34, Town 23 N., Range 3 E. In 1886 Pittsville was incorporated as a village, and in 1887 as a city. Mound Cemetery was laid out by order of the city, the survey being recorded Jan. 28, 1896. It lies in Section 27.

The Pittsville Independent, a Democratic weekly newspaper, was started in 1883 by C. H. Clark. Having made himself unpopular at the end of a few months Mr. Clark disposed of the paper to F. S. Woodworth and M. P. Pomeroy, who published it for several years under the firm name of Woodworth & Pomeroy. The available records show that in 1887 the publishers were the Western Wood County Association, with A. E. Germer as editor, and under this title and management the paper was continued until 1891 or 1892. After that no paper seems to have been published in Pittsville for four or five years until the Yellow River Pilot appeared about 1898-99, with James R. Howe as proprietor. This was a Democratic weekly like the Independent. A year or two afterwards the Pilot
came under control of H. H. Dunn, who made it Republican in politics. In 1901 it was published by Pitt Bros., being still a Republican weekly, and its home remained in Pittsville until 1904, when it was merged with the Wood County Times and moved to Neenah, where it was published as the Wood County Times and Yellow River Pilot by P. O. Winther. Then in 1909 C. E. McKeel bought the subscription lists of the Yellow River Pilot and established the Pittsville Record, a weekly, eight-page, six-column paper, which is still flourishing under Mr. McKeel's management and editorship, its circulation extending throughout the west end of the county, in which field it has no rivals. Politically it belongs in the Independent Republican class, and a good job printing-office is run in connection with it.

Some copies of the Pittsville Independent as it was 35 years ago are still in existence. One bearing the date of Oct. 5, 1887, carried advertisements of the the following mentioned business firms: P. N. Christenson & Bro., general store; Doud, Son & Co., general store, C. V. Doud & Son, general store (C. V. Doud being a cousin of Roscoe Doud of the firm of Doud, Son & Co.); McConnell Sisters, millinery; A. B. Cotev, general merchandise with dry goods emphasized; M. J. McRaith, merchant tailor; City Drug Store, conducted by Dr. M. B. Wood and E. W. Ring; W. E. Little, watch and clock dealer and repairer; William A. Dawes, boots and shoes; Pittsville market conducted by C. E. Compton, which stated that he kept fish every Friday; Chet Doud, livery; Warren Johnson, flour, butter and eggs and William Smith and S. T. Young, saloons. The same issue advertised Catholic services for the second Sunday in each month, conducted by Father Beyerle and Congregational Church services by the Rev. Mr. Campbell. There was also a notice of J. S. Alban Post, No. 73, G. A. R., which post has since died out. Hiles & Ward advertised 10,000 acres of land for sale at $2.50 to $6.00 an acre, on a small payment down and the balance in yearly installments of wood delivered on the W. P. & S. Railway. Dr. W. H. Packard, dentist, had a brief notice, as also had the Johnson House, Henry Johnson, proprietor. The issue of the Independent for Oct. 17, 1889 showed in addition to some of the business men previously mentioned, that C. A. Ludewig had a harness shop, Dr. A. B. Crawford was practicing dentistry, and that the City Drug Store was being conducted by Dr. M. B. Wood, Mr. Ring's name not being mentioned. This store subsequently burned down.

When L. A. Houston was conducting his mill south of the village, he also ran a blacksmith shop in connection with it, but the first blacksmith in the village was John Landford, who set up his shop about 1881 or 1882. When the mills were in operation Pittsville had no less than seven stores and there were some large lumber yards and barns here.

At an early day one post office sufficed for both Dexterville and Pittsville, and it was kept at the home of L. A. Houston, which was between the two places. Later the Pittsville Post Office was established. Among the early postmasters were Thomas W. Pitts and J. P. Horton. In 1885 P. S. Woodworth succeeded Mr. Horton and served for about ten years. He was succeeded by Sara Baum, whose successor, L. J. Palmer, served until the present postmaster, Thomas J. Crowley, took over the office in August, 1920, having been appointed in March, that year. The Pittsville office is now one of the third class, and there are two rural routes.
In 1904 Sam N. Baum built a creamery, which he operated until April 15, 1912, when he sold it to John Maxwell. When he first started he made only three tubs of butter a week, but before he sold out he was making 250 tubs. He had five teams with which he hauled cream from the farmers in Clark, Jackson and Wood counties. His factory was located in the north end of town near the schoolhouse. Mr. Maxwell did not operate the factory but sold it to Trossen Bros., who sold out Aug. 1, 1910 to Fred G. and E. W. Speich, who established the Pittsville Creamery which is still in operation. The two brothers conducted it until November, 1918, when it burned down. Fred G. Speich then took over the business and rented a small building, which he enlarged by an addition of 20 feet. In 1921 he made it 14 feet wider and added one story to the building, and is now planning a further addition of one story, which will increase the length of the lower story by 40 feet in the fall of 1922. During the past year the business has doubled and he has no about 250 patrons among the farmers, to whom he sells separators.

The Farmers' Co-operative Society established a cheese factory in Pittsville in August, 1919, with Harry Huebner as cheese maker. In March, 1920, Mr. Huebner was succeeded by the present operator, Joseph Sternot. The present secretary is Anton Kliefgan, of Pittsville.

The Pittsville Telephone was started in 1902 by the Telephone Toll Line Co. of Wood County, of which J. H. Gaynor was superintendent. Lines were built from Grand Rapids to Marshfield and Pittsville, and from the latter place to Babcock and Bethel. After conducting the enterprise for four or five years and not being able to make it pay, the company sold the toll line between Grand Rapids and Marshfield, the service being suspended for a week during negotiations. What remained was purchased by George J. Favell, the present owner, who has extended the lines through several districts including Dexterville and Veedum. He operates 72 or 73 miles of pole wires, and has about 65 local phones and 150 rural.

The Pittsville State Bank was founded in January, 1904 with the following officers; president, John F. Sims; vice president, W. B. Jansen; cashier, T. S. Saby; the capital was $10,000. At the time of organization they located in the frame structure now occupied by Thomas M. Cleary; the present quarters consist of a one story brick structure which they erected in 1910, located just north of the Salter Mercantile Store. The officers now are: president, John F. Sims; vice president, G. H. Salter; cashier, J. F. Seidl; Asst. Cashier, Grace McNeal. In 1917 the capitalization was increased to $15,000 and a surplus of $5500 was established. One of the principal aims of the institution is to make available sound investments for farmers.

Catholic services were held in Pittsville as early as 1879, since which time a parish has grown up known as St. Joachim’s, including a fine church edifice and school, (see Chapter on the Catholic Church in Wood County).

The Congregational Church of Pittsville was organized June 26, 1881. The Rev. J. S. Norris of Grand Rapids first visited Pittsville in the fall of 1880 and held meetings occasionally until the following spring, when a series of revival meetings were held, and after those he held meetings regularly until the time of organization of the church, when Stowe Sawyer was engaged to occupy the pulpit for three months under the auspices of the Home Missionary Society. The first officers were: D. B. Lowell and J. C. Dawes, Deacons; Mrs. S. O. Boynton, treasurer;
J. Ralph Boynton, clerk. The fourteen charter members held meetings at the Hammel School House, Coteys Hall, and Websters Hall, until the erection of a church building about 1888; this was a frame building 30x50x16 facing First Avenue and cost about one thousand dollars to erect. Nov. 8, 1914 at 2 A. M. this building was burned to the ground. It was the morning of the day that a Temperance program was to have been given by the Sunday School. No certain cause for the fire could be assigned. The present church, a structure about 50x50 made of concrete blocks and facing Second Avenue was built in 1915 at an approximate expense of $3,500. The following have served as pastors, subsequent to the Rev. Sawyer’s service: Nov. 1881, Dr. J. A. Brown; Aug. 1885, Rev. J. F. Guyton Aug. 1886, Rev. D. A. Campbell; Jan. 1890, Rev. D. H. Richie; Dec. 1891, Rev. Chevis; April 1893, Rev. Thomas Barker; Sept. 1896, Rev. A. A. Martin; June, 1899, Rev. W. D. Stevenson; June, 1902, Miss Brown and Miss Harlow; Dec. 1908, Rev. Thomas Hoffman; Jan. 1911, Rev. Klein; April, 1912, Rev. Wm. Vater; Aug. 1914, Rev. Samuel Bullough; Aug. 1918, Rev. Vaughn; Sept. 1920, Rev. F. H. Spies, the present pastor. There were periods of months when the church was without a pastor, but for no length of time were services discontinued. The membership at one time reached the hundred mark, but gradually decreased as the families began moving away from the Pittsville vicinity in search of other employment after the shutting down of the saw mills here. The membership at present is twenty-five, although the average attendance for the year past was 85. The Sunday School has an enrollment of eighty. The Ladies’ Aid Society numbers twenty-six.

Evangelical Lutheran St. John’s Church, Missouri Synod, of Pittsville. This society was organized with 24 members, Oct. 14, 1888, under direction of Rev. W. Knuf, a missionary pastor. Services were held here every three or four weeks. Mr. Knuf having other congregations to attend to. In 1892 the society was incorporated, the articles being dated June 6, and signed by Freidrich Lipke, William Schiller and Christ Runo. The first elders (1888 to 1891) were Gottfried Sowatzki, Friedrich Bunge and Andreas Protz; the trustees, William Schiller, Christoff Runo and Fred Keip. On Aug. 26, 1892 bought a lot for a building, the latter being erected soon after. It was a small frame structure and was used for church services, and also as a school, until 1908, when the present brick church edifice was built. Since that time the frame building has been used for parochial school purposes. It is situated about 200 yards north of the church. The brick edifice, which cost about $9,000, has a seating capacity of between 300 and 400. The parish now contains 365 souls, including 50 voting members. There is a well organized Ladies’ Aid Society. The school has an enrollment of 25. The church services are held in the German language, the school being taught in German and English. The first regular pastor was the Rev. H. Maack. The present pastor, Rev. G. Dobratz, assumed charge in 1914.

The Pittsville High School, including the eight grades, in the school year of 1921-22, had an average enrollment of 184. There were six teachers, with J. R. Kalhoun principal. The school officers were G. W. Severns, Verne McCoy and C. A. Salter. The school is under county jurisdiction.

The fraternal societies having lodges or meeting places in Pittsville, are the
Masons, Odd Fellows, Modern Woodmen of America, Beavers, and the American Legion.

Pittsville Lodge, No. 232, F. & A. M., has been domiciled here for 36 years, its charter being dated June 9, 1886. It started with nine charter members, namely: Myron F. Hubbard, Simon W. Bailey, Peter N. Christensen, Virgil B. Webster, Irwin H. Germond, Samuel T. Young, Frank W. Cotanch, Byron R. Tarbox and D. Lakeman Gill. The first officers were: Myron F. Hubbard, W. M.; Simon W. Bailey, S. W.; Peter N. Christensen, J. W. The lodge now has 61 members and is in a flourishing condition. It owns its own buildings and holds meetings the first and third Thursdays of each month.

Lodge No. 28, I. O. O. F., was established in 1888. It also owns its own building, which was erected in 1904. It has now 36 members. Louisa Lodge of Rebecca's, No. 86, was organized June 7, 1893.

Rock Run Camp, No. 1924, M. W. A., was organized March 1, 1893 with 14 charter members. Its membership has since increased to 49. There was also a camp of Royal Neighbors here, which was transferred to Veedum.

Colony No. 688 of Beavers was established April 2, 1915, with 42 charter members. Its membership has since diminished, as it now has but 17.

Palmer Post of the American Legion, District of Wisconsin, No. 276, was organized with 15 charter members June 14, 1920. The post was named after Harry Palmer, who was killed in France.