

THE EARLY YEARS OF AMERY

The history of the earliest years of Amery was researched by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Ryder and published in 1962 on the city's seventy-fifth anniversary. Other histories were compiled by Boake Christensen in 1957 and the Amery Free Press in 1973 on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fall Festival. This section on the beginning of the city is based on these sources.

In the Beginning

Northwest Territory

The old Northwest Territory, first national territory of the United States, was composed of the area about the Great Lakes bounded on the south by the Ohio River and on the west by the Mississippi River. It included the present states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and a part of Minnesota.

French control began here in the early 17th century when French priests and explorers, traders and trappers came to barter with the Indians. The Treaty of Paris in 1783 ended the Revolutionary War and declared all the Northwest Territory to be within the United States boundaries. Cession of all lands to the United States government by 1786 tended to end strife over rival claims. The ordinance of 1787 set up the machinery for the formal organization of the territory and admission of the states into the Union. Thus the British, who had settled in the eastern part of the United States and Canada, pushed on westward and began settling the territory.

At this time, Indians roved the area and paddled their canoes on the waterways. British influence was strong among the Indians. Now Great Britain and France both laid claim to the territory. The quarrel over the Northwest Territory was one of the chief causes of the War of 1812. Finally, the Treaty of Ghent in 1814 settled the disputes over the territory and it definitely became a part of the United States.

Wisconsin

Soon after this, more settlers began to arrive in the part of the area that is now Wisconsin. The lure of the lead mines in the southern part of the state brought a rush of settlers in 1820. Soon after this, European migration was extensive. People from many of the European countries came to the territory to clear land and cut out homes for themselves in the wilderness.

These were men and women of pioneering strength and courage. They sought freedom of religion and government and were anxious for opportunities to better themselves. They tended to settle in groups of their own nationalities in various parts of the area. Neighbors in the old country were neighbors in the New World. They brought with them many of their own customs and legends. Thus Wisconsin became a melting pot of various nationalities. In 1848 Wisconsin became a state and was admitted into the Union.

Polk County

Polk County was established by the Wisconsin legislature in 1853. It was named in honor of President James K. Polk, the 11th President of the United States. Many people of Scandinavian origin settled in the county. It is believed their choice of land was because it was an area of hills, woods, lakes and rivers, so much like their own homeland.

Much could be written of the pioneer days in Polk county. Its history would be one of friendships and feuds, losses and gains, joys and sorrows. In the early days, lumbering was the chief industry, for the area was practically covered with trees which had to be cut down to clear the land for farming.

Amery

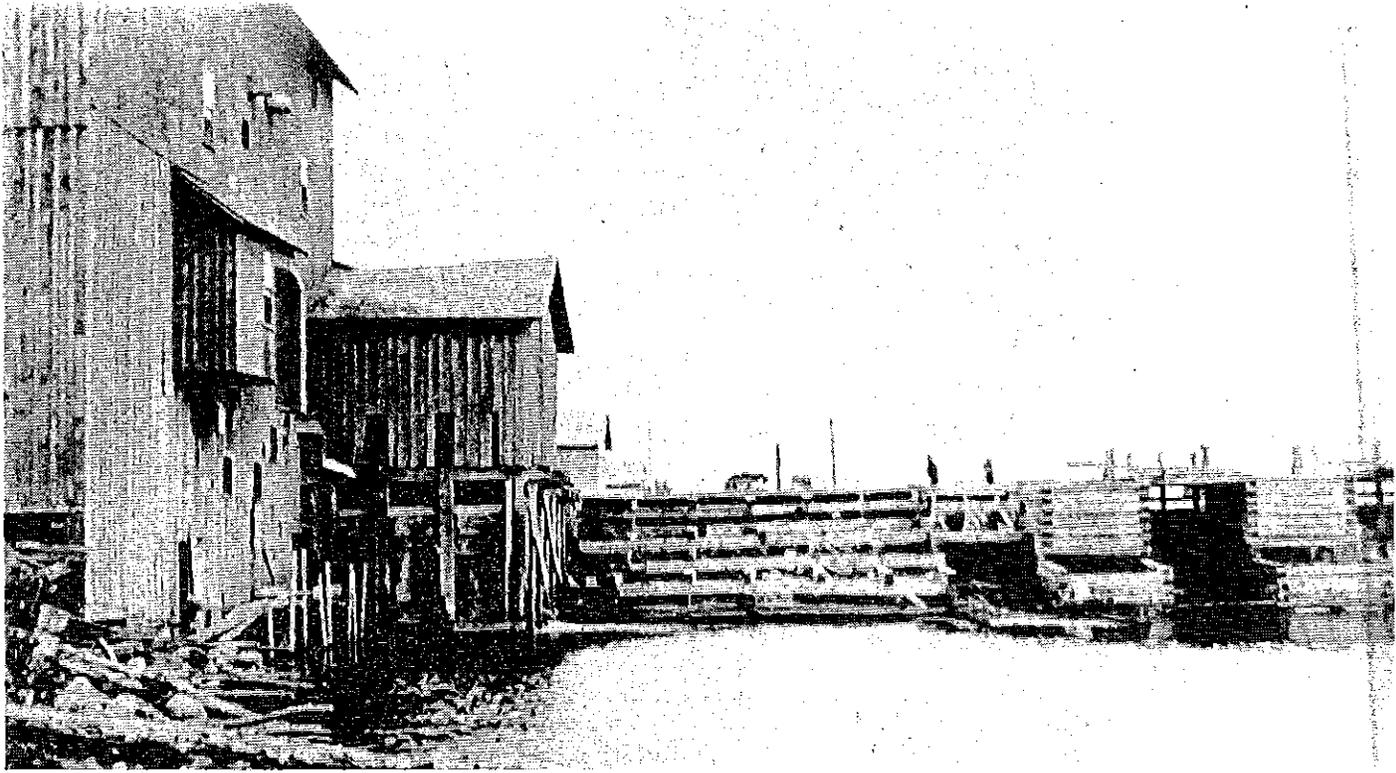
The origin of Amery is closely connected with the lumbering industry. The saw mill was really the nucleus around which the village grew. Records show that among the first settlers to arrive in this area were two men by the names of Greeley and McCusick. They followed the Apple River and cut the first logs in the township of Lincoln. The logs were then floated down the river to Stillwater where they were sawed into lumber.

In order to assure sufficient water for the drives, a big dam was built across the river just south of where the bridge on Highway F (Broadway) crosses it. Traces of this dam still remain. It was built by a man named Isaac Staples who came to the area from Stillwater.

Originally what is now Amery was known in those days by the name of the "Big Dam". Shortly after the dam was built, a one-room store was built near it. This store was owned and operated by a General Harriman, a veteran of the Civil War.

In 1887, the Soo Line built the railroad through the country from Osceola to Turtle Lake. This railroad was to extend from the Twin Cities to Sault Ste. Marie. News spread around that a saw mill was to be built and a village started near the juncture of where the railroad crossed the Apple River.

Among those who heard these rumors were two young men from Turtle Lake and Perley named Webb and Griffin. They decided to join together and investigate the rumors. Theirs was a long and hard journey for they walked most of the way. They came by way of Clear Lake, following a trail that led past the old Jim Peterson place, later known as the George Sylvester place.



In the beginning Amery was known as Big Dam because of the large wooden dam.

When they arrived at the "Big Dam" they found a man by the name of John Briggs and his two sons preparing to build a saw mill near where the Central Avenue bridge now stands. They immediately decided that this would be a good location for a general store. While Webb journeyed to St. Paul to buy the stock, Griffin built the one room store of two small loads of lumber that were brought from Clear Lake. It took Griffin just four days to build the store building. It was all ready to receive the stock when it arrived.

This store was built on the river bank about where the site of the canning factory was later. In a short time, Griffin persuaded his father-in-law, Mr. L. J. Robbins, to move to the little village and start a hotel. This hotel was first located near the mill and stores and called the Robbins House. Later it was moved to the site presently occupied by Johnle Video, but for most of the century occupied by the Amery Hotel.

Shortly after the railroad came through and the depot was built, the Soo Line Improvement Company bought the 40 acres of land surrounding the depot and had it surveyed into lots. The more desirable of these were north of the railroad track. Prices for the lots were from \$25 to \$100.

More settlers arrived, among them Manfred Smith, the grandfather of Mr. Erwin Danielson. He was the first depot agent, being transferred here from Perley. Several of the first settlers came from Perley. They were seeking new homes because the saw mill and almost the entire village of Perley had been wiped out by fire a short time before.

After the Robbins House was moved, Webb and Griffin

built the first permanent store building. This is the building which for years was the Lincoln Store and is now Peterson's Our Own Hardware. This building is a brick building and was constructed of bricks manufactured in a brick yard owned by Jim Peterson. There are few surviving buildings left that were built of this brick. This factory was located just south of the property now owned by Mike Cwayna.

At first it was thought that the main street of the town would be the street that is now known as Harriman Avenue, named in honor of General Harriman. But when the hotel was moved and Webb and Griffin built their new store on Keller Avenue, the main thoroughfare shifted as well. A lumber office was built which was soon followed by a drug store.

By this time, the name of the settlement had been changed to Amery. This was in honor of William Amery who was born in England in 1831. Amery learned the carpenter trade in London and came to this country in 1861, locating first in Stillwater, later moving to St. Croix Falls. Here he settled and cleared a tract of land for farming. He was married to Sarah Hackett in 1855 and became a prominent resident of Polk county, serving as county treasurer. He also held many town offices. Amery is named in honor of this respected man. William Amery died in 1887, the year Amery was named, leaving a widow, two sons and three daughters.

More settlers came and so the town grew. At one time there were three saw mills and a stove factory operating in Amery. Those were located along the river, the yards extending as far as three blocks north of the railroad tracks.

1888-1893 were the years of Amery's building boom. In 1888 J. G. Burman relocated here from Stillwater. He built a furniture store, which his wife operated while he worked in the lumber mills. He also served as the village undertaker. Later he added an implement department to his store, and later still, hardware lines.

In 1890 John C. Dahl located in Amery, engaging in lumbering and milling until 1901. He then opened a store which handled general merchandise.

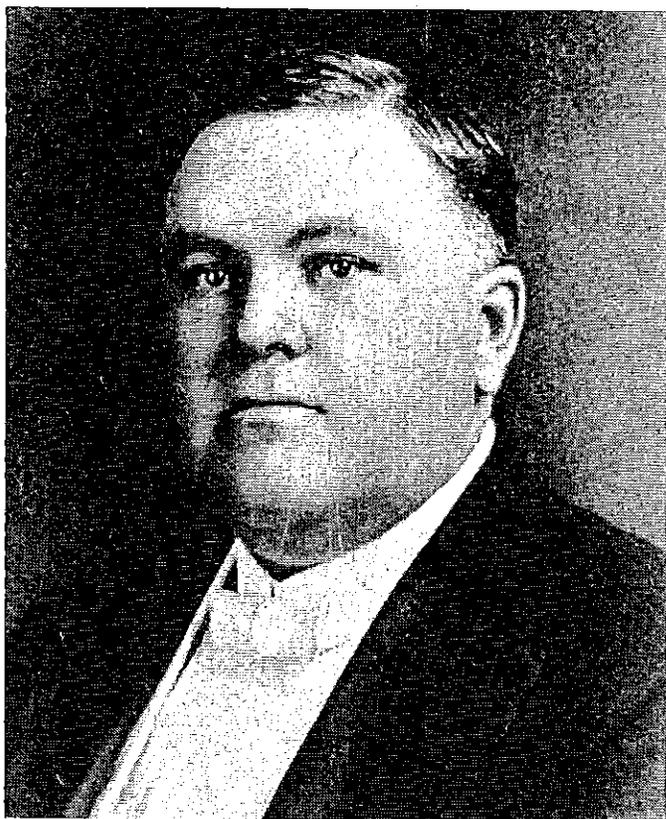
Dr. Henry A. Holliday located here in 1888, and resided in Amery until his death in 1900. He built the house across the alley from the school (now occupied by Randy and Linda Olson). This was the first dwelling in Amery on which siding was used instead of logs or bricks.

stood where the Stella Cheese plant used to operate. The burning of this mill was somewhat of a mystery. It was thought to have started from the explosion of an oil lamp. The Mississippi Logging Company of Shell Lake was supplying the mill with logs. They were having trouble and the workmen threatened to burn the mill if it shut down.

At first drinking water was carried from a spring at Bear Trap Lake. The first community well and town pump were located on a lot just west of the Northwest Federal Savings and Loan Building. It was a shallow well and a tin cup, fastened to the pump with a chain, was always ready to use. Later a diphtheria epidemic was attributed to this well which was, unfortunately, located next to a livery barn. Several children died during this epidemic.



Dr. Holliday



Dr. Crommett

James R. Schaffner built the Schaffner Hotel in 1888, running his establishment for eleven years. A jewelry store was opened by William W. Winchester in 1890. William T. Kennedy opened the first law office near the Burman Store about that same time. He was married to Mae Colburn, daughter of William Colburn.

John Briggs started the first mill. Johnstone Brothers and Howe also owned mills. These were followed by John E. Glover and P. C. Maxon. Mr. Staples owned and operated the stave mill. Years later, E. F. Klingler owned and operated a saw mill and wood-working factory on the site of the present American Legion hall.

The Johnstone mill burned September 21, 1893. This mill

Many saloons sprang up. One of those was opened in June, 1889, by William Colburn. Mr. Colburn had settled in Bear Trap in 1857 and, after serving in the Civil War, he built a combination store, saloon, hotel, dance hall, post office, and blacksmith shop there. In 1889 he tore this building down and used the material to build a saloon and boarding house in Amery. (This building stood many years, until it was removed to make way for the new Holiday Village store.)

By 1890 there were at least six saloons in the village, and the nights were celebrated loud and long. In the September 28, 1889, issue of Osceola's Polk County Press, a headline appeared about a fight in Amery. The article read, in part: "A fight in Amery, with probably fatal results, was last Monday

about midnight. Quite a general fight took place in Amery. The fight took place among the saloon men, but they all claimed it was a sober fight. Report has it that Charles Park owed a bill which the saloon keeper was trying to collect, and over this a fight was started, resulting in Park being hit on the head with a bottle or brass knuckles and his skull fractured. Doctors Holliday of Amery, Goodwin of Clear Lake, and Crommett

of Star Prairie, have attended him and they all agree that he can not live." The October 5, 1889, issue said that Mr. Park had died on Wednesday afternoon and a coroner's inquest was held before Coroner Holliday. The verdict was that he came to his death at the hand of a beer bottle, in the hands of Ole Hoserud.

City Hall

A frame building located next to the alley behind the present Johnson Drug Store served as Amery's first City Hall. A small concrete block jail was located just north of this frame building. City Hall moved to its present brick structure on Center Street in December, 1950.

Following is a list of officials who have served our village/city government since 1891.

Village Clerks Before Amery Became a City

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| C. B. Dodge | 1891 |
| W. T. Kennedy | 1891 |
| J. F. Dunham | 1893 |
| M. A. Frissell | 1894 |
| J. F. Snyder | 1895 |
| George Heald | 1902 |
| F. E. Yates | 1906 |
| B. R. Atwood | 1907 |
| O. F. Dahlstrom | 1913 |
| V. H. Christensen | 1915 |

Mayors for City of Amery

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| P. C. Amundson | 1919-1924 |
| Vin Christianson | 1924-1928 |
| Mr. Rownsavall | 1928-1930 |
| W. T. Kennedy | 1930-1936 |
| W. W. Winchester | 1936-1944 |
| Oscar Wike | 1944-1946 |
| Mr. McKinney | 1946-1950 |
| Lloyd Christiansen | 1950-1954 |
| Dr. Alme | 1954-1958 |
| Paul Dzubay | 1958-1962 |
| George F. Griffin | 1962-1973 |
| M. H. Hayes | 1973-1980 |
| L. S. Toftness | 1980 to present |

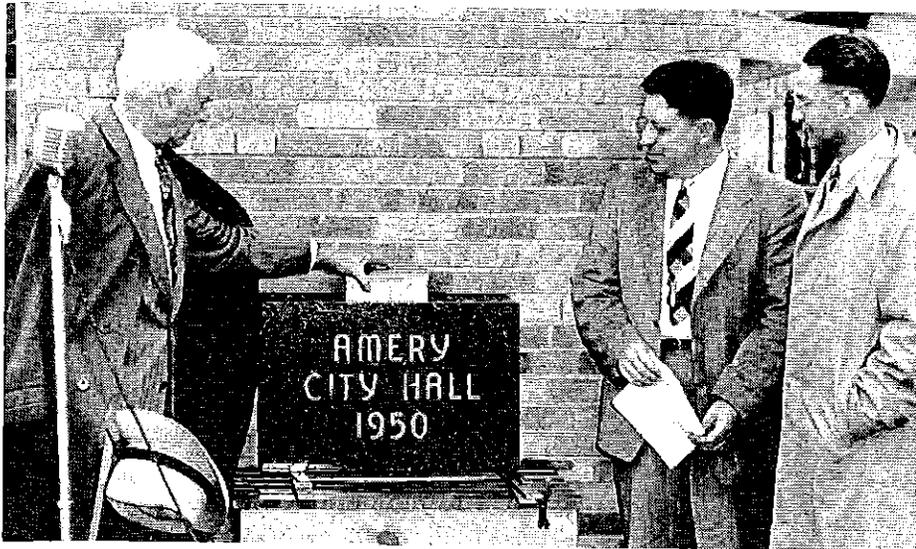
Clerks

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Herman Christianson | Oscar Losness |
| John H. Swesey | John Froshaug |
| Frank Sylvester | Ralph Mickelson |



Mr. John Swesey, Amery's second city clerk, takes a drive along the east shore of South Twin Lake.

City Hall Dedicated in 1950



TOP: Mr. Al Ryder, a prominent citizen, inserts the time capsule into the cornerstone while Mr. D. K. Lien, M. C., and Mayor Lloyd Christensen observe. CENTER: City Clerk Frank Sylvester, Councilmen C. V. Anderson and Herb Jones, Mayor Lloyd Christensen, Councilmen Bob Iverson and Dave Palmer. BOTTOM: City Hall as it appeared in 1950.

