

RAILROAD ERA

RAILROAD TRANSPORTATION

With the advent of the railroad, stagecoaches became a less popular form of transportation. Railroad travel was more reliable, economical and efficient than stagecoach travel.

The railroad depots at Syene and Fitchburg Village became a more practical place to locate than the bypassed, stage-inspired settlements of Oak Hall, Lake View and Dogtown.

Railroad transportation included advantages for Fitchburg farmers that stagecoaches could not provide. Farmers gained entrance to wheat, dairy and livestock markets via the railroad. Increased access to markets resulted in economic growth of both farms and trade centers. In addition, railroads provided good passenger transportation. People traveled faster to their destination, with more regularity, and under easier conditions than in stagecoach days.

However, there were also disadvantages to the railroads. Conniving agents convinced farmers to mortgage their property to aid railroads. Some mortgages foreclosed and farmers lost money in extended litigation. The number of farm mortgages lost to railroad aid in Dane County was eight-five, amounting to a total of \$122,950.¹ Further, consolidated railroad companies gained monopolies, enabling them to charge high prices for transportation of freight and passengers.

Progressive Wisconsin governor and senator, Bob LaFollette, worked hard in the early 1900's to put through laws for railroad regulations and labor legislation which included better working conditions for railroad employees. To recuperate from the rigors of the political arena, the nationally respected reformer took short vacations in Fitchburg at the home of Dr. Philip Fox, his private physician. Fighting Bob was so fond of Dr. Fox that he named his son Philip, who was also to become governor, for him.

Two railroads, the Chicago & North Western and the Illinois Central established lines through Fitchburg in the later 1800's.

CHICAGO & NORTH WESTERN RAILROAD SYENE SETTLEMENT — SWAN CREEK

The Chicago & North Western Railroad's main predecessor, the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, received its charter from the Illinois Legislature in 1836. The present Chicago & North Western

¹Elisha W. Keyes, *History of Dane County* (Madison: Western Historical Association, 1906) p. 242

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Railroad is the outcome of consolidations, purchases and unions of railroads under various corporate names.

In 1852 the Beloit and Madison Railroad Company was incorporated and was authorized by the Wisconsin Legislature to build a railroad from Beloit to Madison. The Beloit and Madison Railroad failed and was then leased to the Galena Company in 1862. By 1864 the Galena Company finished a line going from Beloit to Madison. This line passed through the eastern side of Fitchburg in Sections 2, 11, 14, 23, 26 and 35. A depot was established in Section 11 at Syene. The Monfort division from Blue Mounds to Madison was completed around 1881, passing through Sections 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 in Fitchburg.

While the railroad was in its development stages through Wisconsin, Dr. William H. Fox was appointed as commissioner by the railroad to receive subscriptions for capital stock. Dr. Fox also secured his own stop, Fox's Crossing, for shipment of livestock to market.

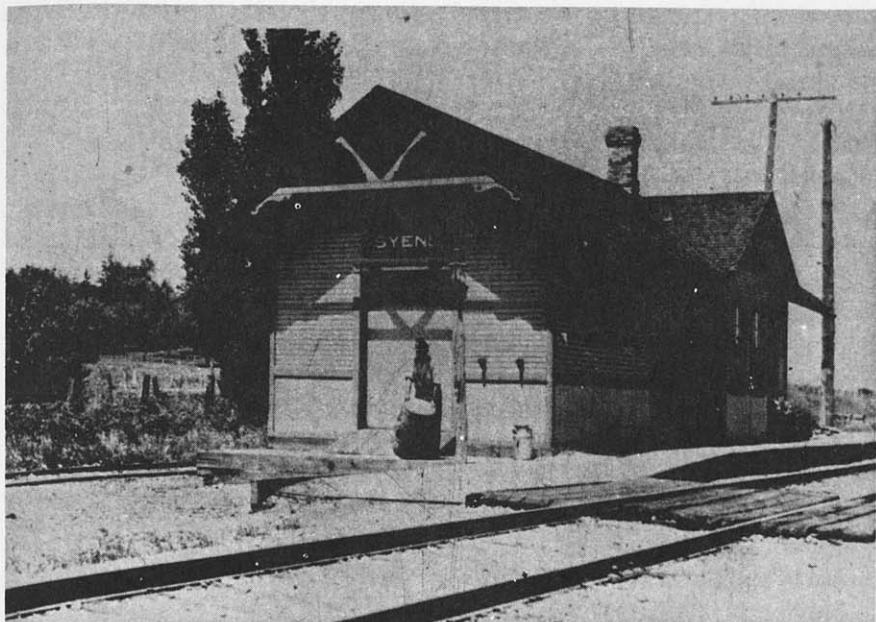
A tragedy occurred in 1900 near Fox's Crossing. The *Oregon Observer* explains,

"William Jones was killed when his buggy was struck by a train at the Catholic Church crossing. The sheds shut the view for some distance. The engineer blew the whistle and said 'Mr. Jones looked around the side curtains of his buggy which were on and the top up.'"

At the Syene Station, a trade center developed around the depot which operated from 1864 to 1926. No one from the neighborhood had to go farther than Syene Road to find a depot, post office, grocery store, creamery, stockyard and blacksmith shop. Farther down the road was the McCoy Dairy and ice cream bar factory.

The grocery store was operated by Mr. and Mrs. John Odegard until it was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Vern Sykes. Sykes not only operated the store but raised a garden for truck farming. Mrs. Sykes also managed the post office and sold train tickets at the depot.

The Chicago and North Western Railroad operated the stockyard at Syene Station. Donald Gill remembers a harrowing experience his father, George, and the hired man encountered while driving hogs to the Syene shipping yards. A pelting rain forced them to herd the hogs into a tobacco shed. They soon abandoned the shed and Gill explains a near tragedy, "*They had just gotten about 100 feet or so when a tornado came up and lifted the shed right up in the air and dropped it right down. If they had stayed in there, they'd both have been killed. The same storm moved the barn on our farm about six or seven inches off the foundation.*" This probably occurred during the tornado of May 23, 1878. This tornado caused extensive damage in its sweep over central Iowa, northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin.



(picture courtesy of M. Jones.)

Syene Depot operated on the Chicago & North Western train route from 1864-1926.



The Stoneman family lived near the Syene Depot. They are from left to right: Edna (Cross), Janet, Harold, Donald, Dorothy, and William.

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Important in the social and religious development of the Syene community was the Swan Creek Methodist Church. Among memorable pastors were Fallows, Dinsdale and Eaton. Mr. Eaton arranged to have a noted Wisconsin author, Hamlin Garland, give his first in a series of lectures at the Swan Creek church. Garland briefly recounts this episode in his autobiography, *A Son of the Middle Border*.

In 1905 Mary O'Sheridan praised the influence of the church: "*The little church has always been a power for right living and good fellowship, and it is the wish of all that to its present fifty-six years of prosperity another fifty-six and more may be added.*" The church did not attain fifty-six years, however, because church services discontinued about 1928.

Swan Creek school was located close to the church. Margaret Lalor's family attended the school and she remembers, "*In early times the people went to the old school house for recreation, and there was a good many spelldowns, singing schools, speaking schools and box socials.*"

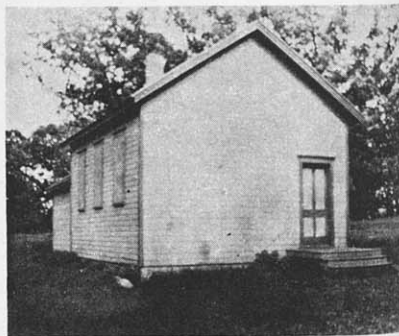
A Syene Ladies Aide was organized at the Swan Creek Church on November 24, 1896. The first officers were: Miss Caroline Whitson, President; Miss Martha Tipple, Secretary and Miss Florence McCoy, Treasurer. People came to meetings from Madison, Oregon, Syene and Wingra Park. In 1905 Mary Grant O'Sheridan reported in the *Wisconsin State Journal* that the Aide held fairs and oyster suppers to help pay the minister's salary and furnish the church.

Sewing for the needy was a favorite hobby of the Ladies Aide. O'Sheridan explains, "*all sorts of wearing apparel is constructed in hopes that there may be no incongruities of architecture between the*



(picture courtesy of G. Stoneman.)

Swan Creek Church



Swan Creek School

garment and the needy one to whom it will be given or, in other words, leaving its fit to fate."

Another sewing organization of the Syene area was the Swan Creek Sewing Circle, formed in 1915. Gladys (Jones) Stoneman credits Hazel Lalor as the original charter member. During both world wars, members of the circle made bandages for the Red Cross and still engage in such activities as sewing quilts for members and clothes for children at Central Colony. Still active, the Swan Creek Sewing Circle celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 1975.

Activities more to a gentleman's liking involved a rifle rivalry between Syene and Oregon. A challenge from the Syene Rifle team appears in the October 28, 1886 issue of the Oregon Observer: "*To Oregon Rifle Team: We hereby challenge you to a shooting contest to take place on Syene grounds, the losing team to furnish banquet supper at Park Hotel. Distance not to exceed 500 yards and each man to be allowed ten shots; contest to take place within two weeks. Syene Rifle Team.*" (William Gill, Henry Williamson, Sidney Terwilliger).

Excerpts from a poem by J. H. Lalor describes the shooting match.

On the nineteenth day of February
eighteen hundred and eighty-seven
The air was very bright and warm;
the sun shone from the heavens.

The Syene Rifle team arose
and hastened on their way.
For the Oregon team had challenged them
for a shooting match that day.

Away they rode 'neath sunlit skies
with many a laugh and joke;
'We'll win the game today,' they said,
'And have a rousing smoke' ...

On further details of the game,
'tis useless to dilate,
For the Syene boys came out ahead,
by a score of twenty-eight.

The Chicago and North Western Railroad spawned the railroad settlement of Syene and resulting clubs and organizations of Syene and nearby Swan Creek.



(picture courtesy of Oregon Observer.)

Swan Creek Sewing Circle organized in 1915 celebrates 60th anniversary in 1975. Standing, left to right, are: Carole Kinney, Marge Blaney, Lucille Uphoff, Francis Gundlach, Marie Nobbs, Rachel Haight, Lucille Gundlach, Beatrice Larson, Freida Lease, Beth Rouley, Mary Kinney, Margaret Mertz, Gladys Stoneman and Janet Keenan. Seated are: Dorothy Lyons, Laura Mandt, Hattie Henshue, Gladys Beale, Evelyn Evert, Francis Meicher, Donna Meier, Florence Kellor, and Edna Cross.

CHICAGO & NORTH WESTERN STOPS

at

SYENE

Northbound to Madison Southbound to Chicago

7:00 AM 6:00 PM

ILLINOIS CENTRAL STOPS

at

FITCHBURG VILLAGE AND BEANVILLE

Northbound to Madison Southbound to Freeport

10:00 AM 9:00 AM

6:30 PM 3:30 PM

ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROADFITCHBURG VILLAGE — STONER PRAIRIE DEPOT
(BEANVILLE)

In 1887, a second railroad passed through Fitchburg: the Illinois Central Railroad. It brought the thriving trade center of Fitchburg Village and a milk stop at Beanville.

Two historical Illinois men were instrumental in the establishment of the Illinois Central. Congressmen Abraham Lincoln and Senator Stephen Douglas urged the passage of a bill granting federal land in Illinois to the railroad. The bill was passed by the Senate after considerable debate, and in 1850 signed into law by President Millard Fillmore.

After railroad construction in Illinois, trains soon expanded into the neighboring states of Iowa, Indiana and Wisconsin. In 1887, the railroad, under the name of the Chicago, Madison and Northern

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Railroad, purchased land in Fitchburg from the farms of Purcell, Byrne, Adams, Harrington, Vroman, Joseph and James O'Brien, Gillet and Mutchler.

A large tract of land was purchased from the Patrick Byrne farm. To compensate for this loss, the railroad provided an underground cattle pass for suitable entrances to all of Byrne's fields. When Fitchburg took over the ownership and maintenance of Wendt Road in 1944, the Town accepted responsibility for all guarantees granted to the Patrick Byrne farm.

In 1887, during the decade of peak United States railroad construction years, track was extended from Freeport to Madison, passing through Fitchburg. Catherine Byrne remembers that her mother, Jane (Barry) Byrne, provided meals for the railroad builders. These men slept in shanties supplied by the Illinois Central.

Full train service began shortly after February 1, 1888, when the Illinois Central's first passenger train came through Fitchburg. Passenger trains supplied mail and baggage service while freight trains hauled farmers' livestock to Chicago stockyards and transported milk to the Pet Milk Condensary at Belleville.

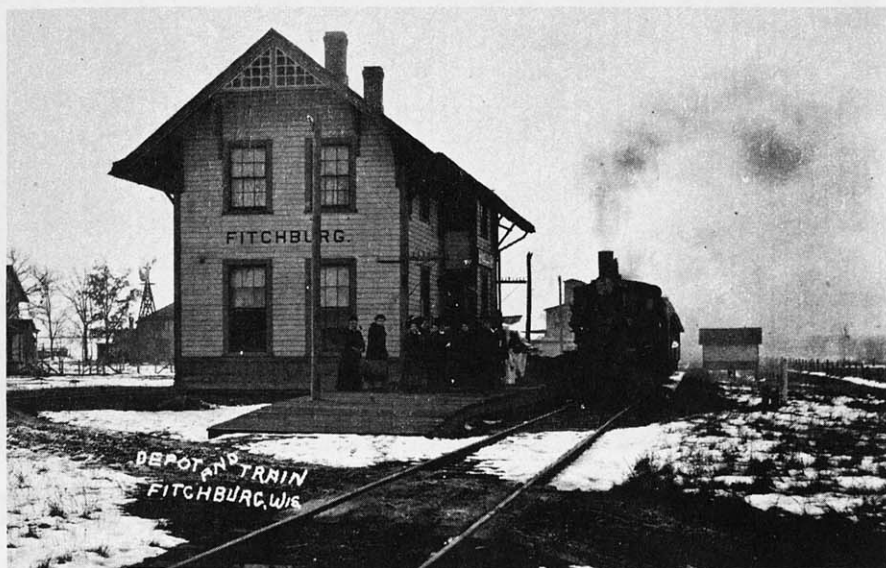
The railroad settlement of Fitchburg Village evolved from the depot. The small village was a bustling beehive of business in the early 1900's. Larger than the Syene settlement, Fitchburg Village contained



(picture courtesy of C. Byrne.)

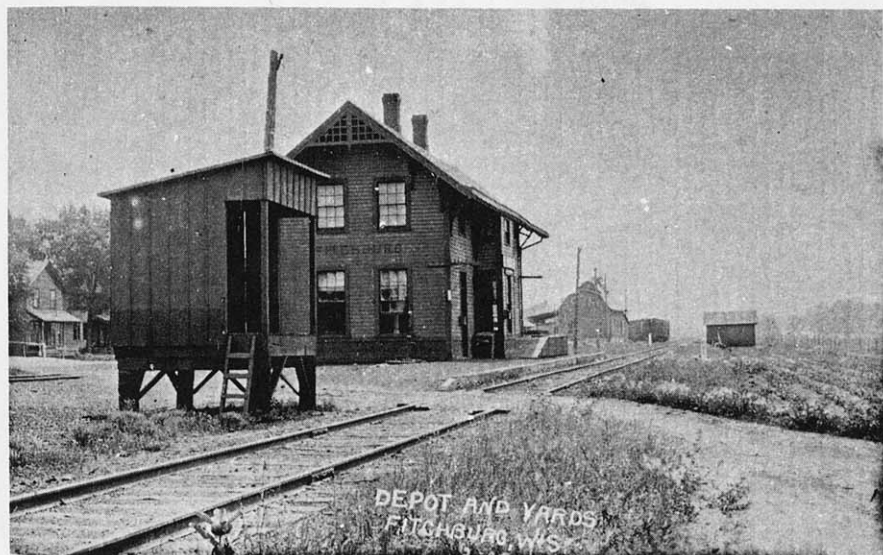
Patrick Byrne negotiated with the Illinois Central Railroad for compensation of land loss.

a grocery store, feed mill, lumber and coal yard, implement dealership, stockyards, blacksmith shop, garage and church. A cheese factory faced the village at the end of Wendt Road.



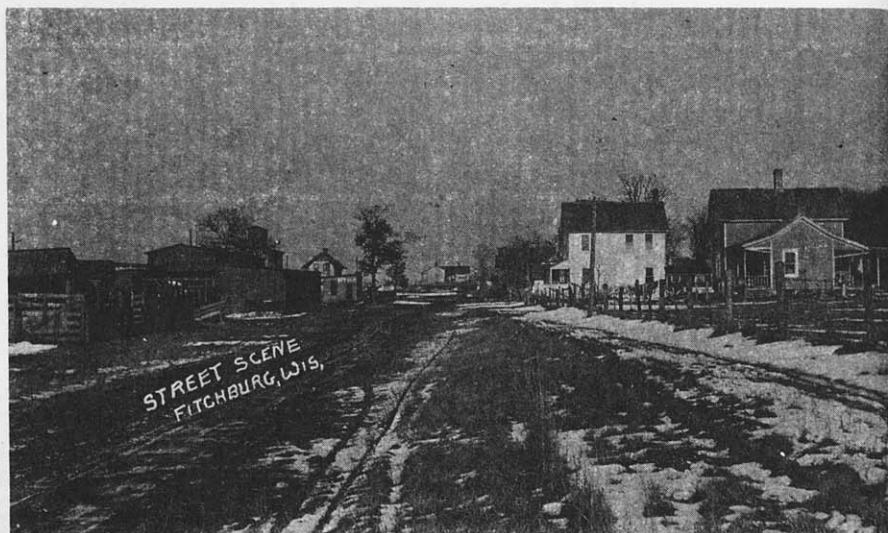
(picture courtesy of A. Adams.)

Fitchburg Depot and train along Illinois Central tracks about 1910-12.



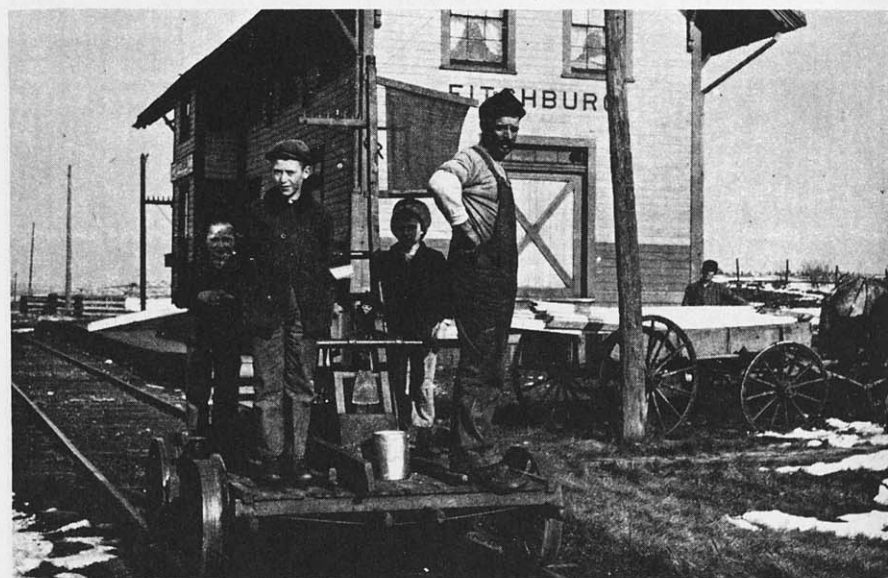
(picture courtesy of R. Purcell.)

Fitchburg Depot, milk stop and stockyards.



(picture courtesy of C. Byrne.)

Fitchburg Village street scene as Fitchburg was from 1900-18. The left side shows the commercial section with stockyards, lumber mill, and depot.



(picture courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin.)

Children around the village loved the pump car.



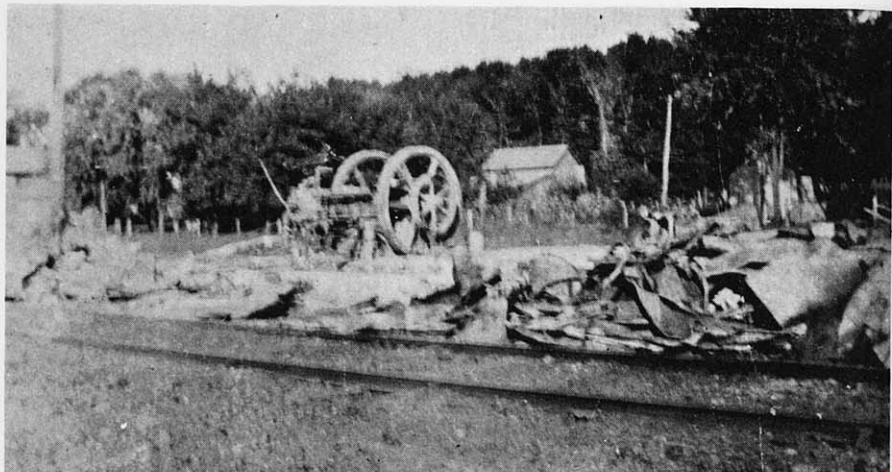
(picture courtesy of R. Purcell.)

Roy Clapp, Will Purcell, and Art Purcell stand in front of the grocery store.



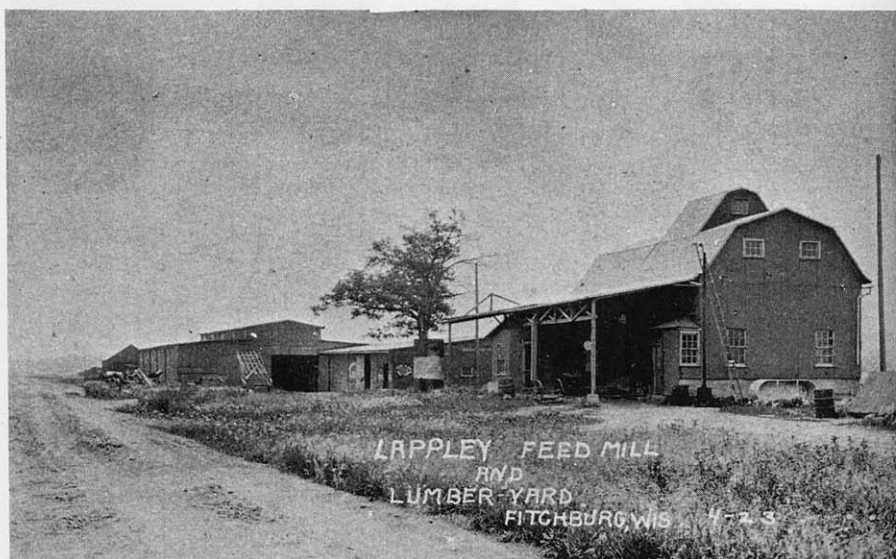
(picture courtesy of A. Adams.)

Lapley Brothers' lumberyard and feed mill about 1910-1912.



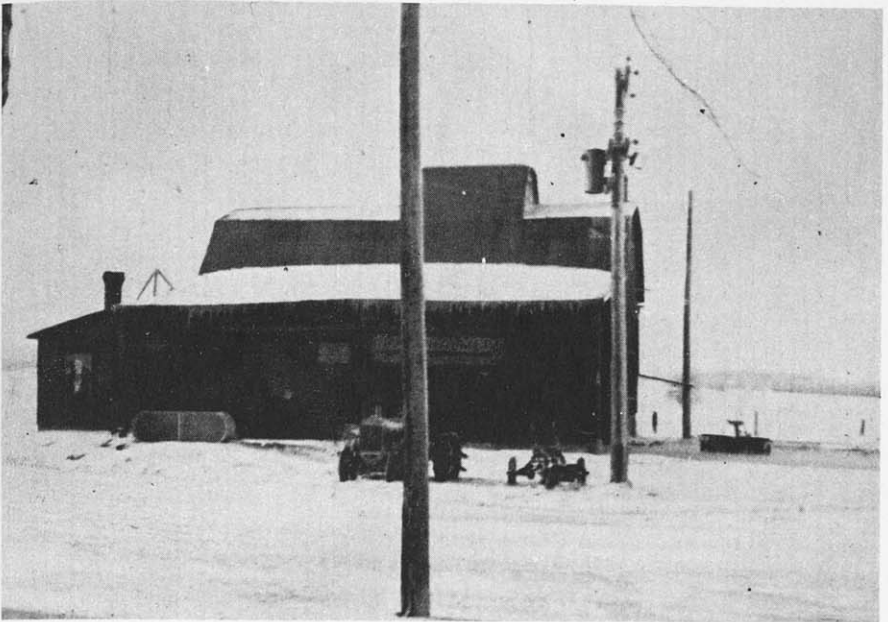
(picture courtesy of A. Adams.)

The Lapplely feed mill burned to the ground in a 1914 fire.



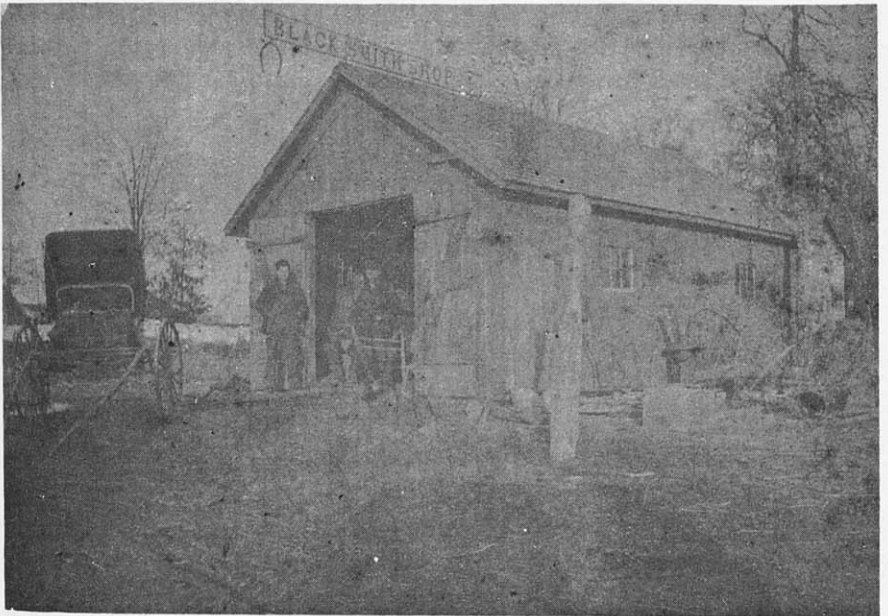
(picture courtesy of R. Purcell.)

The rebuilt Lapplely Brothers' lumberyard and feed mill.



(picture courtesy of G. Vroman.)

Side view of Lappley Feed Mill.



(picture courtesy of A. Adams.)

Fitchburg Blacksmith shop prior to 1900.



Rose McWatty and Ellen Clapp standing at the Patrick Byrne farm near Fitchburg Village. The David Byrne family settled in 1854 and built this house in 1877.

The railroad provided jobs for some villagers. For several years, Fred Penn was the Illinois Central Section foreman and kept the tracks in good operating condition. Station agents at the depot sold passenger tickets, handled freight, and also provided telegraphic service. Some agents were: Mr. Smiley, Francis Lamboley, and Mrs. Roselle Jones.

The business establishment remaining in trade for the longest period of time was the general grocery store. In 1890, Thomas Purcell built a two-story building and established a grocery business which he operated until 1898. The Purcell grocery became famous for the sale of Peruna, a soft drink of the time rumored to contain liquor and sold as a cure-all tonic.

A rival gathering place was the Fizz House, started by Henry Meister in 1898. Meister dispensed soft drinks. His residence also came to be a favorite meeting place of neighbors and villagers.

In 1898, Purcell sold the grocery store to business partners, Borchardt and Henrichs who moved the building to a more accessible location across from the depot.

The Herman Wendt's bought the store in 1910. Mrs. Dora Wendt took over full-time when her husband died in 1924. She sold the store and left Fitchburg for three years between 1929 and 1932. During these years a new owner, Mr. Dehnert, took over the store but found it impossible to maintain payments on the property during the



(picture courtesy of N. Purcell.)

Thomas Purcell built and operated the grocery store at Fitchburg and also served as post master.

depression. Mrs. Wendt returned and re-established her store in 1932 where she remained until her retirement in 1964.

The post office was housed in Mrs. Wendt's store for several years. The original post office in Fitchburg, located in William Lappley's business office, moved to Mrs. Wendt's after a 1926 fire in Lappley's office. In 1952, by United States postal decree, the office closed and mail service from Oregon rural route took over Fitchburg Villagers' mail.

Mrs. Wendt's store was more than a place to buy groceries or receive mail. It was a social gathering place where local farmers congregated to talk about farming. It was customary for women to stay home while men met at the store and chatted every night. Catherine Byrne says her Uncle Jim, a bachelor, rarely missed a night of visiting at the local grocery store. There were occasionally boxing and wrestling matches and dancing in the basement which Ervin Lappley thought was all good-natured fun.

A highlight of Mrs. Wendt's store was her salt and pepper shaker collection. Everyone donated sets until she had about 300 which she dusted faithfully each week. Mrs. Genevieve (Lacy) Purcell remembers *"She always told us she loved every one of them except a pair of feet. She always said if she didn't think she'd hurt the person's feelings that gave them to her, she'd throw them out."*



(picture courtesy of G. Fischer.)

Mrs. Wendt on her last day as post mistress in 1952, presenting mail to Mr. and Mrs. Carl Larson.



(picture courtesy of G. Purcell.)

A Fitchburg Village party for Mrs. Wendt's retirement. From left to right are: Mrs. Walter Hoffman, Mrs. Lobeck, Mary Adams, Ken Hall, Genevieve Purcell, Arnel Adams, Ruth Hall, Dora Wendt, Sylvia Doerfer, Carl Larson, Mrs. Zwiefel, Vernice Baxter, and Maude Weiss.

Mrs. Purcell further reminisces: *"Fitchburg has never been the same since Mrs. Wendt left. It was always a central place of interest where everybody could go and express their feelings and desires. There was somebody there who would listen."*

Also in the village, the Lappley Brothers conducted a combination of businesses established in 1899. They ran a feed mill, lumber and coal yard and implement dealership. William Lappley acted as general manager while John Lappley led a carpenter crew that served the construction needs of the area.

Ervin Lappley remembers helping in his Uncle John's construction business: *"Most of us kids who could handle a paint brush would lay the barn boards on sawhorses and paint them. That would be one coat and then the second coat of paint was added when they got the building up. We got 25 barrels of that dry red ocher and mixed that with linseed oil and we'd paint the boards. That was the boy's job."*

One day when the Lappley cousins were painting boards, they got themselves into mischief. Ervin Lappley remembers: *"We decided to paint this white collie dog red. So we painted him red except his head. We never thought about drying him out. As soon as we were done, he ran home and busted right through the screen door into the house. There was red paint on everything. The lady was really mad. We painted her white dog red, dripping red. The dog was never any good after that. So we threw him in the car with this carload of pigs and shipped him to Chicago. He brought us three dollars."*

For a short time, Ervin's brother, Albert, ran an unusual silk treatment shop in the village. He used a special rubberizing method that waterproofed silk which was used for shower curtains and hospital sheets. Later, Albert's business was bought by a large Chicago operation.

About 1927 Ervin Lappley took over the Lappley enterprises and later moved his coal and implement dealership to the larger village of Oregon. The Lappley enterprises are still a going concern in Oregon.

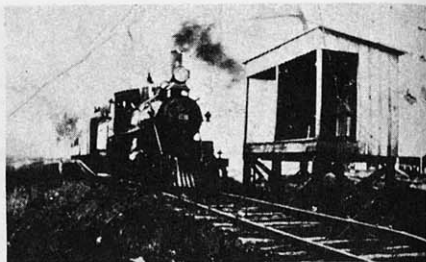
The blacksmith shop changed ownership several times as did the garage. The cheese factory was operated as a farmers' cooperative.

Near the south end of the village was a Lutheran Mission Church established in 1898 by Rev. E. F. Sherbel. In about 1925 it was discontinued and sold to a homeowner, Wesley Wilson.

The Illinois Central Railroad established the Stoner Prairie Depot at the Rufus Gillet farm. This never developed into a railroad settlement but as a milk stop it provided a gathering place for local people.

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Beanville milk stop along the Illinois Central Railroad. The depot operated from 1877-1938.

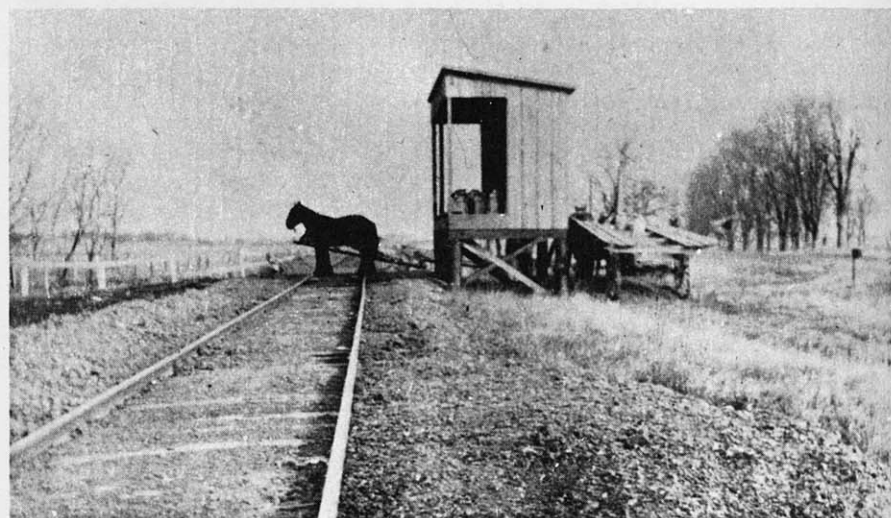


(picture courtesy of L. Lacy.)

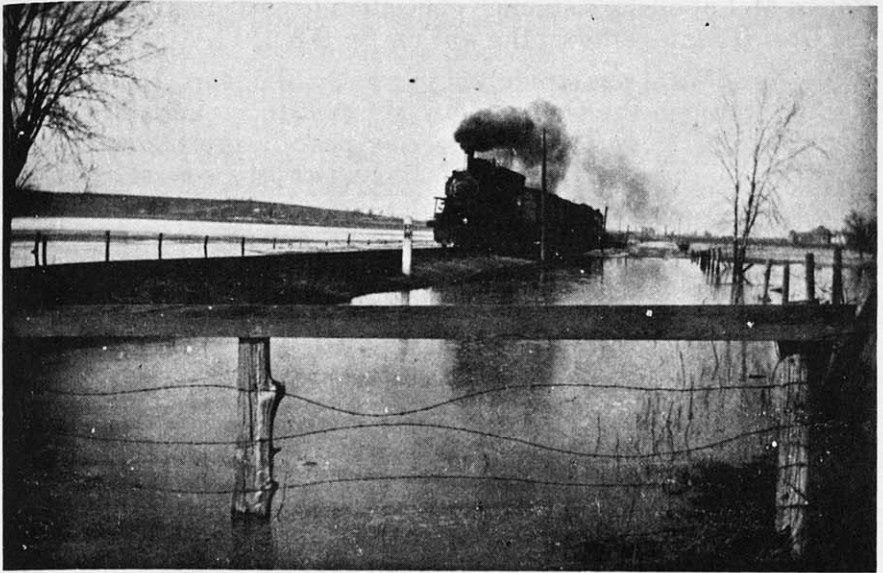


(picture courtesy of G. Vroman.)

Mary Vroman (Mrs. Hiram) waiting for the train.



(picture courtesy of G. O'Brien.)



(picture courtesy of L. O'Brien.)

Train approaching Beanville about 1937. Site of present Leo O'Brien farm.

Stoner farmers still chuckle about the local naming of "Beanville". Rufus Gillet was a progressive farmer who grew soybeans, only to get a friendly ribbing from the others for his choice of crop. One Halloween night in 1916, some prankster neighboring farmers got together and painted "Beanville" across the milk station where it remained for several years.

Children also enjoyed the excitement of a neighborhood depot. Leo O'Brien who lived nearby remembers using a lantern to flag down the train in winter time for boarding passengers. *"That was a big thing for a kid,"* he explains. *"I waved my lantern back and forth and when the engineer saw me, he gave a couple of little toots with his whistle."*

About 1925, passenger trains were discontinued. For a short time the railroad company operated a gasoline powered car for passenger service. In Fitchburg Village this was known as the "Red Devil" and the Beanville station as the "Tunerville Trolley." The Fitchburg Village closed about 1926 while the Beanville depot was discontinued in 1938. Not long after, the settlements declined.

WORLD WAR I

The issue of the United States entry into the war created divided feelings among Wisconsin's people. Despite German nationalism and

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Robert M. LaFollette's staunch opposition to participation in the war, the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917.

World War I was strongly supported in Fitchburg. Lillian Snover Keenan, through the *Oregon Observer* in 1918 explains Fitchburg's participation, "*From a long period of peaceful prosperity we were awakened to the stern realities of war and as people must be ready to meet any emergency.*"

The "Woman Committee" was founded in Fitchburg and worked under the Dane County Council for Defense. The first officers were Genevieve Byrne, Chairman; Kate Fahey, Secretary; Mary Lacy, Treasurer. The committee was composed of Clara Griffin, Tessie White, Margaret Kivlin, Josie Gorman, Mabel Richardson, Flora Keenan, Mary Lacy, Isabel Scott, Mary Purcell, Mrs. Pat Barry and Mrs. M. Leslie.

Leo Lacy explains his exemption from the World War I draft, "*Before my time came to go, we had a fire and burned out all the*



Leo Lacy

buildings except the house. The neighbors got together and went to the draft board and got me excused from going."

The Lacys rebuilt the barn during the war only to lose it to fire again in 1919. Leo says, *"I pretty near went with the last fire. We milked the cows and put the milk in the cans like we did them days, and came to the south end of the barn. The horse was in the barn. My Dad was there and he said, 'Let's wait a few minutes 'til it quits raining.' I said, 'Not me' and I started to run and they followed me. We didn't go only about sixty or seventy feet from the barn when it (lightning) killed a team of horses where we stood. The roof of the barn fell in within five minutes."*

During the war, a flu epidemic claimed many Wisconsin lives. Monsignor Edward Kinney recollects, *"In our home, everybody had the flu except myself. The doctor found I didn't have it and took me to Madison only to find one of my cousins there with smallpox."* Gordon Vroman's mother, Ida (Brown) Vroman, died during this epidemic as did Lyman and Bill McKee's mother, Fannie (Richardson) McKee and Jim Clayton's parents.

Phil Barry said that during World War I it was almost impossible to buy wheat bread, *"One of the biggest treats we had was when a neighbor grew some wheat and took it to the mill and had it ground. Then we had some wheat flour and made some old fashioned bread. The only flour you could buy was about half barley and it wasn't hardly fit to eat."*

After the disasters, sickness and deprivation experienced during the war years, Fitchburg people were ready to celebrate the ceasefire on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918. Gerald O'Brien's father, Emmet, had a 1916 Buick touring car that he would put the top down for special occasions such as Armistice Day. Gerald recalls, *"It was a beautiful day out so we rode to Madison. The big point of interest was at Camp Randall which was all park at that time. University students were putting on drills and parades. Everyone had flags. The thing that stands out in my mind was that I was a little boy and I got my shoes full of sand."*

After Armistice Day, Leo Lacy tells of his brother Arthur's joyful homecoming, *"It was pretty near a month before we finally got a letter from him that he was okay. He called from Chicago and said that he'd be home — I'll be at Syene on that 5:00 train."*

FITCHBURG MEN IN WORLD WAR I

Frank Adams	John Keenan
Duane Bowman	Vincent Kivlin
Wallace Bowman	Arthur Lacy
John Brekke*	Rudolph Mandt
John Brown	Wilson Mutchler
Paul Brown	Archie Penfield
Joseph Caine	Eugene Penfield
Harry Coggins	Arthur Pledger
John Collins	Sidney Pollard
Chris Faulkner	Rudolph Rudh
Elmer Gallagher	Edward Skelly*
William Gorman	Otto Stoemer
Raymond Hermann	George White

*Died

Footnote — Oregon Observer, Nov. 1918

SCHOOLS

Fitchburg's schools during the railroad years were typical of most in Wisconsin. They were one room schools with one teacher who taught all eight grades. The room contained a minimum of equipment: desks for pupils and teacher, a blackboard for lessons and one for the display of schoolwork. There were separate cloakrooms for boys and girls. Outside was a well stocked woodshed, near the school building, and further away were separate outhouses.

Schools were heated in the winter with a wood burning stove. Every morning the teacher or an appointed pupil built the fire. Leo O'Brien, who attended Stoner School from 1920-27 says, "*I went to school on cold mornings when the teacher had trouble getting the fire going and you could see your breath in the room. The water in our drinking fountain would have a coat of ice over it. We would all gather with our jackets, caps and mittens on back around the stove.*" Wilfred Kinney, who attended Fitchburg Center School from 1917-24 describes, "*You could heat your face and freeze your back.*" Ester (Meuhlmeier) McManus remembers her students biting into frozen lunches that were kept in the unheated cloakrooms at Prairie View School.

Many people who attended Fitchburg's district schools agree they got a fundamental education. The school day began by singing songs such as America the Beautiful, Battle Hymn of the Republic, Way Down Upon the Swanee River, etc. After this inspiration the earnest young scholars began their studies.

School records show the traditional subjects studied: arithmetic, reading, grammar, history, civics, language, geography, physiology, agriculture, writing and spelling.

University history professor, William Dunn, who attended Camp Badger School from 1923-31 assesses the value of the rural school, *"I'd like to pay a tribute to the good work that those old one room schools did. Teachers were rather young girls themselves, they didn't have college degrees. Yet their teaching made us skillful readers within two or three years. We got our fundamentals pretty well in that simple situation. The county supervisor was in charge of the rural schools and this had a lifting effect on the educational quality."*

Along with their studies, each pupil was responsible for a job in maintenance of the school. Mrs. Genevieve (Lacy) Purcell, who taught at Maple Corners from 1919-22 tells us, *"The pupils had their chores to do. In the morning some of the older boys took the pail and went to the neighbors and got water. Usually that would suffice until noon and then they'd go again and get another pail."* A well rounded education included cleaning erasers, washing blackboards, dusting fixtures, cleaning the toilets and sweeping the schoolroom. An annual workday was Arbor Day when everyone brought a rake and cleaned the school yard.

Recess was always a welcome break from studying and working. When Nora (Grady) Purcell taught at Syene School, she took her pupils hiking. They picked wildflowers along East Lacy Road. In colder weather they trudged up Joe Sweeney's hill for sledding and according to Ed Lynaugh, *"We proceeded slowly down the hill with all haste."* Often, they played crack-the-whip on sleds, hooking them together with a tobaggan on the end. The tobaggan was reserved for their teacher and they tried to dump her off on the wild ride down the hill.

An extended recess occurred at the annual Spring Play Day. School children practiced the competitive events for weeks. The anxiously awaited events were the three legged race, sack race, potato race, broad jump, wheelbarrow race, high jump, running races. And there was always a baseball game between the "better fellers". Kay (Fahey) Harty remembers *"Play Day was fun because we'd have a roster of what activities were going to be held and we'd get our best kids"*

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together for the things they were the most talented in." Pupils who didn't compete practiced cheers to encourage the competitors.

Not everyone was comfortable in the rural schools all the time, though. Leo Lacy states, "*When I started school at Fish Hatchery School in 1905, I was left-handed. I got more lickin's than there was population in the school district. They tried to switch me over to write right handed. I got so I hated the teacher, I hated the kids, I hated school. I'd as soon stayed home than go to school because as soon as I got inside the door, I'd get a lickin'.*"

While Leo Lacy remembers hard times as a pupil, Dorothy (Legg) Lappley remembers hard times as a teacher at Maple Corners in 1927, "*The first day I wore glasses because the year before that I heard they threw a teacher out the window, so that's why I wore glasses.*" Fortunately Miss Legg found that she loved teaching her pupils.

Dedicated teachers overcame difficult obstacles to attend school. Syene's Miss Turner, even when she was sixty years old, walked from Madison on the railroad track to school. Miss Legg, from Maple Corners, walked down the back road with mud up to the tops of her boots to get to school.

Children enjoyed neighborhood hospitality on their walk home. Vincent Dunn remembers as he and his brother, William, walked home from Camp Badger, Bridget Maher called them in for a piece of cake. "*We always used to ask her how deep the pond was (on the Maher farm). She was probably afraid we were going to go in there and she'd say, 'Oh, it's deep as a fencepost,' so that immediately changed our minds from walking in.*"

A teacher occasionally came under scrutiny from parents. Ester (Muehlmeier) McManus who taught at Prairie View School during the 1920's followed the fashion of the times by ratting her hair and fixing it in buns over her ears. The Merrick boy one day reached up under her hair to see if she had any ears. Miss Muehlmeier was so startled that she reprimanded the boy by slapping his palm with a ruler. The boy's father complained only to find school board member, Jim Stone, a good friend of the teacher's, unimpressed.

School life revolved around the rural schools. The annual Christmas program, spring program and commencement exercises were rarely missed by anyone who lived in the neighborhood. William Dunn remembers an amusing incident at a competition held one night at Camp Badger school, "*A number of us got up and gave these pieces. While the judges were downstairs making a decision, we had a lull. Our teacher, Mrs. Hammersley said, 'Does anyone know anything for the audience while we're waiting?' and I said, 'I do.' Ma, Katherine (Maher)*

Dunn, said she just about sank through the floor wondering what I'd come up with, but lo and behold, I had memorized a little piece from the paper and it was humorous. I got up there and recited it correctly and fully, and it brought down the house. I can barely recall one or two lines — 'Does the calf of your leg eat the corn of your toe' and a 'bald headed man's head was like heaven because there was no parting there.' People in the audience said, 'If only the judges could have heard this.'"

Kate Fahey recalls socializing at card parties which were held to raise money for school support. "We used to have card parties as benefits for the school. We'd want to buy some books, playthings and balls for the children. We'd have a party and invite everyone in the neighborhood. We'd serve them lunch and they'd give us a quarter. Maybe we'd have several of these parties to get something bigger. The school was the hub of the community."



(picture courtesy of P. Fox.)

Prairie View School — District #8 (October, 1915)

Front (left to right): Noel Merrick, Gordon Kivlin, Norbert Francis, Gwen Merrick, Bill Caine, Lester West, Merlin Francis, Artie Caine, Arthur West, Stan Kivlin, Phil Fox.

Back (left to right): Lillie Peterson (teacher), Lucille Kivlin, Mavel West, Ellen Caine, Della McWatty, Elizabeth Collins, Charlene McWatty.



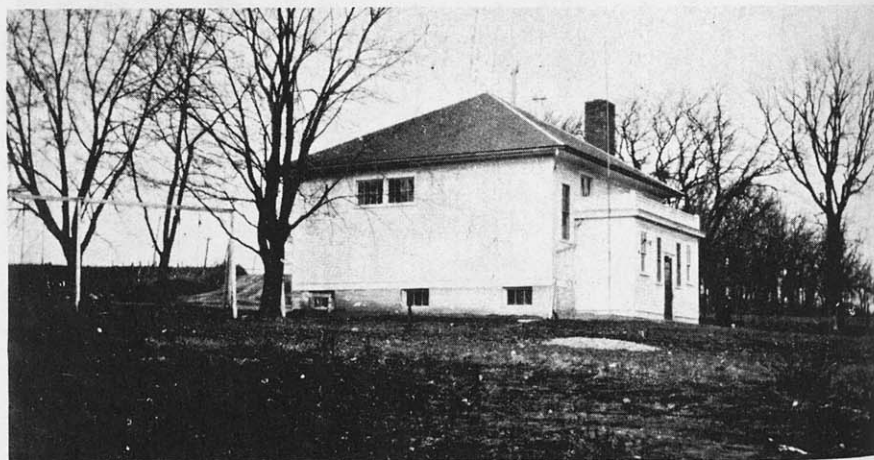
(picture courtesy of A. Adams.)

Maple Corners School — District #12

Front (left to right): Fred Hageman, Francis Penn, Albert Lappley, Linda Lappley, Vera Lappley, Ernest Matthis, Lurene Lappley, Mabel Penn, _____ Kluever.

Second (left to right): _____ Goth, _____ Kluever, Pat Purcell, Olive Lappley, Melva Lappley, Miss Jessie Fuhrman (teacher), Arnel Adams, Minnie Hageman, Raphael Purcell.

Back (left to right): Herbert Lappley, Harry Penn, John Hageman, _____ Goth, Bill Hageman, George Hageman, Della Kluever, Helen Brown, Joe Brown, Margaret Wiese, Clifford Penn.



Stoner School building — District #7



(picture courtesy of G. Vroman.)

Stoner School Reunion — District #7 (July 23, 1933)

Back: Unknown, George Richardson, Elmer Vroman, Art Grady, Fred Gillette, Charlie Adams, Sheldon Adams, Mr. Gleason, Joe Richardson, Leo O'Brien, Elmer Wiese, Gerald O'Brien, Eugene Richardson, Mary Richardson.

Row 2: Rufus Gillette, Helen Gillette, Elsie Wiese, Eva Wiese, Unknown, Marie Rieder, Unknown, Mabel Richardson, Lettie Blizzard, Unknown, Helen Grady, Unknown, Ed Richardson, Art Vroman, Unknown, Wilson Mutchler, William Grady, Darwin Mutchler, George Ferguson.

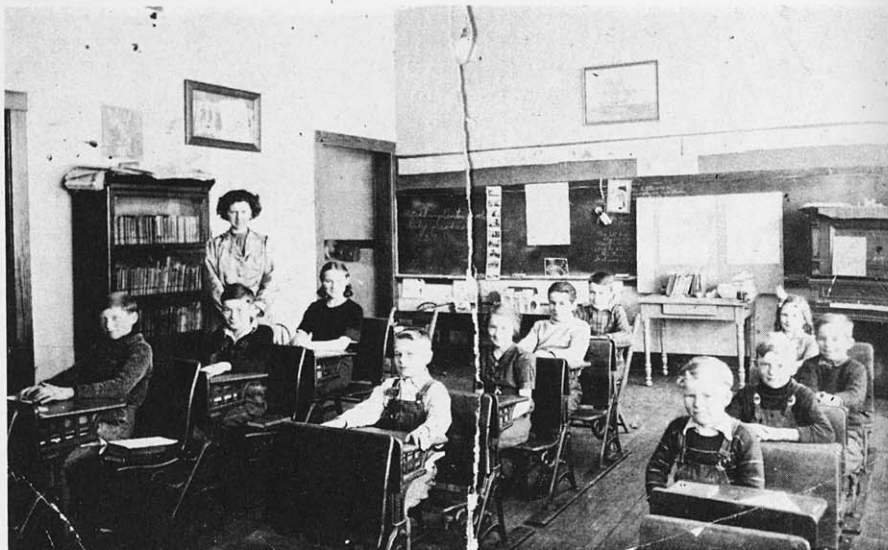
Row 3: Eleanor Lacy, Genevieve Byrne, Alice Pierce, Mrs. Gillette, Hirman Vroman, Minnie Tiger, Unknown, Mrs. Ben Haight, Helen Gillette, William Whalen, Phil Mutchler, Sherm Gillette.

Row 4: Margaret Mutchler, Barbara Rockwell, Margaret Richardson, Frances Richardson, Jim Richardson, Dale Gillette, Eleanor Grady, Jean Vroman, Irene Ferguson with Collath boy, Dorothy Grady, Orrill Ferguson, Ed Grady, Gordon Vroman, Don Grady, Clarence Rockwell, August Koster, Leo Richardson.

Row 5: Ralph Richardson, Shirley Mutchler, Dorothy Whalen, Katherine Grady, Jim Richardson, Bill Richardson, Bill Grady, Jr.

Most Fitchburg schools also had very active mothers' clubs. Kate Fahey helped organize one at Fitchburg Center. She said, "Before Christmas we always worked on a project for the teacher, maybe tie a quilt for her or make jam. We did something in someone's house for the teacher. Teachers who came often stayed a long time and we thought a lot of them. She was very much revered by all the families." Although the school is closed, Fitchburg Center's Mother's Club still meets socially as do the Camp Badger and Maple Corner groups.

RAILROAD ERA



Fitchburg Center School — District #___ (1937)

(picture courtesy of M. Fahey.)

Teacher — Ruby Jacobson

First row (front to back): Norbert Christianson, Jack Caine, Ada Coggins.

Second row: Mary Gorman, Bobby Fox, Bill Fahey.

Third row: Lawrence Caine, Eugene Christianson, Unknown, Mary Fahey.



(picture courtesy of B. Sweeney.)

Oak Hall School — District #4 Teacher: Mrs. Frank Anderson

First row (front to back): Laverne Butler, Gerald Wiese, Jack McManus.

Second row: Wally Hoffman, Bernard Wiese, Bernard Sweeney, George Rowe, Art Rowe.

Third row: Jerry Rowe, Leroy Butler, Ruby Hoffman, Florence Barry, Grace Barry.

Fourth row: Phil Sweeney, Donald Butler, Bob Barry, Howard Wiese, Butch Hoffman.



Syene School — District #1 (1932) (picture courtesy of E. Cross.)

First row: Mary Jane Sweeney, Genevieve (Dolly) Sweeney, Angie Crapp, Eugene Mattingly, Estelle Mattingly, Evelyn Brewer, Helen Lynaugh, Jack Skelly, Stanley McGaw.

Second row: Richard Sweeney, Garland Mattingly, Dorothy Stoneman, Ruth Skelly, Vincent Sweeney, Bill Stoneman, Donald Sweeney, Verley Sweeney.

Third row: Robert Johnson, Edward Lynaugh, Donald Stoneman, Raymond Sweeney, Harold Stoneman, Kenneth McGaw, Elsie Wall Blaney (teacher), Marion Gundlack, Mary Brewer.



Syene Ball Players, 1922-23.

Front (left to right): Herbert Blaney, Joy Osmundsen.

Second row (left to right): Glenn Osmundsen, Unknown, Bill Lynaugh, Donald Stoneman, Don McGaw.

Back row (left to right): Genevieve Jones, Alice Lynaugh, Enid Blaney. Syene students were rumored to be the rowdiest in Dane County. However, Syene produced more than its share of invaluable town employees, such as Ed Lynaugh-Clerk, Don McGaw-Road Foreman, and Bill Stoneman-Assessor.



(picture courtesy of K. Fahey.)

Fitchburg Center's Mother Club

Left to right standing: Kate (Keeley) Fahey, Josie Gorman, Hazel (Heins) Caine.

Left to right sitting: Lucille (Whalen) Fahey, Miss Schiedegger.



Reunion of Teachers

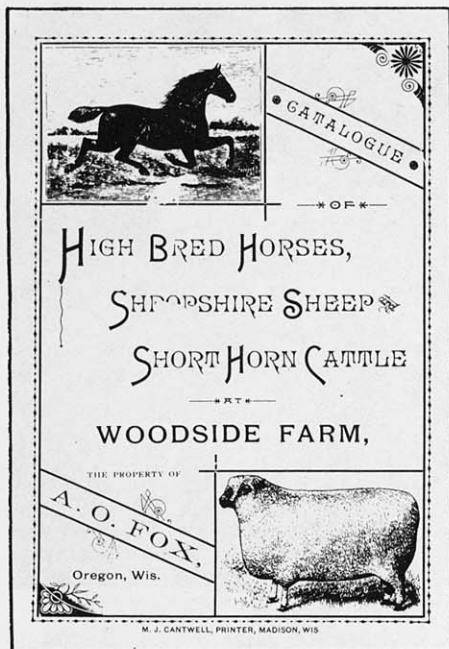
Left to right: Margaret Lacy, Nel Martin, Marie Rieder, Mary Anderson, Mrs. Purcell.

AGRICULTURE

Following the wheat years, the period was a time of experimentation in agriculture. By 1870, stock raising became a general practice with sheep in particular providing meat for the farmer's family plus a regular income from sheep's wool. Fitchburg had famous purebred sheep raisers.

A. O. Fox became the largest breeder of purebred, pedigreed, mutton sheep in the United States, winning ribbons at the World's Fair. He amassed a track of almost 1,000 acres by buying up spoiled wheat producing farms which the cinch bug had ruined. Note was often made in the *Oregon Observer* of the admirable breeding stock A. O. Fox had shipped through the railroad depot at Oregon.

Joe Kivlin also raised prize stock. From England Kivlin and Fox imported Shropshires, Dorsets and Cheviots and Kivlin also bred shorthorn cattle, Poland China and Chester White hogs and Belgian horses. At the St. Louis Exposition Kivlin took second premium on a Shropshire ram.



(picture courtesy of P. Fox.)

The cover of a catalog of A. O. Fox's stock. Includes explanations of various kinds of stock, the manner in which they were bred, the prices, terms, etc.

The *Observer* of 1898 tells that 85 students from the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture visited the farms of A. O. Fox, "They wanted to see some good stock and they saw it."

By 1906 tobacco was the favorite crop of Dane County farmers. Ohio people introduced the tobacco culture as well as sheep raising. In far southeastern townships of Dane County, one quarter of the total tobacco crop of the State was grown and its success was due to the sandy loam soil.

The *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* of October 21, 1885 tells of its introduction to Dane County at Fitchburg.

"It was in March, 1853, that Ralph Pomeroy came to Madison from the Miami Valley, Ohio where Pomeroy had previously grown tobacco. In the company with J. R. Hiestand, they rented ten acres of land from Hiram Hiestand, five miles southwest of Madison on Syene Prairie, at \$5 per acre. The field was planted with the old Connecticut seedless variety. The crop was a fine one — a very large growth estimated to yield at least a ton per acre. To cure the crop they built a two tier pole shed, in the ten Ohio Style, and borrowed rail fence enough to hang it on with twine, instead of lath as at present ... the tobacco was stripped and sold to

Dewey and Chapin of Janesville at 3½ cents per pound ... This was undoubtedly the first tobacco ever marketed in the State"²

Elizabeth McCoy presently lives on the Hiestand tobacco farm. She tells of a farm in Edgerton that grew tobacco before the Hiestand undertaking but it froze making the tobacco grown in Fitchburg the first successful planting.

Miss McCoy describes the original home on the farm as typical of homes in Virginia where tobacco was grown. A cupola on top of the house provided a place where overseers could watch men working in tobacco fields.



Present home of Elizabeth McCoy, world renowned biochemist. Former site of the Altrusa Fair. Farm and grounds have been deeded to Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation.

Dane County was a pioneer county in extensive raising of tobacco. It not only produced more tobacco than any of the other counties in the early 1900's but held the United States record for largest producing county of tobacco.

By the 1890's, farming centered around the dairy cow. As the *Oregon Observer* records in 1898,

"The cow rules the land. It is no wonder. She is prominent in state politics."

Initially, milk was mainly used by pioneer dairymen for the production of butter and cheese. Both were fairly simple processes, given the required skill and machinery and kept very well if properly packed. Creameries and cheese factories sprang up across Wisconsin for the purpose of marketing dairy products. Fitchburg contained creameries or cheese factories at Oak Hall, Fitchburg Village, Syene and Dogtown.

Even though railroads were important for the transportation of milk to creameries and cheese factories and dairies, it was also hauled

²Elisha W. Keyes, *History of Dane County*, (Madison, Western Historical Association, 1906) Chapter XIV.



Tom Jones on his milk route to Kennedy Dairy.

(picture courtesy of E. Cross.)

Tom Jones with his collie dog, Laddie.



(picture courtesy of G. Stoneman.)

by a horse and wagon. Genevieve (Jones) Jackson recounts the difficulties her English immigrant father encountered on his milk route from Syene. *“Approximately a year and a half after coming to the new world, Tom Jones bought his dairy route, hauling the milk from farms in the area to a Madison creamery. There were many hardships to endure during his hauling tenure such as spring thaws causing washouts and soggy, muddy roads; severe winter snows, frostbite and icy terrain, heavy rains and electrical storms. In spite of the trying conditions, he always managed a cheerful outlook, returning home*

midday to tend to this farm work and curry his well-trained horses. Tom's milk route remained in the family throughout his life, passed on to his son, Edwin, who operated it by truck."

Tom Jones' daughter, Gladys Stoneman, milked cows night and morning. She remembers one cow in particular, "*There was one cow I used to milk because I could get more milk out of it than anyone else.*"

James Clayton, orphaned by the 1918 flu epidemic is justly proud of his father's dairy operation. At one time Alvin Clayton held the United States record for the second lowest bacterial level in milk production in the nation. He peddled milk in a pony cart in the University area until his early death. Clayton's milk was so pure it was chosen to feed infants in the new Madison Stoeber Maternity Hospital.

