CHAPTER XIX

ARPIN

The village of Arpin, with a population of 350, is located in Section 21, Town 24 north, Range 4 east, or in the congressional township of Arpin. It is on three railroads: the Chicago & Northwestern, the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie, commonly known as the “Soo,” and the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul.

The village, like the township, was named after the twin brothers, John B. and Antoine Arpin, who came to Wisconsin from the Province of Quebec, Canada, and in the early sixties were interested in logging on Yellow River. In 1879 John B. Arpin began logging on the upper Wisconsin River, he and P. B. Champaigne, of Merrill, Wis., purchasing a large tract of land from the Francis X. Biron estate. He also operated in other parts of Wood County.

In 1890 he, with his sons Daniel J. and Edmund P., organized the John Arpin Lumber Company. At that time the Sherry-Cameron Company owned a two-thirds interest in a large tract of timber land at Arpin, which the John Arpin Company bought. They built a sawmill at Arpin, which they operated until 1904, in which year they quit business there, selling their interests to Bert Gaffney.

It was John B. and Antoine Arpin who created the village, which was first located about a mile east of the present site. They made a pond as a reservoir for logs and built their mill on the east side of it. Byron Whittington operated a store and built some houses on the road north of the pond, while W. H. Damerow established a creamery between the road and the pond and soon had 50 patrons, making daily about 250 pounds of choice butter, which he sold to the Puerner Creamery Company of Marshfield. After two years, however, he gave it up.

When the Wisconsin Central Railway (now the “Soo”) penetrated Wood County in 1890 they missed the village by three-fourths of a mile, but built a little depot at the crossing of the highway leading to it. Later, in 1901, the Chicago & Northwestern built their road, parallel to that of the “Soo” and close to it.

In the meanwhile Martin Pyle had laid out another Arpin farther down the line, about a mile or more south, and just east of the tracks. There he put up a store and cheese factory. Then a saloon was built and opened in “Martin’s Town,” and more people moved in. For a while it looked as though the location selected by Mr. Pyle might prove to be the permanent site of the village, but the people near the depots were not idle. Another town was platted, west of the railroad, and a store, saloon and blacksmith’s shop built. The fertility of the soil had attracted a number of people to the vicinity, and they favored the third site as being near the depots, which caused those who had settled in the other locations to move in closer and has resulted in the development of the present village.

There has been no plat recorded of the original site of the village. The first plat recorded is that of Moffatt’s Addition, which was surveyed by G. W. Severns, county surveyor, and was certified June 1, 1917. The addition is described as “all that part of the southwest quarter of Section 21, Town 24 north, Range 4 east,
as shown on map.” It consists of ten blocks in the west part of town (modern village) and was surveyed by John Moffatt.

A smaller addition to the village, known as the East Side Addition, as it lies east of the railroad, was surveyed and platted by Warren Severns by direction of Albert M. Stondall, owner, and was subscribed and sworn to Feb. 27, 1918. One or two other additions have since been made, though not recorded. The village has now a population of about 350.

Martin Pfyle, who has been mentioned as having conducted a cheese factory a mile south of the modern Arpin, subsequently sold it to the farmers, by whom it was conducted for awhile on the co-operative plan, or until the summer of 1920, when it was sold to August Busse, its present proprietor.

On the original site of Arpin, east of the railroad, a post office has been established in 1890, and J. Z. Arpin was postmaster for four years, when the office was taken by Bert Gaffney, now a resident of Biron, who conducted it for about ten years. Byron Whittingham, who moved his store to the new village, took the post office in or about the year 1905 and was postmaster for ten years. He was succeeded by John Loschky, who handled the mails until November, 1921, when the present postmaster, H. F. Roehrig, took charge.

On May 6, 1914, the Dairymen’s State Bank of Arpin was established, the first officers being: C. E. Blodgett, president; J. T. Holland, vice president, and Charles R. Setzkorn, cashier. The original stockholders numbered about a dozen. The bank was capitalized at $10,000, and started with a surplus of $2,500, which has since grown to $9,000. The deposits on July 1, 1922, were over $125,000. For about a year and a half after starting, the bank occupied temporary quarters in a small frame building, at the end of which time the neat and substantial building now occupied was erected. The original officers are still serving.

In 1902 a Presbyterian congregation was gathered together and erected a frame church building in the old or original village of Arpin, among the first members being Robert Morris and C. E. Edwards. The first pastor was the Rev. Mr. Agnew. By 1917 the congregation had become strong enough to erect a substantial brick building in the modern village, it costing between $6,000 and $8,000. This was accomplished under the pastorate of Rev. A. H. Anderson. Since he left, the church has been supplied by several pastors, chiefly theological students. The present pastor, the Rev. Paul Wright, took charge May 12, 1922, and also serves the church at Sherry. The congregation now has about 75 members, and the Sunday school, which has been maintained from the beginning, has an enrollment of about 50. There are also an active Ladies’ Aid Society and a Christian Endeavor Society. Church services are held once a week, and during the last three summers a daily vacation bible school has been held and proved a great success, having an average attendance of 30.

Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Church of Arpin.—This congregation, belonging to the Missouri Synod, held its first meeting Aug. 27, 1899. After the religious service a meeting was held to plan for the building of a church edifice. William Doring was appointed treasurer, August Passer secretary and Christian Daevel trustee. The building committee was composed of William Thiemke, Henry Stahl, August Passer and Christ Daevel. The site selected for the church was two acres on the farm of George Hahn, two miles south of Arpin, and was donated
by Mr. Hahn and the frame building was erected which is still in use. At the second meeting of the congregation there were 12 voting members and it was moved and seconded that the congregation be incorporated. The church has maintained its organization from the beginning and now has 32 voting members and about 60 communicants. Four services a month are held, two in German and two in English. In October, 1919, the Rev. Walter Wurl became pastor and is still serving. He also serves the churches of the same denomination at Vesper and Seneca Corners. The Sunday school in the Arpin church is conducted in the English language and also the instructions for confirmation, this custom having been inaugurated by Mr. Wurl. A Ladies’ Aid Society is now about to be organized.

St. John’s Evangelical Church, Arpin, was organized in 1913 by Rev. Ajanke. He left in 1915 and the church has been served by Rev. G. E. Paulowitz of St. John’s Evangelical Church of Wisconsin Rapids. The church edifice, a nice frame building, was erected in 1913. The congregation numbers about 20 families. Both church and Sunday school services are held every two weeks, the sermon being in German and the Sunday school services in English.

The Swedish Evangelical Free Church of Arpin.—This congregation was formed July 4, 1912, and by December the same year had a frame building erected two miles north of the village and one-quarter mile east. The first pastor was Rev. Mr. Lilyquist. The congregation now numbers 32 members. In addition to the church services Sunday school is held every Sunday and there is a Ladies’ Aid Society which meets once every two weeks. Among those who have been most active are Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wernberg, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Wernberg, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Wernberg, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Swemberg, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Blomquist, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Fredlund, Axel Renberg and H. G. Renberg.

The Modern Woodmen of America established a camp in Arpin in or about the year 1908, which is numbered 8979 and today has 16 members. There is also a lodge of Royal Neighbors.

The water supply of the village is derived from wells. There are a number of good stores and hotel accommodations are not lacking.

The children of Arpin have the advantage of an excellent schoolhouse, a well constructed brick building of two stories and basement, which was dedicated Feb. 26, 1915. It is well lighted and furnished, and provides for two teachers under the state graded school system. Additional space is provided for manual training.

The roads in and out of Arpin are very good and some important improvements have recently been made. They include a state road that was constructed about 1914. The village derives considerable trade from Bethel, two miles distant, which is the seat of Bethel Academy, a Seventh-Day Adventist institution; also from Powers’ Bluff, where some of the last survivors of the Potawatomi Indians have a settlement, their Indian dances, given several times a year, attracting many visitors. Both general farming and dairying are carried on in the territory surrounding Arpin, especially dairying, and many of the farmers have taken up pure-bred cattle. The soil is good and well adapted to the raising of forage crops, and the natural pasturage is excellent. As a cow and milk country, therefore, it stands high. Frequently the hay is so thick that it cannot be run into windrows, but the hayloader is driven right into the swath and loaded up. There are several
cheese companies in or near the village, including the Arpin Cheese Co., the East Arpin Cheese Co., the Hillside Cheese Co., and the Fairview Cheese Co. John Loschky, John Moffatt and B. Whittingham & Son conduct stores devoted to general merchandise, and L. Loken a hardware store, while there is in addition a meat market, boot and shoe store, lumber yard, blacksmith's shop, garage, restaurant, hotel and livery and taxicab stable, in addition to the business interests already particularly mentioned.

Near Arpin there is a Jewish agricultural settlement that has an interesting history. It was planned and carried to a successful issue by A. W. Rich of Milwaukee, and was known as the Milwaukee Agricultural Association, Mr. Rich being its president. The enterprise at its inception derived financial support from the fund established for philanthropic purposes by the Baron De Hirsch of New York. In 1904 H. F. Roehrig, as manager of the Agricultural Association, bought a large tract of land north of Arpin village and brought from Milwaukee 12 Jewish families whom he settled on the tract. To each family was allowed 40 acres of land, for which each was to pay $1,000. The Association cleared two acres on each tract and built a small but comfortable dwelling. During the first year each family received $5.00 a week cash to help meet living expenses, and the Association also purchased for each family from three to five cows. From the land allotted them the settlers cut and marketed their wood and received the proceeds from the sales. Gradually financial help was withdrawn and the people were left to their own resources. Of the 12 original families so settled five succeeded and remain on their land. The others failed to make a success of farming and moved away, but others came to take their places, until now there are 15 families in the community, all doing well. This colony built a small but comfortable synagogue about one mile north of Arpin village and engaged Rabbi Rokita to minister to them, and he is still with them and holding regular services. All the families have increased their holdings to 80 acres each, which they have cleared and developed into good farms with good sets of buildings. Mr. Rich, the promoter, who died in Milwaukee in 1918, deserves much credit for the enterprise, for besides starting it, he gave it much personal service and also considerable financial assistance from his own pocket.