CHAPTER XXX

FORMER VILLAGES AND STATIONS

Dexterville is a name that conjures memories of a once busy and populous village, which, as a distinct community, has vanished into the misty past. Its early history has been told by a previous historian and will be repeated here, to some extent in the words of the original narrative. In the summer of 1849 George Hiles, in his day one of the best known lumbermen who operated in Wood County, made a trip through the central part of Wisconsin in search of a suitable place in which to locate, and where he could in time build up a village. He found that a great deal of the best government land had already been taken up, chiefly by speculators, but Section 14, Town 22 N, Range 3 E, in the county of Wood was yet subject to entry, and, there being a fine water power, he determined here to set his stakes. He therefore entered his claim and settled upon it in the month of October, 1850. He had brought with him Mr. H. Searles, and together they built a log shanty for a residence. A sawmill was completed and was in running order by the first of the next year and about the same time a dwelling house was put up into which the Searles family moved. In 1852 the village had some 12 inhabitants, and Mr. Hiles, intent upon developing the resources of the place, applied to the government for the establishment of a mail route and post office. The petition was not granted, however, until 1857, when Mr. Hiles became postmaster. The next important step was the establishment of a school, which was effected in September, 1858, with Miss Nancy Plato as teacher. Miss Plato soon after became a bride, being married to William Dixon in November, 1858, by Jacob Benson, J. P., and this was the first marriage in the little community. The first birth had occurred several years before, and was that of T. G. Searles, son of H. Searles, in the spring of 1854. The first death was that of James Sprague in May, 1853. George Hiles started the first general store, which was still in operation in the early eighties, and he also operated a sawmill, shingle and planing mill, and later about 1881, a large tub and pail factory. About 1870 the Hiles interests at Dexterville employed several hundred men. In the early eighties there was another store, kept by C. J. Krueger and A. S. Robinson, and a hotel the proprietor of which was W. R. Jarvis. Syme, Hewitt & Co. were stave manufacturers. The Green Bay & Western Railway, which entered Wood County in 1872 and passed through Dexterville, lent a new impetus to the growth of the village and for a number of years it was quite a flourishing place. But that growth and prosperity depended entirely upon the lumber industry, and after the timber in the neighborhood had been exhausted, the mills ceased operations, the workmen moved elsewhere in search of employment, and the decline of the village was rapid. Dexterville is a railroad junction point of the Green Bay & Western and the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railways, but there is now no village, the only place of business being a good general store patronized by the farmers of the vicinity. This store was built in 1916 by Edward Keenan, Jr., its proprietor, who is also station
agent and postmaster, having been appointed to the last mentioned office in 1918. Mr. Keenan’s father settled in Dexterville in the early seventies, helped to build both railroads here and at one time was extensively engaged in logging in this neighborhood. Within a short distance from the Keenan store, which is only two or three hundred feet from the station, there are two or three houses, and perhaps ten or a dozen others (farm houses) within a radius of three-quarters of a mile.

Scranton, a former village in Dexter Township, was located in Section 29 (Town 22 N, Range 2 E), on the east fork of the Black River, and was a station on the Green Bay & Minnesota Railroad, near the line of Wood and Jackson Counties. The site was first settled by E. C. Bullis, March 17, 1873. In the same year Mr. Bullis erected a frame house, which was the first of any kind in the village. The first marriage in Scranton was that of P. Ryan and Mary Bullis, the ceremony being performed by Frank Mosher, justice of the peace. The first children born were Frank and Laura Bullis, twins, on Feb. 24, 1874. The first death was that of Mrs. Susan Anthony, who passed away at the age of 34 years in February, 1876. A school was established in January, 1876, with Miss Jennie Harlan (now Mrs. Charles Houston of Pittsville) as teacher. It was started with some 15 pupils. On Nov. 24, 1873, the post office was established, E. C. Bullis having been appointed postmaster. George Hiles established saw and shingle mills, and most of the time kept about 15 men employed. James Hiles conducted a general store, Benjamin Seeley was a carpenter, William Tucker a tinsmith, and William Downing the village blacksmith. There was also a hotel owned and managed by E. C. Bullis. The population in 1880 was about 65. Scranton died out after the timber had been cut, as the land was sandy and not good for farming.

Hansen, a former village in Hansen Township, was located in Section 23, on Hemlock Creek, and on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, 11 miles northwest of Wisconsin Rapids (then known as Grand Rapids) and nine northeast of Pittsville. A tavern, known as the Forest Tavern, was built here as early as Civil War days, but by 1873 was no longer conducted as such, though the building was still standing, somewhat fallen into decay. At that time, however, the locality could boast of a store, a sawmill, and three houses. The mill, which was built and operated for a time by a man named Stearns, afterward passed through several hands, at last coming into possession of Mons Anderson, a clothing manufacturer of La Crosse, who got it through a mortgage. He engaged M. R. Hansen to operate it for him, Mr. Hansen (after whom the village was named) having settled there in 1883. Previous to that the place was called by some Forest City and by others the Little Mill. Later Hansen bought the mill he had been engaged to operate, and conducted it until the timber gave out. About 1886 or 1887 a stave mill was built by a man named May, who later sold it to Roenius & Uehling, who operated it for 15 or 16 years. About the same time there were also one or two stores and a blacksmith’s shop, but no saloon so long as Mr. Hansen remained, as that was an institution to which he was opposed. About 1895 he went to Colorado, having, however, previously built a planing-mill in Hansen, which he operated for several years. For some years he was postmaster of the village. Then W. H. Bean, now of Vesper, had the post office eight years, having, about 1897, bought 200 acres including the village site. Mr. Bean also operated a sawmill. The Hansen post office was continued until the advent of the free rural delivery sys-
tem and the neighborhood now has rural delivery from Vesper. The village gradually declined with the exhaustion of the neighboring timber supply, and stores and mills were abandoned. The locality is now occupied by the farming interests and there is nothing there resembling a village.

Saratoga.—Through the lower part of Saratoga Township from east to west, flows Ten Mile Creek, emptying into the Wisconsin River in Section 27. When the government surveyors who made the three-mile wide survey visited this section in 1839, this stream was known as Iron Creek and was so entered on their field books and maps. In Section 33 the old Portage road crossed the creek, making a bend at that point which has since been straightened, and it was at that point on the rising ground, just south of the creek and east of the road, that in early days a little village sprang up known as Saratoga or Ten Mile Creek. It was started about 1855 by the erection of a small "pony" sawmill. Lots were platted but the plats were never filed. In a short time there were, in addition to the mill, two stores, two taverns, a blacksmith shop and several residences. The mill was operated by a man named Ensigne, and as late as 15 years ago there stood in the vicinity a small marble monument erected over the grave of a young child of his, and near by another monument. The inscription on the one was: "Ardena, son of J. and L. R. Ensigne, Died Apr. 23, 1860." That on the other was: "Frank T., son of F. and M. Durrell. Died Aug. 5, 1856." These monuments and a few lilac bushes were the only evidences left of the former little village. But though the more obvious material vestiges of a community settlement in Saratoga Township have disappeared, there are many human links existing which connect the past intimately with the present. From two to four miles north of Saratoga village there was a piece of fine open country which was settled about 1856 by a number of families, mostly Irish, who came overland with ox-teams from Kenosha County and took up land. These were the McCamley, Turney, Powderly, Mullen, Keough, Matthews and McDonald families, with perhaps one or two others, including the Scotch family of John Cristal. They all became prosperous and many of their descendants in the second and third generation are now among the leading citizens of the county.

Hurleytown, or Hurleyville, as it was sometimes called, consisted of a sawmill, boarding-house, and one or two stores at South Centralia, and was named after Timothy W. Hurley, who with his partner, Mr. Burns, established the mill and boarding-house in or about the year 1855. In 1870 the mill was sold to John Rablin, though Mr. Hurley continued to conduct the boarding-house for some time after.

Progress was the name of a shipping-point for logs and lumber on the Hiles railroad, now the Dexterville-Romadka branch of the St. Paul. It was located in the southwest part of Section 33, Rock Township. A railway siding was put in and George Hiles brought in a relation of his, who kept a tavern for the convenience of the lumbermen. Any slight importance it once had was extinguished when lumbering operations were abandoned in this vicinity.

Cary, Amelia and Catherine, which names appear on some maps of Wood County, were shipping points for lumber, in Cary Township, on what is now the Dexterville-Romadka branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway. Cary, as shown on the map, is in the northern part of the township, a little east of
north, and on the line between Sections 10 and 11. Amelia, where there is a general store, is in the eastern part of the township, on the line between Sections 23 and 24, and Catherine is in the southeastern part in Section 36, or more correctly, on the line between Cary and Wood Townships. At none of these places is there a village.

Cranmoor is a shipping point for cranberries in Section 9, Cranmoor Township. There is a school in the vicinity.

Bearss Marsh was the name of a plat surveyed Jan. 16, 1879, in Section 9, Port Edwards Township, by E. Newman, under the direction of J. T. Bearss and Phillip Alexander. It was recorded Feb. 6, 1879, and described as the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 9, Town 21 N, Range 4 E. A station called Bearss Station was also established at the nearest point on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway for the shipment of cranberries, in which business the Bearss family were largely engaged. The attempt to found a village, however, was unsuccessful.

Daly is a station on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway in Section 31 (east), Remington Township.

Pittsville Junction is merely a junction point of two branches of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway in Section 2, Dexter Township, one branch running northwest to Pittsville and the other northeast to Vesper and Arpin.

Frisby is a station just southeast of Marshfield, on the Chicago & Northwestern and Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railways. There is no village but the station is close to the Wood County Hospital (Insane Asylum) and hence is convenient for visitors to the institution.

Mohle is the name of a station on the Greenwood branch of the "Soo" Railway in the northern part of Lincoln Township. There is no village.

Ebbe is a station on the "Soo" Railway, in Section 17, Lincoln Township. It was named after Peter R. Ebbe, who, with P. N. Christensen, built a sawmill there in 1890, and who still resides in the vicinity. After the mill was erected the railroad built a side-track and a box-car depot, but some years later, after the mill burned down, they took out the side-track.