CHAPTER XX

BABCOCK

The village of Babcock is situated on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, in Section 14 (east), Remington Township. It is 17 miles southwest of Wisconsin Rapids and 11 miles south of Pittsville, which is the nearest banking point. The Yellow River flows in a southerly direction just west of the village, and a little farther to the east of the village is Hemlock Creek, also flowing southward, which joins the Yellow River about half a mile below Babcock. A daily stage is run to Dexterville, which is a railroad junction point five miles north.

The village of Babcock has never been incorporated and is therefore under town government. A good quality of water is obtained from driven wells, every house having its pump. There are no open wells in the village. As yet there is no electric light system but several of the stores have individual light plants. For domestic illumination the kerosene lamp is still in general use.

At an early date, probably in the latter sixties, a settlement called Remington was started on the west side of Yellow River, opposite the site of the present village of Babcock, and a little store was conducted there by W. J. Shea whose widow now lives in Wisconsin Rapids (see biography of Andrew Law). At the same time J. W. Babcock, after whom the present village was named, owned and operated a large sawmill at Nekoosa, and was also closely acquainted with certain officials of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway. Having ascertained that they had decided to build a branch of the St. Paul road through Remington, he, having an understanding with them, sent for P. N. Christensen and arranged with him to buy up privately the village site. This the latter tried to do but was unsuccessful, as some owners refused to sell. Then Mr. Christensen was told to go across the river and buy enough land for a village site on that side, saying nothing to anybody, of course, about the proposed railroad. There was then nothing on the site of Babcock, or east of the river, except a hotel a quarter of a mile to the south, a saloon kept by a man named Durfy, that stood by the side of the old Hiles logging railway, and a little stone house which some settler had erected. P. N. Christensen, who was familiar from long usage with land abstracts and titles, secured all the land he wanted without letting anybody know what was coming, and this having been accomplished and all papers legally executed, the site of the village was surveyed by E. D. Rogers for the Babcock Land Company, the certificate being signed by H. C. Payne, president, and J. W. Babcock, secretary. Mr. Payne was from Milwaukee. Others interested in the company were A. J. Earling and Mr. McKenny, both of whom later served as presidents of the St. Paul road. Trains began running in June, 1873, and the railway company made Babcock a division point, built a roundhouse, and started trains from this place. Quite a number of railroad men made it their home, and for awhile it flourished.

The company built a large hotel, and so arranged their time schedules that all trains stopped here to give crews and passengers an opportunity to obtain meals.
Several hotels and a boarding-house were erected. There were also places—and these were not the least popular—where thirsty travelers, and residents also, could quench their thirst with beverages not now to be openly obtained. A small saw-mill of the type commonly known as a “pocket-mill” was set up to cut the lumber for the buildings erected in the village.

The prosperity of Babcock lasted, however, only as long as the village remained a railroad division point. When, after a few years, it ceased to be so, and the railroad men left, a period of depression and stagnation immediately set in from which the place has not yet fully recovered.

The first general store in Babcock was conducted by George Lyons. The first postmaster was W. J. Shea, who was succeeded by Charles Guerin, the office being subsequently managed for a few months by the latter’s assistant, Geo. L. Ward. Then Glen Morse had it for awhile, and after him Dr. A. H. Morse was postmaster for a year, then W. P. Nolter for several years. The next postmaster, Nelson R. Carr, conducted the office for many years until 1915, when the present postmistress, Miss Amanda M. Grube, took charge. It is an office of the fourth class.

The earliest blacksmith’s shop now remembered was that of Julius Miller.

In 1916 the Babcock Creamery Company was established, with Charles Randeker as treasurer. August J. Koehn vice president, and E. L. Long butter maker and manager. The company buys hand-separated cream from the farmers. The output, 25,000 pounds of butter the first year, has largely increased, and in 1921 amounted to 100,000 pounds. The product is marketed in Chicago.

There are two churches in Babcock, All Saints’ Catholic Church and a Protestant church. The history of the former may be found in the article on the Catholic Church in Wood County by Father Reding. In the days when Babcock was a railroad division point the Catholic congregation was large, but it has since been reduced to about 50 adult members.

The Protestant church in Babcock was started as a Methodist Episcopal church and the building is still owned by the Methodists. The first services were conducted by the presiding elder from La Crosse, but were held only occasionally, and for some years the preachers were mainly theological students. There were, however, not many Methodists in the congregation, but various other Protestant denominations. From time to time services were suspended. Mrs. Ingraham and others started a Sunday school, which was practically an independent organization, though the school was held in the Methodist building until the presiding elder objected. The church is at present served by Rev. C. A. O’Neil, a Congregational pastor who has preached here every two weeks for two years.

There is also a Lutheran congregation, served by Rev. G. M. Thurow of Wisconsin Rapids, which uses the same building.

Babcock can boast of a very good brick schoolhouse, which was built about four years ago.

In addition to the business interests which have already been mentioned Babcock has two general stores, two hotels, a garage, a restaurant and a drug store.