

'EARLY-MID 1800's

Agriculture and lumbering were primary attractions to Wisconsin in the early 1800's, just as other occupations were indigenous to other parts of the developing United States.

The first Blaska (Blaschke) to come to the United States in 1852 left Chicago, having lived there for the first two years, until 1854, after learning of the agricultural opportunity to buy land in Wisconsin from the government. (Insert first land grant). This involved clearing the land, and making it a productive area for the subsistence of his family.

(Farm life in America, particularly in Wisconsin, was quite different from the present image of rural life with industrialization and urbanization. Agribusiness now has taken over the farm lands with automated machinery and multi-million dollar investments, buying up the very farms that were hewn from the wilds by our ancestors, pioneering on the land, that would become the "breadbasket" for populations across the nation and world.) The midwest ^{was} equated with "farm country", the pioneer experience, family farms, common man, patriotic and political. No longer!

The Germans, Bohemians from Czechoslovakia, Swedes and Norwegians came to the midwest in large numbers because the land here was known to be the richest and most productive in the country for farming, and, in latitude, weatherwise, was the most like that they had known in their native lands. It is said that the English from the East Coast had arrived earlier, not to farm the land, but to stake out claims from the government, and often made their fortunes by resale of the land to the newly arriving immigrants.

in Dane County, Wisconsin

The original Blaska farm/of _____ acres was purchased in 1887 at a cost of \$_____, by John Peregrin Blaska, grandfather to Gregory Blaska, who is now the owner, and great-grandfather to his son, John, who is managing the farm at present.

(Insert the marriage dates of John and Anna, and circumstances.)

(Economic depression in many areas in late 1880's, early 1890's.) 1870-80's?

grain binders developed in 1890's? (Knotter-Easterly) Steam engine 1900?

(Add tie-in from father's early days in Waterloo Township, & reason for leaving Amherst Junction and returning to Jefferson County.) Also, big lumbering over?)

Many of the more distant relatives and friends stayed in Wisconsin temporarily, and then left for the less-settled areas farther west to find their fortunes there, where some of their descendants remain today.

For those who remained in Wisconsin, clearing the land, starting from scratch, so to speak, their efforts during that most difficult period could only be called subsistence farming, providing enough food for the family and animals, and perhaps a small portion left over for sale in the community. Later, after establishing the needed horsepower, equipment, and communal neighborhood help, farming became a little more diversified, and at the same time, as communities grew, a market for the farm products grew, and profits could be made. Thus farming became more diversified, and stayed that way pretty much until electrification came to the countryside (1941??), and the technological advances in machinery, and in crop management after World War II ushered in the mega-farming era, specialization, and expansion with automated machinery requiring fewer people to accomplish planting, cultivation, and harvesting.

Following is the inscription from the plaque erected by the citizens of Sun Prairie in 1937:

"In memory of the pioneers who gave this community its name when the party of Augustus A. Bird, commissioner, and Charles H. Bird, later the first settler, passed this way from Milwaukee to erect the first capitol at Madison. After nine weary days of rain, they were thrilled with sunshine upon this prairie, and carved "Sun Prairie" on a Burr Oak tree one mile and a half east of this village on June 9, 1837."

In today's economy, with the labor in farming greatly diminished with automation, it is difficult to imagine the conditions under which our great-grandparents struggled to establish a new home in this free country when they arrived here in 1852. After making the trip across the Atlantic Ocean and across the land to Chicago, where they lived for two years, they arrived in Waterloo Township in 1854. No doubt the lure of owning land in the newly opened Wisconsin Territory was the incentive when great grandfather Blaschka contracted with the U. S. government for a grant of land of 40 ?? acres at the cost of \$1.50 per acre in Waterloo township. Because he was a master tinsmith in his native Austria, his skills were ^{no doubt} a valuable asset as there was little that was "ready made" in those years. The astute settler recognized the advantage of an area that had a lake, river, spring or some source of water available, some land that was at least partially cleared for growing the foodstuffs necessary sustaining life, and timber for building a home. They had to rely mostly on their own ingenuity to make the tools, and on their neighbors to pool efforts to build their log cabins and clear the land for farming. Trees had to be cut down to make the logs and the furniture for their homes, food obtained for the family—probably fishing, hunting, ^{wild ducks, geese, deer} carrying water from the swamps or springs, making beds of hay or dried leaves etc. to pad the ~~bee~~ logs hewn for beds etc. so they learned to be a sort of logger, farmer, fisherman hunter, carpenter, well digger, blacksmith, and a doctor of herbs to ward off illness. Berries, nuts, fish and wild game were abundant in those years, and probably contributed greatly to their subsistence. The streams were dammed, and mills for grinding wheat and corn were one of the first essentials for the community so that bread could be made from the flour

(I don't remember our grandparents talking of spinning wool for clothing, but it may have been done in their very early years.)

(2)

In the days of horse-drawn equipment and transportation, the horses had to be taken to a blacksmith for horse shoes. Also, wagon frames, plow shares, and axes had to be sharpened or repaired/so the blacksmith was an indispensable ~~asset~~ ^{metal tools made, artisan} in the forming communities. ~~As our great grandfather was a master tinmith in his native~~ After two years in Waterloo Township, our great grandfather apparently became aware of the burgeoning lumber industry in the northern Wisconsin, and took his family to Amherst Junction in Portage County in 1856. Aunt Elvina Plaska related that he worked as a blacksmith there during the lumber boom, and she said it is there that he met his accidental death, ~~in a~~ the circumstances of which are not known. As horses were used to pull the wagons carrying the timber to the river, (7) they could pull the load for only a certain number of miles before needing rest, and new horse-shoes were needed at frequent intervals. Watering troughs had to be available every five miles, or so, on the main routes for wagon and buggy traffic as the horses needed to be watered frequently, as well as being fed, particularly on a long trip. Teams had to be changed, as well. (In town, on short trips, horses would have nose bags of oats attached to their bridles so they could eat when hungry, and drinking troughs were provided along the street with the hitching posts to tether them.

When traveling by horse and buggy, or wagon, one needed to know where one was going, and approximately how long a trip it was, as there were no markers, or signs, as there are today, to tell one what the next town was, and how many miles away ~~from it~~ it was.

Work was shared as most of it was human labor with the help of the horse. The small village stores, shops, mills, and saloons were patronized where exchanges were based on the personal relationships established over years with trust, sharing and tolerance developed. Community pride, and communal effort made the area grow and prosper.

Both our grandfather, and our dad helped to build the new Catholic Church and the water tower in Sun Prairie by providing horses, wagons and manual labor to haul stones from the quarry, and assist ~~the~~ with the actual building of the foundation.

Our father and a hired man would plow entire fields with one horse pulling a single plow with the man walking in the furrows behind the horse to guide the plow share. Later, two horses were used for larger double plows that had a seat on the frame for a man to sit and drive the horses. ~~Scythes~~ Hand scythes originally used, but later only for cutting the weeds and underbrush on the perimeters of land around the home. Advances included the tillers, rakers, and seeders for grain, and eventually tractors (Case) greatly diminished the human labor in farming.