SETTLEMENTS

The Norwegian Settlement

When the first permanent Norwegian settlers, Syver and Barbra Gothompson and their ten children, came to the area between the two Sugar Rivers in 1849, they occupied an abandoned log building. It may have been built by a trapper, or perhaps by one of the Norwegians, Aaslok Aarhaus and a Mr. Leikvolden, who stayed only a short time. The Gothompson family had arrived in Wisconsin at Milwaukee, where they hired a team and came to Green County.

When they came, there were Indian trails along both Sugar Rivers which went all the way to Blue Mounds, 30 miles away. These trails were often a foot deep and one-and-a-half feet wide. The Indians, who were Winnebagos, had their camp at the lower end of the Peter Gaarder farm, on the “island” known shortly after this as the John Gunhill Dakken place. Deer, muskrat, raccoon and fox were plentiful, as well as fish in the river. The Indians and the settlers had no serious problems sharing the area for a time.

The Gothompson built an addition to the log house, making it a double house; and it became the stopping place for all Norwegian immigrants who passed this way, often housing an amazing number of people. It was also used for the first school.

Most of the Norwegian settlement pioneers came in the 1850’s, and struggled to eke out a living on what is called Sparta sandy clay loam, not an ideal growing medium. Descendants of early settlers who live in the settlement today are Kittlesons, Gilbertsons and Albertsons.

THE ALBANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

These Lutheran pioneers very soon felt the need for worship services. The first meeting of the congregation which eventually built the picturesque stone church was held in the log house of Syver Gothompson in 1850.

In 1864 the stone church was built on the present site. That church, with some alterations, remains today. The stone came from the quarry to the northwest of the church, on the slope on the present Ivan Kittleson farm. Lime was burned in the quarry to produce mortar. The stones were laid up by Ole Gilbertson and fellow church members who gave freely of their time. Original records of the congregation are in the Norwegian language.

By 1884 there were nineteen families and several individuals belonging to the congregation. For many years a minister came from Orfordville to hold weekly worship services.
The beautiful Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church was constructed in 1864 using stone from a quarry just northwest of the church. This photograph was taken in 1904 when the new bell tower was dedicated.

Now in 1983, with the congregation consisting of 54 family units, the little stone church is no longer large enough. Land has been purchased on the northeast corner of the village of Albany, on Highway 59, where a new church will be built. The present pastor of the church is Reverend Allan Schoonover. For the present, Sunday school is held at the Senior Citizen Center and Sunday worship services at St. Patrick’s Catholic church in the Village of Albany.

Croake Settlement — Home of the Irish Pioneers

Halfway between Albany and Evansville, on both sides of the County line on the fertile soils of both Rock and Green Counties, is the Croake Settlement. Strictly Irish in its origin, this rural colony is typical of the pioneer building of America. Jimmy, “the King,” Croake came about 1840, leaving his native home in Kilkenny, Ireland. He purchased 350 acres of land from the government, building a log cabin for himself in the woods and clearing the land for farming. This site is on Finneran Road just off the county line.

On rare occasions Jimmy walked to Janesville, hacking the trees along what is now Magnolia Road so that he would not lose his way on the return trip. When he heard that another hermit in the area had been devoured by wolves, the young “King” wrote to his two brothers, Patrick and Michael, to come and join him in this new land. That was the potato famine era in Ireland; consequently, a sizeable delegation joined Patrick and Michael in their emigration—among them, Tom Dunphy and his wife; Tom’s sister, Margaret (who married the “King”); James Croake (Jimmy the carpenter); Billy and Mickey Croake (the masons); and another James Croake; three Tipperary cousins, Edmund, Big John, and Jeffrey Croake; and Kate Ryan, a widow and her six-year-old daughter.

The first winter four families including the carpenters lived in a long log cabin, but the need for more durable homes prompted the building of a substantial stone house.

The Celtic instinct for a home and children led to many marriages, but so inherent was the love for their own that the Croakes took for husbands and wives only members of the settlement. However, six families did marry into Croake families— the Dunphys, Bonner, Dawson, Finnan, Maloy and Tierney families. This meant that in time everyone on the settlement was related either by blood or marriage ties. In some instances there was a double relationship which complicated matters and caused their Yankee neighbors to throw up their hands in confusion, as a Croake, with the love of the intricate, said that the widow’s Ellen had married Long Pad’s son Tom and that made the children of Frank Croake the nieces of Ellen by marriage and her sister’s grandchildren.

Jimmy the “King,” and his wife Peggy had nine children; the first died in a smallpox epidemic. Jack, Tom, Dick, Jimmy and Mickey spent their lives living in or near Albany.
When Big John Croake's baby daughter died, the "King" set aside a portion of his farm for a cemetery, known as "Calvary on the Hill" or the "Croake Cemetery." This cemetery located on the County line is the resting place not only for those early settlers but for many of their descendants. Irish folklore has been handed down from one generation to another and many a child living in this settlement and playing on Bump's Bluff never doubted that some day a leprechaun would be spied eating those matchless wild strawberries so enjoyable to all of them.

In the simplicity born of their temperament and the faith of their fathers, they made of "The Bush" an Arcadian spot. Ever mindful of the Croake crest—six doves and the Gaelic motto of their clan, "Buallin Se," (Dove of Peace), they dwelt in perfect harmony. Three grandsons of these early settlers are still living—Johnnie Croak, Frank Dunphy and James Dunphy. The Dunphy, Petersen and McCreedy families, all descendants of these first Irish families, still farm on the land cleared by their ancestors. Two great grandchildren of Jimmy the "King" are living in Albany—Duane Dixon and Marcelline Wilson—as well as representatives of the next two generations—Dennis Carroll and James Graves and his children, Matthew, Phillip and Megan.

Attica

Albany's families are well entwined with those of Attica—Swanns, Brewers, Keehns, Bartletts, Nyes Qualleys, Zimmermans, Petersens and others.

In 1845 Attica, a crossroads community in the far southwest corner of Brooklyn Township, was called Winneshiek, after an Indian chief. It then became Milford; then Winneshiek again. When the post office was established, it was learned that there was already one Winneshiek in the state so the name "Attica" was chosen after Attica, New York. Although it did not grow rapidly, Attica was a lively trading center for many years. Originally settled for its good source of power, a six-foot head of water on Little Sugar River supporting both a saw and a grist mill, Attica boasted a store, a cooper, the usual blacksmith, and eventually, a school, a church and a cheese factory. Today Arthur A. Keehn runs his Attica Garage and Repair Service. Ronald Miller operates what used to be the Attica store and sells milk, cheese, beer and pop. The number of residences in the town includes that of auctioneer Wayne Albertson, Sr.

ATTICA COMMUNITY CENTER

In the winter of 1873-74 the people interested in building a church met in Joel Smith's home. Since they wanted the church to serve the greatest possible number of people, the Methodist religion was selected. Joel Smith, who lived just south of the present building that now serves as the Attica Community Center,

The "new" Attica Methodist Church—now the Attica Community Center was built in 1906 and 1907, and served the community until 1953. Original church, built on the same site in 1874, was destroyed by lightning.

volunteered to donate two lots if that site were chosen for the new church. Joseph Bartlett donated all the stone that they could use from his quarry, located west of Attica cemetery.

The building committee consisted of Joseph Bartlett, Fayette Jipson and Arad Ross.

In 1908 the market for milk produced by Attica-area dairymen was this cheese factory. Wooden barrels in the foreground probably were used to hold whey which local farmers hauled back to their farms, mixed with oats or barley, and fed to their pigs.
The first pastor, Reverend R. Pennilla, also served Albany church: the first trustees were William Layton, Joseph Bartlett and Joel Smith.

The church was made of stone with a double door to the East and the altar, built of black walnut—round and high to accommodate the large bible—was located at the west end of the church. Forty seats were built by Fayette Jipson who received ten dollars for his five days of labor. The Epworth League donated funds for the material. The church was heated by two wood stoves, one on each side of the entrance. Light for evening services was provided by kerosene hanging lamps and two bracket lamps near the altar. The cost of the church was $2,089.72; total donations amounted to $2,040.70. When all the equipment had been purchased, the debt was $455.69.

The church had its first communion in the summer of 1874 when Mrs. Joseph Bartlett made the wine and baked the bread for the service.

The second church, which now stands, was built in 1906 and 1907 after the original building had been so badly damaged by lightning that it could not be used. Stone from the first church was used in the second and a south wing was added for the pulpit. The wing so enlarged the church that the seating capacity was increased to one hundred fifty. Three red upholstered chairs, donated by stock buyer David Stephens, were placed in the sanctuary area. Mr. Hayden built the podium for $8, and Mrs. Thomas Campbell gave the large bible and hymn books. Cost of the new church was $1,745.27.

The church served the community for many years both for sorrows and for joys, and the last service was held in April, 1953, when Edna Zimmerman was baptized and became a member of the church.

In June, 1955, the Methodist Conference of the Western District of Wisconsin declared the church abandoned and that all its contents and the building itself should be sold, proceeds to go to the Albany Methodist Church. Nineteen families gave $25 each—other smaller donations were received, too—and $600 purchased the building for the community. A bell donated by Mr. and Mrs. E. O. Knapp and never installed because of its great weight now serves John Simons Grace Methodist Church in Beloit. Thus the Attica church ceased to exist and became the Attica Community Center.

The first social evening in the new community center was held on December 11, 1955—a Christmas party and program planned by Ethel Schultz and Grace Edwards.

Maintenance of the center has included replacement of the kerosene lamps with electric lights, oil heat for the wood-burning stoves, a new roof, painting, and lawn mowing.

Through the untiring efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Marion Swann the Attica Church building has become the Attica Community Center, the setting for continuing good times and good fellowship.

The English Settlement

The early settlers in the English Settlement, northeast of Albany, were immigrants from the English-Welsh border country, and most would be considered Welsh in nationality. They came from a hilly, beautiful land of small farms and small industrial towns which could not support the growing population.

A journal kept by Thomas Francis who came to the United States in 1855 reveals in part what the ocean crossing was like:

"The first part of our journey was very rough but very swift. One dog was blown off and drowned. Don't bring a box without some kind of feet under it to keep it up off the damp. Take care to bring no fat meat for no one in the ship likes it—bring lean—sea sickness makes the stomach weak—bring herrings. Bring some vessel to put the allowance of meat to soak in and one to keep broth in. We throw nice broth away for want of a vessel to put it in. We take our victuals to cook up on deck. I would advise you to bring plenty of provisions for hardship will come."

Among other early settlers who lived in the settlement or nearby were:

Edward and Mary Hamer Lloyd, William and Margaret Davis Francis, Benjamin and Emma Francis Swancutt, Edward and Mary Davis Davis, John and Mary Francis Williams, Edward and Mary Evans Meredith, Thomas and Elizabeth Evans Pryce, Richard and Sarah Lloyd Smout, Richard and Mary Jarmar Hamer, William and Mary Lloyd Lewis, John and Anna Griffith Trow, Richard and Ann Jones Reese, Alfred and Margaret Jarmar Edmunds and John Jones, whose wife Sarah Sheen did not emigrate.

The living conditions of the early days were primitive and difficult. The log houses were chinked with dirt and manure made into mortar. Mrs. Edward Davis carried all the family's drinking water for a half mile using a shoulder yoke. Early lighting was from a "bitch" light which was a rag soaked in coal oil and then lit.

These people persevered and no doubt agreed with this observation by Thomas Francis: "This is a first rate country for a man that works for his living."
English Settlement Union Church was built in 1886, and used until about 1968. Members of the congregation, pictured in the early 1900's, included, left to right: Dave Phelps, Tom Edmunds, Mae Watkins, Tom Lewis, Zella Francis, Vira M. Trow, Bill Williams, Mae Williams, Alfred and Jane Lewis and children, Jim Francis, unidentified man, Sarah Francis, Liza Watkins. Standing on steps, left to right: Mae Williams, Nellie Watkins, Jane Edmunds, Elder Graves’ wife, Elder Graves, “Grandpa” Hamer, Roy and Orin Lewis (boys), John Watkins.

ENGLISH SETTLEMENT UNION CHURCH

This congregation made up of the residents of the English Settlement had its beginning in the deceasing of the land for a Swancutt Cemetery in 1861. By 1887 additional land was deeded and the name of the cemetery was changed to Trow-Swancutt. A meeting was held in 1884 when the residents of the English Settlement felt there was a need for a church building. A sum of $505 was raised with a proposal that a church be built. It was to be a non-denominational church. The church was built in 1886 with William Reese, Thomas Lewis, James Lloyd, Aaron Jones, Thomas Edmunds and James Francis serving as the building committee. The church was dedicated in January 1887 at a service led by the Reverend S. L. Eldred. The first church officers were Chairman, William Reese; Treasurer, William Lewis; Secretary, Thomas Lewis.

Church services were conducted throughout the years by several denominations. Elder E. P. Graves, an Advent Christian Minister, often had charge of the services. Blanche Jones, a life-long resident of the Settlement and village, remembers him well as the “preacher who continually pounded the pulpit to emphasize his sermons.” She was then a small child attending the services with her parents. By 1968 the church was not actively used but a church board was named to attend to the repair and upkeep of the structure. The church burned to the ground in April, 1970. The cemetery is still maintained by a perpetual care fund begun in 1923 and administered by a cemetery board. This little cemetery lies to the west of the English Settlement Road about four miles northeast of the Village of Albany.