

## FROM DOG SLED TO AIRPLANE

The earliest forms of conveyance to be used in Portage County may have been dog sleds in winter, and in summer two-wheeled carriages known as carioles or trains. John DuBay was using a dog sleigh when he appeared at Fort Winnebago in 1836 or '37, and also purchased a horse and French train there from Henry Merrell, probably en route to the trading post on the Wisconsin River in modern Dewey township.

But the most common form of conveyance used later by the lumbermen and settlers in the 1840s and 1850s was a light wagon with four, spoked wheels mounted on iron tires not more than an inch and three quarters wide. This proved impracticable in the sandy country of central Wisconsin and after the Civil War the wide, iron-tired wagon wheel with wagon box grew in favor for hauling both freight and passengers, while the four-wheeled buckboard replaced the light wagon with an even narrower tire which, despite the sand, was practical because it was not meant for heavy freight but as a passenger vehicle. The top buggy, which came later, apparently developed from the buckboard.

In the winter time the narrow-sleigh cutter was used for passenger traffic and the wide-bunked bob sleigh for freight and logging.

The first scheduled stage line in the county may have been established by Jacob Myer in 1847. It probably followed the old Pinery Road between Plover and Portage via Grand Rapids. Myer (or Myers) is also listed in the 1847 territorial census; in 1861 the Plover tax roll reveals that he had a lot valued at \$400 in Block 1, Lot 1, northeast corner of Union and First Streets, which may have been the main livery barn and office of his stage line. In the first issue of the *Plover Herald*

published in 1856, Myer ran an advertisement headed "Summer Arrangements," meaning, no doubt, the schedule of his stages during the summer months. These stages left Stevens Point daily at 3 a.m., except Thursday, for Portage, arriving at 8 p.m. the same day. The Stevens Point-Berlin route was a tri-weekly service, leaving Stevens Point Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 1 a.m., arriving Berlin the same day at 4 p.m. A line to Grand Rapids left Stevens Point Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 7 a.m. (arrival time not given.) The route to Weyauwega left Stevens Point daily at 5 a.m. "connecting with boats at Gills Landing."

Two weeks later, under "local items" in the *Herald*, it is learned that Myer had begun using a new set of coaches on the Weyauwega run "which is a desirable change from the old Prairie Schooner that was used during the days of pioneer staging." The editors of the *Herald* wished "Mr. Myer" well and referred to him as the "oldest stager of the Northwest." From this it would appear that up to 1856, the so-called stages to Portage County were wagons converted into prairie schooners, that is, with canvas over the box, and, in making the change to a new set of coaches, Myer had converted to the type commonly associated with the stagecoach still seen in motion picture dramas of the American West. Early engravings of the type of stage used on other Wisconsin lines confirms this.

At the height of operations before the Wisconsin Central reached Stevens Point, Myer reputedly employed 150 horses at various points and changed horses on his stages every ten miles or so. Most of the horses were probably Morgans raised on a farm he owned in Sec 20 of Buena Vista. As there were no fences on the Prairie to speak of, his horses, according to local legend, roamed at will, and the neighbors were kept busy sending the dogs after them.

Probably the only livery barn left in the county dating back to the days of the stagecoach, and which local tradition insists is a "stagecoach barn," is located in Sec 31 of Buena Vista on the west side of H-51 about two miles be-

<sup>1</sup> *Plover Herald*, Aug. 21, 1856.

low Keene (the Roman Brychell place). The siding on this barn is no doubt a replacement but an investigation of the interior reveals the framework to be of ancient vintage, with pegs binding the timbers together. Further confirmation is added by the fact that the abstract on this forty shows that Myer purchased it from the government in 1854, and in 1856, mortgaged it to the Milwaukee & Horicon Railroad in exchange, probably, for bonds which later had to be redeemed at a loss to himself. The distance from this barn to Plover is a little more than 10 miles but not unreasonable for the last stretch home.

John DuBay, one of the early competitors to Myer, in July 1852 began operating a stage line between Fort Winnebago and Stevens Point. It appears to have been discontinued in the autumn of 1853. During this period he ran an advertisement, every second week, in the Fort Winnebago *River Times*<sup>1</sup> which carried this information:

#### NEW STAGE LINE

THE undersigned has now completed arrangements for running a tri-weekly line of stages between Fort Winnebago and Stevens Point, straight through, via Grand Marsh and Buena Vista, in two days, using two horse epliptic spring carriages, as follows

Leaves Fort Winnebago Mondays, Wednesdays,  
and Fridays:

Leaves Stevens Point Mondays, Wednesdays, and  
Fridays:

Fares through, upward \$3.50

Fares through, down \$3.00

July 12, 1852

JOHN B. DUBAY

The advertisement fails to explain why it cost more to go from Portage to Stevens Point than from Stevens Point to Portage. Probably the road running north was considered more uphill.

Another stage line, known as the Wisconsin Stage Company, began operations out of Stevens Point and Plover late in 1856 or early 1857. This was a state-wide organization.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *DuBay: Son-in-Law of Oshkosh*, p. 79.

Up to 1858, while there was a stage line from Gills Landing to Plover, there was no direct connection from Stevens Point to Gills Landing via Amherst. "Bad business," noted the *Pinery*, whose editors had seen "a respectable gentleman from the East yesterday who footed it all the way from Gills Landing to Stevens Point."<sup>1</sup> Apparently this was corrected that same week when the Wisconsin Stage Company "put a team on this route yesterday."

By the spring of 1859, the Wisconsin Stage Company was operating five carriages every day to Berlin, Weyauwega, Grand Rapids, and New Lisbon; and on May 20 the *Pinery* reported, *inter alia*, that more than 50 passengers arrived by these stages "night before last," and that "passengers arrive daily by stage in three days from St. Louis by Oshkosh and Gill's Landing."

In addition to these stage lines, O. C. Wheelock, later mayor of Stevens Point, operated a line between Stevens Point and Wausau from 1858 to 1862,<sup>2</sup> and either before or during 1864 the Wisconsin Stage Company was operating a daily service to Wausau.<sup>3</sup>

A stagecoach driver well remembered in Linwood township is George Sutton. Some time in his career, Sutton came into possession of a horse chestnut, a flat variety rounded like a dollar, which he carried in his pocket as a talisman when driving the stages. Long after he retired in Linwood his right hand was ever in his pocket fondling the horse chestnut, and when he died it was still in his pocket. But it did not follow him on the 'long day's journey into night' and is now in the interesting collection of buttons kept by Mrs. Wallace Diver of Linwood.

Meanwhile, it seems that one or more freight lines had begun operations out of Stevens Point-Plover by 1856. One of these may have been owned by J. H. Morgan whose livery barn, at least in 1861, appears to have been located on the southeast corner of First and Walnut

<sup>1</sup> *Pinery*, April 23, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> Obituary in *Stevens Point Journal*, April 6, 1895.

<sup>3</sup> *Pinery*, Dec. 9, 1864.

Streets in Stanton (Plover). Earlier, the *Pinery* advised that freight rates from Waupun to Stevens Point were \$1.25½ per hundred weight, plus 17 cents from Milwaukee to Waupun for a total of \$1.42½ for Milwaukee-Stevens Point through freight. From Fond du Lac to Stevens Point the rate was \$1.09½.<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1854 construction was begun on a steamboat, apparently rather small, to sail the Wisconsin River between Stevens Point and Mosinee. The boat, a side-wheeler, was launched that summer and christened the *Northerner*. Two years later a new and larger boiler was installed and the vessel was capable of carrying 30 passengers and several tons of freight. In the years following, excursions on the *Northerner* and other river steamers were fairly common. On Aug. 7, 1856, an excursion party left Anson Rood's Wharf at the foot of Main Street and made its first stop upstream at Wade's place at 6 a.m. By 8 a.m. it had reached the landing near Charles Mann's tavern-house ten miles north of the city; and by 9:30 a.m. the excursion passed Wylie's tavern and shortly DuBay's trading post, Whitehouse Landing at Knowlton about a mile and a half above DuBay's, then Warren's Mill, Drake's Landing, Bean's Eddy, and at 3 p.m. arrived at Little Bull. It is not clear from this whether passengers were allowed ashore at any of the above points, but it would appear that some stops were made as it should not have taken the steamer nine hours between Stevens Point and Little Bull. On the other hand, low water was often a problem. Alex Wallace recalls a family story about the arrival in Knowlton of "Uncle" (George) Whitney. En route to the north, the family had purchased a cow in Stevens Point; while the other members and their baggage went on board the steamer, Daniel Whitney, a brother to George, led the cow on foot to Knowlton on the same day and arrived ahead of the steamer. The other men had been forced to get out in the water and push in order to negotiate several spots on the river.

On March 31, 1859 a second steamboat, christened

<sup>1</sup> *Pinery*, March 15, 1856.

the *City of Stevens Point*, made her trial run under Martin Perkins, master. The ship was scheduled for daily service to "Mosinee" — one of the first times this name is used instead of the more familiar Little Bull Falls. By 1860, the name of the above steamer may have been changed to *City Belle* which by then was making "regular trips to Mosinee."<sup>1</sup> By 1864 the steamer *Star* was making daily runs to Mosinee.

River steamers continued to operate from Stevens Point into 1890s although by that time were being used mostly as excursion boats.

The main stage lines appear to have been discontinued in the 1870s, but some form of stage transportation between Amherst and Stevens Point continued as late as 1901,<sup>2</sup> and Abbott ("Abbe") Boyington, operating the star route from Stevens Point to Alban post office around the turn of the century, also carried passengers.

Milwaukee and Chicago newspapers in the 1860s were reaching Stevens Point in one day after publication and letters from New York in four days. In the 1870s, the United States mail was turned over to the railroads running through the county, not without a fight from the stage lines, and star routes were established to carry mail to the rural post offices. Most of these were discontinued shortly after the turn of the century and replaced by rural free delivery, abbreviated R.F.D. One of the first mail carriers from Green Bay to Plover may have been Olaf E. Dreutzer,<sup>2</sup> the same who in 1846 was licensed to operate a "grocery" at Plover.

The first rural delivery route in the county was laid out late in 1900 and the contract for carrying the mail was awarded to Smith Harroun at \$500 a year. The route went from Plover to Liberty Corners and east to St. Patrick's church, thence northeast to Carey Corners, thence west along the "Lombard road" (roughly Trunk D) and back to Plover for a round trip of 30 miles. In 1902

<sup>1</sup> *Pinery*, June 15, 1860.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Waupaca County*, p. 157.

three rural routes out of Stevens Point were established with W. F. Cartmill on Route 1, William Dergan on Route 2, and F. Campbell on Route 3.

Harry Whipple of Lanark recalls that when the first mail routes were established, the farmers were advised to buy a standard type red mail box with lock and key. If several boxes were situated at a given corner even as it happens today — convenient for some and inconvenient for others — the red mail boxes were placed a few feet apart, not all on a single buggy wheel as often happened later. When the mail carrier approached, he stopped his horse, or horses, in the middle of the road, got out of the buggy and, carrying a big ring of keys, opened the mail boxes. After depositing the mail, each box was again locked. This precaution seems a bit odd to a later generation which has grown up with no locks on its metallic mail boxes. However, tradition lingers, for even the latter are equipped with a latch for a padlock which no one bothers to use. The lock-and-key type mail box might suggest that people at the turn of the century were less trustworthy than they are today, which is unlikely, but it was no doubt easier to trifle with a mail box 50 years ago when travel was slow and travelers few. Moreover, the system of money orders has made trifling with the mails unprofitable. Nor does the modern mail carrier get time to read the postcards.

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Lacking a river to serve a pioneer community, even in a limited manner, the one avenue to the outside world which people waited for and dreamed about in the hinterlands of the Wisconsin frontier in the 1850s and 1860s was the railroad. This was the new invention which was making sport of the bad wagon roads, sand hills, sloughs and swamps.

And wherever the railroad went, it attracted a crowd of local people who drove in from miles around to watch

the track layers and to greet the first passenger train. Years after the first train came in, it was still a source of wonderment to hear the hoarse whistle of the engine echoing back and forth through the forest or across the prairie several minutes before it came into view. As the black monster moved closer to the depot, the bell began to ring, growing louder and more insistent, demanding of everyone to clear the tracks. Looming larger in front than behind, the engine slowed down, huffing and wheezing, still talking for all to hear. Suddenly it came to a noisy, metallic halt and the cylinder behind the high iron wheels let loose with a terrific WOOSH which shot steam clean across the depot platform. After that it just stood there, thumping in low pulsating beats, impatiently waiting for the engineer to turn it loose again. Barefoot boys gingerly picking their way down the platform through the small cinders dropped from the smokestack were wont to gaze admiringly up to the engine cab window at the man with the long visored cap and blue handkerchief around his neck. He was a genius.

Thus for the next half century or more the railroad became a part of the American legend, and no less so in Portage County. But with most things, even the railroad, it had to be bought with a price which, in the amount of discord and suffering it brought to many in the county, was high. And yet the county needed the railroad if it was to survive on a competitive basis with other counties, and the business men and farmers — although not all the latter realized it — also needed it desperately.

Up to 1860 the southern part of the state was served by two east-west railways connecting Prairie du Chien and La Crosse to Milwaukee with branch lines, including one north from Horicon to Berlin and one to Oshkosh. And when Ellis wrote his *Hand Book* in 1857 he included a map of a projected route of the "Milwaukee-Horicon-Stevens Point Rail Road" which was to cut diagonally through the state from Milwaukee to Superior via Stevens Point. No railroad reached Stevens Point until 1871 and when it did, it came by way of Menasha



and Waupaca, not Berlin, under the name of the Wisconsin Central. When promoters of the projected Horicon line to Stevens Point came up to sell stock in the company in the mid-1850s, at least one town board met to vote on bonding the county. Diarist Lombard tells us that he went to the polls in Lanark on Oct. 15, 1857 to vote on "the county given bonds to amt (amount) of \$200,000 in exchange for that amt of capital stock of the Milwaukee & Horicon Rail Road." He fails to say whether he was for or against it. Meanwhile, some 6,000 investors, many of them farmers including some from Plover and Buena Vista townships, bought stock in the Horicon line against a mortgage on their farm or property. The stock company sold these mortgages to investors in the East and when the railroad company failed in the panic of 1857, the stockholders were holding worthless paper which the Eastern interests forced them to redeem or lose their property. This became known as the "Horicon Swindle" and left a bad impression about the railroad companies which lasted many years. One who bought stock in the Horicon railroad was Almon Maxfield who mortgaged 129 acres of land about a mile southeast of Plover for \$1,100. His certificate is dated July 1, 1856 with maturity falling in ten years at eight per cent interest.<sup>1</sup> It looked like a good investment.

In an effort to stimulate the construction of railroads, the federal government, which held most of the lands taken over from the Indians, began making grants of these lands for the purpose of encouraging investors to build railroads through the several states. On May 5, 1864 the Congress made a grant of 839,276 acres to the Winnebago and Lake Superior Railroad and the Portage and Superior Railroad companies which included every alternate section of land ten miles on either side of the railway right-of-way along the proposed routes to be followed by the two lines. These two companies consolidated in May 1869 and on Feb. 4, 1871 became the Wisconsin Central Railroad, which in 1909 was leased to the Soo Line.

<sup>1</sup> In collection of Regional History Research Center and Records Depository, Library, Wisconsin State College at Stevens Point.

The most interested backer of the original Wisconsin Central from Menasha to Stevens Point was Judge George Reed of Manitowoc, and the leading backers in Stevens Point were Matthew Wadleigh, a member of the original board of directors, and Almanson Eaton. On Feb. 4, 1871 contracts were let for the building of the line from Menasha, and on Nov. 15 the first construction train pulled into Stevens Point. This was as far as the railroad went until the early spring of 1872 when the track laying was resumed northwest to Colby, and eventually to Superior.

The city of Stevens Point purchased the right-of-way through the city and donated it to the railroad, but in making this grant, specified that the division point, the shops and roundhouse would remain forever in the city. In writing up this contract the financiers, Gardner, Colby & Company, left out that portion of the contract and the omission was not discovered until 1886 when the company decided to move the main shops to Waukesha. Only then did the city realize the deception. The gradual removal of the division point and shops continued down to 1899 by which time a dangerous situation had arisen in Stevens Point because workmen who had spent their lives in the yards were about to lose their jobs. The *Stevens Point Journal* on Sept. 30, 1899 called it "the most arbitrary exhibition of capitalistic power that has taken place in Wisconsin for many years [and] is just the sort of thing that breeds anarchists. . ."

The timetable of the Wisconsin Central on June 16, 1888 reveals that there were five passenger trains west daily, three passenger trains south, three freight trains west and three freight trains south. In addition, Stevens Point was served by two passenger trains on the Green Bay line south and east, and two passenger trains south and west. On Aug. 28, 1957 the Soo Line was operating four passenger trains, that is, two each way, and 12 freight trains daily, and four freight trains daily except Sunday; there was no passenger service into Stevens Point on the Green Bay spur from Plover. On Jan. 4,

1959 still another reduction in passenger service on the Soo Line was adopted which allowed only one daily passenger train west and one east. Stops at Custer, Amherst Junction and Amherst, which had been served since the railroad was built in 1871, were also dropped. Low passenger usage and resultant deficits were cited by the railroad company for the cutbacks. On the other hand, it also portended better and faster service on the remaining trains.

The first Diesel locomotive to operate at Stevens Point began on Aug. 26, 1942 as a yard engine. The first road Diesel began Sept. 13, 1948 on train No. 24. The last steam locomotive to operate in or out of Stevens Point was 2711 on Dec. 21, 1954, passenger train No. 1.

The employees of the Soo Line in Portage County are represented by the following unions: Order of Railway Conductors; Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen & Yardmen; Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers; Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen & Enginemen; Railroad Yardmasters of America; Brotherhood of Railway & Steamship Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express & Station Employees; Order of Railroad Telegraphers; Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees; American Train Dispatchers Association; International Association of Machinists; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; Brotherhood Railway Carmen of America; International Brotherhood of Firemen, Oilers, Helpers, Roundhouse & Railway Shop Laborers; and Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen of America.

The big fight in the early 1870s arose not over the Menasha-Stevens Point line, but the building of a railroad from Portage to Stevens Point. The County Board proceedings are marked by numerous entries, some page-long or more, referring to action taken on the bonding of the county to support this line. In a special election held Dec. 2, 1871 the county voted to buy \$100,000 in bonds, but when the builders failed to begin construction in the next two years, it is quite understandable why the people went to the polls and voted to rescind their bonded indebtedness. On June 18, 1875 the County

Board commenced suit in Boston for the recovery of the bonds which, mysteriously, had been smuggled out of the county into Boston banks. While the case lingered in the courts for years, construction on the railroad actually began in October 1876. A stringer correspondent in Bancroft of the *Stevens Point Journal*, under date line of Dec. 18, 1875, had this to say: "The locomotive has at last traveled the entire length of our town. . . The bell on the locomotive is the noisiest and can be heard the furthest of any bell we have heard — except our two legged belles. . ."

If the Portage line reached Bancroft in December 1875 it appears that the last section to Plover was a long time being completed, probably because of the marsh. The Portage line continued in operation through World War II and on Nov. 9, 1945 all stations were closed; in 1946 the tracks were removed.

A third railroad into the county was the Green Bay & Lake Pepin chartered in 1866 to build a line from Green Bay to the Mississippi River. Construction was begun in 1870 and by 1872 the tracks had been laid through Portage County via Amherst Junction and Plover. In 1881 a spur was laid to Stevens Point. For a time the name was changed to the Green Bay & Minnesota Railroad and eventually to the Green Bay & Western.

To judge from an article in the *Plover Times* of Oct. 25, 1872, the arrival of the railroad in that village was a great occasion. Said the *Times*: "Hurrah! Ring the bells! Fire the guns! Bring out your fire crackers and pop guns! Never mind the powder, St. Patrick's eclipsed! Fourth of July is nowhere! Thanksgiving is in order! For sixteen long and weary years the inhabitants of Plover have been looking, toiling and hoping for a railroad. . . But now we've got a RAILROAD! Hear it O doubter despite all your prophecies to the contrary — the Green Bay & Lake Pepin R. R. is finished to the village of Plover. . ."

A fourth railroad, chartered in 1871, was the Wisconsin Valley which originated at Tomah, went north via Centralia (Wisconsin Rapids) and Junction City to Wau-

sau. The track layers passed through Junction City in 1874 and reached Wausau the same year. The building of this line had its background in an old feud between Wausau and Stevens Point. In 1854 the voters of Marathon County approved a bonded indebtedness to build a plank road from Wausau to the Portage County line. Work on the road was begun in 1857 and completed in 1858. But there is no mention in the proceedings of Portage County about extending the Marathon plank road into Stevens Point. According to Judge Louis Marchetti, Portage County's failure to complete the plank road "created an unfriendly feeling in the minds of the Wausau people. . . and asserted itself finally in the determination of the Wausau business men to resist the building of the Wisconsin Valley Railroad to Wausau via Stevens Point, leaving the two cities unconnected by railroad except by way of Junction City, no doubt to the detriment of both places. It is surmised if not susceptible of proof, that the sum of \$25,000 given by a large number of the business men of Marathon County, nearly all Wausau men, as an additional contribution to the Wisconsin Valley Railroad after it had already contracted with the county for the building of the road to Wausau, was expressly given on condition that said railroad should not run into Stevens Point. They seemed to fear that if the road once struck Stevens Point, some mysterious influence would prevent the building of the road to Wausau."<sup>1</sup>

However, when the railroad reached Wausau, the latter appeared willing to forgive Stevens Point as the Portage County proceedings carry a vote of thanks to the Common Council of Stevens Point for inviting the members of the board "to participate in the pleasures of an excursion to the city of Wausau on the occasion of the late Rail Road Celebration at that place. . ."<sup>2</sup>

A fifth railroad, the Chicago & North Western, came into the county via Almond village from Fond du Lac. An account of the building of this line is furnished in an

<sup>1</sup> Louis Marchetti, *The History of Marathon County*, (Chicago: Richmond - Arnold Publishing Co., 1913) pp. 93-94.

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. III, p. 526.

article by J. F. Frost who gives a vivid description of the repeated entreaties made by the citizens of Almond to the several railroads to run a line through that community. The main inducement in the 1890s was the export of potatoes which had become the cash crop in the area after wheat raising declined. With statistics and arguments, the Almond people appealed to the railroad authorities but the latter treated these enquiries with the disdain of empire builders — which they were.

Finally, the Chicago & North Western decided to build a line from Wild Rose to Almond which would continue to Grand Rapids to create a through service from Fond du Lac. Ground at the Wild Rose end was broken in December 1900 and on Aug. 27, 1901 the track layers crept into Almond village. Of this memorable occasion, Frost wrote: "There was much rejoicing. All Almond celebrated. A free dinner was served in the grove, the Belmont band provided music, and hundreds celebrated the day as one awaited for many years. . ."

With the coming of the railroad, property values went up, warehouses were built to handle the potato business, the Portage County Bank was opened, hotel accommodations were expanded and new stores and saloons blossomed in the warmth of the glow cast by the fire of the "Iron Horse."

The sixth and last railroad line to enter the county was a spur of the Chicago & North Western laid from Elderon to Rosholt village in 1903 (See *Rosholt, The Village of*). Interestingly, in the latter part of 1904, when the new electric power station was being installed at Jordan on the Plover, a news report referred to the possibility of establishing an electric car line from Stevens Point to Rosholt to serve as a connecting link between the Soo Line and the North Western with stops at Jordan, Ellis, Polonia and Batory. However, nothing came of this. "Batory" was actually the name of a creamery built by George W. Allen some 30 rods west of the Tomorrow River on the town road between Hamilton School and a saloon-store once known as "Little Wau-

<sup>1</sup> *Stevens Point Journal*, Sept. 22, 1926.

pun," in the town of Sharon not too far from what was once known as "Stanislawski's Corners." The name Batory, famous in Polish history and today a passenger line sailing between Poland and New York, was probably suggested by Joseph Omernick, secretary of the creamery association of which Nick Kruzicki, Sr., was president.

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Less than nine years after the Wright Brothers successfully demonstrated the world's first airplane at Kitty Hawk, Virginia, Frank Castory, a Hungarian-born barnstorming pilot flew into Stevens Point in a Curtis byplane and landed at the Fair Grounds to thrill a large crowd of people, most of whom got their "first glimpse of one of the marvelous scientific and mechanical inventions of the century." The pilot boldly predicted that the day would come when the airplane would be used "as a medium of transportation, for scouting purpose in warfare, and in several other capacities beneficial to humanity."

One of the first to encourage local flying in Stevens Point after World War I was Paul Collins, a U.S. Army flight instructor during the war. Local interest in airplanes picked up in 1929 when Harold ("Vic") Cartwright bought a Pheasant biplane which was based on a small strip now part of Point Manors in the town of Hull. Another field developed after 1936 east of McDill (Whiting) where Mr. & Mrs. Felix Gauthier began giving flight instructions, did charter work and crop dusting. But both of these fields were inadequate to the rapidly-improved models of aircraft developed in the 1930s. When World War II broke out, and a pilot training program was inaugurated at the Central State College, trainees at first had to be sent to fields at Wausau and Wisconsin Rapids. Steps were taken to develop a new airport, and, under Raymond M. Rightsell, coordinator of the training program at the college, Wilson S. Delzell and Guy W. Rogers, the matter was laid before the Common Council which agreed to buy

<sup>1</sup> *Stevens Point Daily Journal*, Centennial Edition, June 28, 1958.

land northeast of the city and build an airport. The field was dedicated Sept. 20, 1942 and from that day forward became a focal point in pre-flight training for army and navy cadets as well as civilian pilots.

The first manager of the Municipal Airport, A. E. Padags, was also the first to attempt commercial aviation out of Stevens Point. He maintained a DC-3 after World War II which made a daily flight in the north central part of the state. But the first permanent airline was established in 1948 by Francis Higgins of the town of Stockton who, in cooperation with the Clintonville Four-Wheel Drive Corporation, flew a five-place Howard between Stevens Point and Clintonville. This line was shortly taken over by the Wisconsin Central Airline which began with five-place Cessnas and later with two-engine, ten-place Lockheeds — actually only nine passengers were carried because the tenth place was removed to make room for communications equipment. In 1951 the Lockheeds were gradually replaced with Douglas DC-3s, the “workhorse” of World War II fame. In 1958 this airline, which had meanwhile reverted to an old name used by Higgins, namely, North Central, maintained 11 to 12 flights a day with connections to Chicago, Wisconsin cities, Minnesota and North Dakota. And as 1958 passed into 1959 North Central was looking forward to replacing the DC-3s with the larger Convair airplane.

The present manager of the Municipal Airport is Kenneth D. Barlow, assisted by Earl G. O’Keefe.

But the invention that was to transform the social and economic pattern of life in Portage County after the turn of the century, even as it would around the world, was neither the railroad nor the airplane, but the automobile, first referred to by a horse-conscious generation as the “horseless carriage.” Perhaps the first of these to reach Stevens Point was an electric single-seater, the product of a new firm known as the Western Automobile Company, which demonstrated the vehicle on Jan. 7, 1900 in the hope of attracting local capital for a factory to be located in Stevens Point.



The demonstration failed to interest a sufficient number of backers. In 1902 an automobile was the featured attraction at the annual fair in Stevens Point. This was also a one-seater known as the Orient gasoline runabout and was operated as an exhibition stunt by Adolph Hoeffler. A year later the first locally-owned runabout, an Oldsmobile, also gasoline-powered, was acquired by E. H. Joy who was accompanied on the trip from Milwaukee by a mechanic-chauffeur provided by the manufacturers.

The race was on.