In the decade that followed the establishment of the main territorial roads into Portage County, a number of stage-coach inns, or tavern-houses, were built along these routes of travel to cater to the eager young men who came to work in the logging camps of the Pinery, or in the saw mills, shingle mills and grist mills, or to settle on the land as farmers. As traffic increased, stage-coach and freight lines came into being which also patronized the tavern-houses and these became recognized as landmarks in the early history of the county. Most of them appear to have been built after the style of New England, single frame house, two story, with smaller lean-to wings running off the main building. Along the front of the house, facing the road, ran a porch — some called it a "verandah" — which extended the length of the building, often on two sides if it was located on a highway corner. Here were chairs where patrons could pass the time of day waiting for the next stage, or exchange gossip of the road, new developments in land, timber and trade. Immigrants, state-of-Mainers, speculators, farmers, surveyors, government officials, timber cruisers, teamsters and lumberjacks all stopped here, for it was a time of high adventure, calculated risk, and many plungers. The rivers were a challenge to the imagination, the pine in the forests a challenge to the material instincts of man, for in a society where the retrograde of collectivization has not gained the ascendancy, this is what makes man aggressive and eager for gain. It was a time of hard work, but nothing can be considered too hard when it carries meaning and the hope of new life, and especially when it is possible to see this hope realized within the space of a single generation. This was and still is Portage County where
man then was and still is free to pursue his own goals, not the goals of a five-year plan enforced by one-party government based on terror.

Inside the tavern-house some of the owners installed a dance floor or built a shanty nearby where dances were held. Thus the tavern-house also served as a social center although not all handled liquor by any means. The temperance movement was gaining ground in the 1840s; in an indenture of 1846, when Samuel L. Keith and Smith Niles of Belvidere, Illinois, took over the "tavern house now occupied by John K. (R.?) and G. W. Mitchell," in Plover, the latter made it part of the contract that no liquor was to be served on the place. The license to handle liquor was in addition to the license to operate a tavern-house, although there is reason to suspect that liquor was often handled "under the counter" without a license.

The first tavern-house in the limits of modern Portage County was operated by Luthern Houghton and John Batten, probably as early as 1842. One of the road districts established by the county commissioners on July 5, 1844, took a bearing on "Houghton and Battens" and from the description it appears that it was located near the modern intersection of H-51-54 and Trunk B, where a community, known as Rushville, developed before Plover village was platted in 1845. The license to "keep tavern at Rushville for one year from date of this filing (Oct. 25, 1844). . ." was issued in Houghton's name. The latter was also elected one of the three county commissioners in the first election at Plover in 1844; in 1845, Batten's name appears in the commissioners' sessions as county treasurer.

However, the pioneer tavern-house or tavern-inn was associated more with an institution located not in the village, but along the road somewhere at a spot selected to cater to the needs of a man with a horse or team at intervals of ten miles or so. As a fast team can walk four miles an hour, a ten-mile interval represents two

and a half hours’ driving time. Probably the first of these country taverns in the county was located “at the forks of the road leading to Portage City and Berlin and was known as the old Junction, which now is in the town of Almond.” This fork in the road is indicated on the Ellis map of 1855, but owing to lack of definition on a map covering the entire state, it is impossible to pin-point it on a modern plat of Almond township except that it lay in one of the west sections. It may have been situated at modern Spirit Land Corners, but owing to the nature of the terrain and swamp land to the south of Spirit Land this seems unlikely.

Some years ago Alfred Peterson of Almond, working with a crew on a local saw machine, ran the saw into a nail embedded in an oak log which had been cut north of Washburn Lake. This aroused speculation and Nils Washburn, member of a pioneer family of Almond, suggested that it was a relic of the stagecoach road which ran through this grove of oak trees. He later pointed out the spot where the stage road crossed modern Trunk D north of the lake. An investigation of this tract of oak north of Trunk D was made by the author in the company of Peterson on May 18, 1958, and the vestiges of a road, as well as the fork of two roads, was discovered in Sec. 30 about three quarters of a mile north of Trunk D. As this is not logging country, and as the indentation of a road bed, although overgrown with grass, is still plainly visible, there is reason to believe that one fork of one road ran west of Washburn Lake to Montello and Portage, the other fork to the east of the twin lakes to Berlin.

It was probably at this junction that Sherman built the “first framed building erected upon the Indian lands after the treaty was signed with the Indians...” As the treaty no doubt refers to one concluded in 1848 and as Sherman arrived in Plover in October of 1848, it is quite possible that this was the first frame building also erected in the county and is the stagecoach stop associated with local tradition. Sherman’s use of the

1 Note Book, No. 9.
term "framed building," however, is somewhat puzzling. It seems extraordinary that no one had yet built a frame building before this time, what with saw mills only a few miles away, but erecting log cabins was probably easier and even cheaper up to this time. Moreover, when Sherman, a carpenter in his youth, came to Plover he was in fact one of the first of his trade available for this type of construction. Most of the others appear to have been lumbermen or traders who, to judge from the indentures of the period, doubled as justices of the peace, sheriffs, and constables, while the first doctor, John Bristol, even served as probate judge and county treasurer.

However, while Sherman claims to have built the first frame house "upon the Indian lands after the treaty was signed with the Indians," meaning, no doubt, in 1848, he was not the first to build a frame house on the Indian land because Hathaway tells us in his field notes of 1839 that the second place of Charettes (Shaurette?) (across the river from modern Stevens Point) was a frame house and barn. But if Sherman's statement may be taken as prima facie evidence, it would appear that everyone on the left bank of the Wisconsin River in Plover and Stevens Point Precincts was living in log cabins up to 1848, and this suggests a rather interesting picture in retrospect.

The second country tavern-house was probably located on the Air Line Road in the middle of Lot 2, Sec. 30 (T. 22, R. 9) known as "Buena Vista House," first mentioned in the field notes of the government survey made in the summer of 1851. This was probably built in 1850 on land pre-empted by Wellington Kollock and William Wigginton. George F. Schilling, according to family tradition, fashioned the window frames and window sashes on the completed building. In one of the rooms on the third story was a "rocking dance floor," apparently the only one of its kind in the county, said to be constructed on levers which allowed an 18-inch sway in the floor. Whether it allowed an 18-inch sway,  

1 Note Book, No. 9.
which seems extraordinary, or a 2-inch sway, it was no
doubt a popular place for teen-agers of the period
whirling about in the traditional cotillion, better known
as the square-dance. All this came to a sudden end in
1863 when a tornado destroyed Buena Vista House.

Another tavern-house, whether the third or not is
problematical, was built in the future village of Almond
in the early 1850s. The fact that a post office was estab-
lished in Almond as early as July 8, 1850 suggests that
it was becoming recognized as a community which logi-
cally would soon have a hotel. Whether Isaiah Felker
built the first tavern-house or not, the town proceedings
establish the fact that he was operating one there in
1857, probably on the east side of lower Main Street
of the modern village in the northwest corner of Sec.
34 where the 1876 plat identifies a “hotel.”

Thus a traveler with private rig or traveling by
stagecoach from Berlin could stop, in the early 1850s,
at either Almond or at Buena Vista before going on to
Plover. Either in 1855 or shortly thereafter, another
stopping place was established at the intersection of
modern H-51-54, since known as Moore Barn. This in-
tersection was probably not created until 1855 when
the “Buena Vista Road” was ordered laid by the Plover
town board. As this was now a short cut on the road
going south to either Portage or Berlin, it obviously
occurred to more than one person that this intersection,
and not the one farther east created by the Air Line Road
crossing modern H-54, held the greatest opportunity for
the future. The first assessment roll available on the town
of Buena Vista reveals that Jacob F. Moore in 1857 was
paying taxes on nearly a dozen government lots (forties)
around this intersection, which suggests that he had
deliberately planned to keep anyone else from build-
ing on this corner without his approval or lease. “Fod”
Moore, as he was known, apparently did not operate a
tavern-house as such, but rather a livery barn where
wagon teamsters and others could feed and water their
horses and, if necessary, sleep on a cot in the livery
office. It was located a few rods west of the southwest
angle of the intersection.
The main tavern-house between Buena Vista House and Plover in the 1850s was at Stockton, Wisconsin, about three miles east of Plover on the Air Line Road in Sec. 31 about half a mile southeast of Morrill Cemetery. Here Nelson Blodgett built a hotel in the early 1850s known as Stockton House, more commonly referred to as “Blodgett’s,” which was advertised in the Plover Herald of Aug. 14, 1856, as “new, commodious and well furnished [with] good stables attached to the house.” There are several references to this hostelry in the town proceedings, while an advertisement in the Pinery of July 3, 1856 advises readers not to forget “the dance that is to come off this Thursday evening, July 3, at Stockton House.” A week later the Pinery reported that about 100 couples were present “and yet plenty of room for more.”

But after the new road to Buena Vista was laid south of Plover in 1855 (today H-51) Blodgett no doubt suffered the fate of modern-day eating houses and motels which locate on an old road only to have a new one run some distance away. Not even legend can suggest what Blodgett’s inn looked like.

No doubt in an attempt to capitalize on the new road out of Plover to Buena Vista ordered laid in 1855, Mathias (“Butch”) Mitchell built a tavern-house in Sec. 35, about a mile or so southeast of Plover (the Clifford West place). It changed hands early in 1857 when J. Lamphear became the proprietor. Originally known as “Mitchell’s Tavern,” or “Mitchell’s Farm Stand,” Lamphear renamed it Cottage Inn. A “cotillion party” (square dance) was held in February 1857 at Cottage Inn with Henry J. Boyce acting as floor manager and E. B. Worthen’s band furnishing the music.¹

Mr. & Mrs. Abraham Coulthurst may have operated Cottage Inn at one time, probably while Mitchell owned it.

Two people who still remember Cottage Inn are Mrs. Jesse Grant, nee Isherwood, of Plover township, and John Fisher of Almond township. The latter re-

¹ Pinery, Feb. 12, 1857.
calls the last time he saw the building "things was a-running down" and the inn had been vacant for many years. Mrs. Grant recalls, as a girl, going for the mail in Plover accompanied by her brother Henry who drove "Prince," a small horse, and cart. The youngsters usually made this trip after school and on the return trip, with dusk approaching, Mrs. Grant ducked low in the cart while her brother whipped the horse into a gallop past the abandoned building of Cottage Inn because the children in the neighborhood all said it was spooked.

Moore Barn was a landmark not only because it stood at the most important intersection in the county where it could be seen by everyone, but also because the long-abandoned building survived into the 20th Century. Before it was razed in the mid-1920s, several legends had grown around it, one that a number of skeletons were found in the floor of the barn. This rumor, which apparently had no basis in fact, probably developed as a result of several incidents which had occurred in the past, not in the barn itself, but on the road to the south. Hold-ups — some say killings — were made easy by the thick underbrush along this stretch which made it possible for bandits to step into the road at night and grab the reins of the horses without being seen.

There is no record of an actual stage hold-up, but an interesting account of another incident comes down through the Russell family of Buena Vista. William Russell, a younger in his teens, drove one of the stages on the Berlin route in the late 1860s. The stage in Berlin was boarded from a high and rather long platform, the more easily to step into and load. On one occasion, Russell noticed a prospective passenger walking back and forth along the platform, clinging possessively to a small bag under his arm. As the other passengers boarded the stage, the one with the small bag scrutinized them sharply and just before the stage was ready to depart, he asked Russell if he might ride with him atop the stage. As there was no one riding "shot-gun" on
these stages, the stranger was allowed to share the high driver’s seat. Once under way, he asked Russell if he would be willing to make a detour around the Moore Barn corner, suggesting that he had something valuable to protect and did not wish to be waylaid by bandits. Russell agreed and probably followed the Air Line Road up to Plover “and that same night, be damned if there wasn’t a hold-up near Moore Barn,” concluded Bacon Russell, son of William.

Another veteran of the district recalls the story of a farmer who went to Stevens Point with a load of frozen pork. Two or three highwaymen, who apparently noted his passage to the north with the load of pork, waited for his return south of Moore Barn. The intended victim was a native of the district and knew the danger of traveling at night with money. Taking no chances, he hid most of the money realized from the pork in or under the wagon box, but kept a few pieces of small change in his pocketbook. He was held up according to schedule and when asked for his money allegedly said, “Do you think I would travel with that much money? I left it in the bank in Stevens Point. If you don’t believe me, search me.” The story seems a bit pat, but the ruse apparently worked and the highwaymen took the change in his pocketbook and left after a search failed to disclose anything of value on the wagon.

Another stopping place on the road to Plover was the Isherwood Hotel about two miles west of Moore Barn in Sec. 1 of Plover township. The Pinery on Dec. 21, 1865, reported that James Isherwood had “just completed and has now in running order a tip-top hotel [where] travelers will find a good fare…” The tavern-house was built around a smaller house constructed earlier and remains practically unchanged since 1865, today occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Jesse Grant. Three or four small rooms on the first and second floors were reserved for transients but the main section of the second floor was reserved for a dance hall. A platform, still intact, is located over the stairway where the fiddlers seated themselves (they could not stand without hitting the ceiling) and by this
device, more floor space was provided for the dancers. On this platform many a time sat Will Allan and Lew Johnson, better known as “Nigger Lew,” probably a Negro fugitive slave, both playing fiddle, with Johnson calling most of the square dances. He became widely known throughout the county and died at Plover in 1899.

Isherwood was issued a $25 license by the town of Plover on July 19, 1866 to handle liquor. The bar-room was located on the first floor in the room on the southwest corner of the house facing the road. A small bar stood on the north side of the room and chairs were provided around a wood heater in the center. One of these chairs, a home-made affair, resembled a barber chair and everyone called it that. It was comfortable to sit in with the feet on the stove. This is also preserved by the Grants.

Later, as business picked up, Isherwood built a small dance hall across the road which everyone referred to as the “bowery,” a common name for dance halls after the New York thoroughfare of the same name.

On the same side of the road stood a log barn, later replaced by a frame barn which had two rows of stalls, and a special box stall for visiting stallions. The outside of the barn was sided with vertical pine strips or batten painted white to serve as cleats in the siding. This white batten stripping was common on many barns before the turn of the century and may be viewed even now on a few older barns in the county. Outside of Isherwood’s barn stood one of “Nate” Howard’s wooden pumps where the horses were watered.

After passing through Plover and Stevens Point, the first stop a traveler made farther north on the territorial road was probably at Charles Mann’s tavern-house about ten miles from the Public Square on the left bank of the Wisconsin River just below Crocker’s Landing. An anonymous traveler states that on July 25, 1853 he spent a night here on a trip north.1 Mann’s tavern apparently did not flourish, probably because of the fame which gathered around a more strategically located tavern-

1 Pinery, Aug. 17, 1853.
house two miles farther north built that same year by Melanchthon Wylie "who has just completed a large and commodious Hotel, which he calls the 'Plymouth' and where he holds himself ready to wait upon the Public in the most approved style. . .". This hostelry came to be the center of political activity in northern Portage County and many of the Eau Pleine town board meetings were held here in the 1860s and '70s. It also had a dance hall. In the spring of 1855, an excursion was run from Stevens Point to Wylie's on the newly-commissioned steamer Northerner with "100 ladies and gentlemen" who, after "an excellent dinner and refreshments" returned to the city the following morning, apparently having danced all night. Excursions were arranged on a number of occasions in the next decade with people coming from both Wausau and Stevens Point to enjoy the hospitality of Wylie who, among his other accomplishments as a host, had concocted a special drink known as "whiskey and tansy" which was taken up by saloon keepers all the way down the river to St. Louis. A tansy is a coarse perennial herb used in days gone by both for cooking and medicine. Alex Wallace believes Wylie's brew was quite bitter.

The 1876 plat shows that the tavern-house was located on the north side of the stage road where it ran east-west around the big bend of the Wisconsin River just below DuBay's trading post. In 1863, the assessor put an evaluation of $2,000 on this property, including one lot of 68 acres, which suggests a fairly large establishment, no doubt equipped with horse barns, sheds and probably a granary. The entire site is today covered by DuBay Lake.

Mr. & Mrs. Ole P. Quisla, later of Alban township, worked for the Wylies after their marriage in Stevens Point (circa 1870). While Mrs. Quisla remained in the hotel, her husband was employed as a chopper in a logging camp a few miles away. Mrs. Quisla often told her children about this experience and recalled Althina


2 Pinery, May 31, 1855.
Wylie, the second wife, as a most considerate woman to work for. She always encouraged the girls to throw any unused bread in the kitchen into the ash cans because she wanted the Indians to have it. When the bread was deposited in the can, an Indian woman seemed to appear out of nowhere, as if waiting for it, filled up her sack and stole away.

As to Melanchthon Wylie “no man rich or poor was ever turned away from his door hungry.” He died in 1880 and lies buried in Union Cemetery.

From Wylie’s the traveler continued north to another famed hostelry in Marathon County known as the Twin Island, probably built in 1849, at modern Knowlton.

Travelers approaching Portage County from Gills Landing in the early 1850s on the road later part of H-54 were apt to spend a night at Badger Hotel located near the Portage-Waupaca line in the middle of Sec 36 of Lanark. The road at this time did not follow modern H-54 through eastern Lanark, but dipped south somewhat from the intersection of H-54 and Trunk A, thence through the hills southeast and finally along the hillside south of Badger Cemetery into Waupaca County. Part of this road in the eastern section of the township is still used as a town road and is probably the only original stagecoach road left in the county not blacktopped or abandoned.

The Badger Hotel, or “Gray’s tavern-house” as it was more commonly known, was located on the north side of the fork of two roads, one going east to Waupaca and the other southeast to Rural and Gills Landing via Parfreyville. This latter road was probably the main highway into the county from this direction up to the mid-1850s when stages also began to travel from Gills Landing via Waupaca and Amherst to Stevens Point. The tavern-house was probably built by John Fletcher who may have sold or rented to Gray before 1856. After the stagecoach days passed, this property passed to Edward (“Ted”) Minton who razed the old building and erected a residence somewhat on the same foundation. This

\[1\] Stevens Point Journal, Dec. 4, 1880.
house eventually burned but the foundation and cellar are still visible, not to mention the lilac bushes to the east.

Alexander Gray, a "Yark stater" (New Yorker) was a Yankee descendant of Englishmen and, when he took over the tavern-house in Lanark, followed Ye Olde English custom by hanging out a wooden sign on the road decorated with the likeness of an animal, in this instance, the Wisconsin Badger; and from this came the Badger Post Office, Badger Hotel, Badger School, Badger Cemetery, and Badger Community Church on the county line to the east.

After leaving Gray's place, a traveler on the stage from Gill's Landing to Plover was almost certain to stop at John F. Phelps tavern-house, first mentioned in a road survey of 1858, which was located in Sec 19 of Lanark less than a mile east of modern St. Patrick's Church. The Madely post office, established in this vicinity on May 9, 1855, was named after John Madely who probably originated in Madely Manors, England, and settled in the north of the township and after whom Madely School is also named. John Phelps, not Madely, served as the first postmaster, but whether Phelps built his tavern-house before or after his appointment is uncertain. Even as the Mitchell tavern near Plover was often referred to as "the Mitchell Farm Stand", the Phelps tavern was popularly known as the "Phelps Stand," a word seldom heard any more in this connection.

One of the girls who worked for the Phelps' in the late 1860s and early '70s was Hattie Whipple, nee Porter, who came from Waushara County with several other girls whom the one-time town chairman, Ira Whipple, had gone to recruit as hop pickers. (Porter Lake in Waushara County is named after her father, John Porter). When Ira Whipple's first wife died in the early 1870s he courted and married Hattie Porter and from this union came eight children, and Harry, the youngest, was born in 1887 when his father was 67. From his mother, Harry Whipple heard many fascinating tales of the Phelps tavern-house. It was not uncommon to serve 40
“freighters,” i.e. wagon teamsters, at a single meal, most of them driving four-horse teams with freight between Gill’s Landing and Stevens Point. In addition, one or two drivers of the stage-coaches might happen to be at the tables. This was the coach which carried mail as well as passengers even as they are seen today in Western films, but oddly enough were not referred to in Lanark as stage-coaches but as “mail coaches.” Waybills in the archives of the State Historical Society, dated 1855, also refer to “post coaches” although advertisements in the Plover papers usually refer to them as “stage-coaches” and operated by stage lines, not “post” lines.

The original building of Phelps tavern-house, which stood on the north side of the road (the Myron Schultz place) is described as a big frame structure facing the road, long porch with columns, and lean-to wing running off the back. Wide boards, probably pine, were used for flooring, and the doors were featured by long panels. Most of the overnight guests were accommodated in several rooms on the second floor and when these filled up there was always room in the livery barns to handle the overflow. A big water trough and wooden pump stood near the long porch of the inn where the teamsters pumped their own water. Traces of the well are still visible.

Hattie Whipple also told her son how the drivers, on approaching from the east, and before anyone could actually see them, whipped their horses into a gallop and came up to the tavern-house in dead heat to give the impression that this was the manner in which they traveled all day. After feeding the horses, they started out with a great flourish towards Moore Barn but scarcely got over the hill to the west before they dropped their reins and permitted the horses to poke along at their own pace.

Aside from the business of catering to travelers and freighters at Phelps’ “stand” — where no liquor was served — two of the Phelps’ sons, George and Willie, were avid horse traders as well as hostlers and were known to “chew the ears off a horse” to make him mind. Trading horses required great skill and knowledge of
animals and there was no guarantee offered on a trade-
in such as a second-hand car dealer might make today. A horse that stood ever so gently in the stall could, on being worked, turn into a kicker, a biter, or one afflicted with soft shoulders or nervous fright, or was "moon blind," shying away from a field sparrow.

Probably owing to the comparatively long distance between Phelps tavern and Moore Barn, a small tavern-
house was established by Ashley Maynard in Sec 18 of Buena Vista on the northwest corner of the intersection of modern H-54 and County Trunk J, since known as "Maynard’s Corners." The land was purchased in 1857, but when the tavern was actually built is uncertain. Nor did it appear to have any special name, although the 1876 plat identifies a "hotel" on this site. Part of the original building is today occupied by Town Chairman George Fletcher.

After 1858, the year that a stage line appears to have begun operating directly between Gill's Landing, Wau-
paca and Stevens Point via Amherst, a tavern-house was probably established in Sec 1 of Lanark on the north side of modern H-10. This building was taken over by Thomas Pipe in the early 1870s and, according to family tradition, had been used for some time as a stage coach stop. An old photograph (circa 1890) reveals a long porch running the length of the house facing the road. Although remodeled, part of the original tavern-house is today occupied by Ray Pipe, a son of Thomas. John ("Jack") and Frank Pipe, brothers of Thomas Pipe, were familiar in Stevens Point for many years before the turn of the century, John as a stage-coach driver who later operated a livery stable, and Frank as a river driv-
er. It was no doubt through his brother John that Thomas acquired the old tavern-house. This former tavern-house and the homes occupied by the Fletchers of Buena Vista and the Grants of Plover townships are the only ones left in the county which can trace their heritage to a stagecoach stop.

Finally, on the road west of Plover below the Yellow Banks stood the Jockey Tavern in Sec 25, owned and
operated by Cornelius Halladay after he was mustered out of service in the Civil War. The Jockey Tavern got its name after the horse traders and others who frequented it and Halladay too was engaged in raising horses both for drivers and for the race track. The tavern was not primarily a stopping place for transients although one or two rooms were available. The residence of Halladay was located a few rods to the east, closer to the high bank of the river where a visit to this spot in 1957, accompanied by Grandson Fred Halladay, 86, revealed several lilac bushes planted by “Grandma” Halladay still growing. But all traces of the Jockey Tavern a few rods west have been obliterated by the march of time.

Although not a tavern-house, the home of Joseph Oesterle in Sharon was a landmark for people traveling from Alban, east Sharon and New Hope, to Stevens Point. Here, on the long haul, the horses could be watered and the driver could rest and visit with the Oesterles where a bite of homemade cheese washed down with buttermilk was a commonplace hospitality. Many people also came down from Stevens Point on a Sunday drive, terminating at Oesterles, or picnicking under the grove of tall pines that stood on the island of Oesterle Lake.