

History

The first humans appeared in Wisconsin 11,000 years ago. Native American Indians shaped the ecosystem by using fire to maintain prairie and savanna. Native people hunted deer, black bear, and more than 25 other species of mammals. They also consumed mussels, birds, fish, nuts, and fruits. They appear to have planted orchards, which European explorers described as "planted tree groves," to provide supplies of food. Chestnuts, locusts, oaks, ash, basswood, beech, cottonwood, maple, pecans, medlars, mulberries, and plums grew in profusion.

The Native American Indians also dispersed several plants. The Menomonee tribe spread wild rice wherever they passed. Many modern highways were originally roads between native habitations. By the time of European settlement, the region now known as Dunn County was inhabited by the Santee Dakota who feuded with the Ojibwa.

The French coureurs de bois hunted along the Red Cedar and Chippewa rivers. Pierre Le Sueur first mentioned the Red Cedar as "another river of great length." Jean Baptiste Perreault established trading posts along the Red Cedar river. In 1822, Perkins built the first sawmill on the Red Cedar, and by 1829, lumbering was underway. Knapp, Stout, and Company, which began in 1846, became one of the largest lumbering operations in the world. Knapp, Stout owned over one-half million acres of pine land and conducted retail and wholesale merchandising operations, banking, farming, a steam mill, a shingle mill, a water mill, steamboats, and a stageline. Knapp, Stout strongly influenced construction, railroads, and public opinion. Residents of Dunn County were dependent upon the company for goods, loans, and wages.

On July 13, 1787, the Northwest territory, including what is now Wisconsin, was established. On April 29, 1836, the Territory of Wisconsin was created.

Dunn County was originally part of St. Croix County and then a part of Chippewa County in the beautiful Chippewa Valley, a tract of land approximately 150 miles long from northeast to southwest and 75 miles wide. The valley, geologically, belongs to the Potsdam sandstone period, and the Laurentian hills within the Chippewa Valley in the extreme northern section of the state are part of the old Appalachian range (the "backbone" of the continent). Some geologists believe this is the oldest, or first, land which raised above the waters of creation and that our own Penolitic range of the Chippewa Valley may have been, and probably is, the first portion of land which rose above those waters.

Dunn County was created from a portion of Chippewa County on February 19, 1854. The county name was derived from the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin territory, Charles Dunn, after he was appointed by President Andrew Jackson in 1835. It encompasses nearly 858 square miles, and throughout its history, its jurisdiction has been claimed by Spain, France, England, and the United States.

On August 11, 1856, the Dunn County Board of Supervisors created the townships of Menomonee, Spring Brook, Eau Galle, Dunn, Rock Creek, Bear Creek, and Pepin. On March 14, 1861, the Town of Red Cedar, which included the towns of Wilson, Sand Creek, Otter Creek, Grant, Tainter, and Colfax, was created and set off from a part of the towns of Menomonee and Spring Brook. On December 26, 1866, the Town of Grant was set off from the Town of Red Cedar. Grant then included Sand Creek, Wilson, and Otter Creek. The Town of Colfax was set off from Red Cedar on December 28, 1868. It contained the towns of Colfax and Tainter. Red Cedar is now bounded on the north by the town of Tainter, on the south by the towns of Spring Brook and Dunn, on the east by the towns of Elk Mound and Spring Brook, and on the west by the City of Menomonee.

The Cedar Falls area was settled in 1856. The Gilbert Brothers built a water-powered mill in 1859, and the mill was later purchased by Knapp, Stout, and Company. The mill employed about a hundred men. In the early 1890s, the population of Cedar Falls was 250. The dam was built in 1910 by the Chippewa Valley Railroad Light and Power Company. The water backed upriver to create the 1752 acre Lake Tainter. The Cedar Falls school began in the 1860s and expanded to meet the needs of the families of the millworkers.

Rusk, "part of a considerable stretch of prairie land," an unincorporated village located within the township, was once known as

Sherburne Prairie. After the West Wisconsin railway built a depot in 1872, business flourished. A post office, wagon and blacksmith shop, creamery, shoemaker, photograph gallery, drug store, insurance agency, saloon, machinery sales store, feed mill, harness shop, grain elevators, and several lumber companies came into being. Rusk became an important wheat shipping center. Up to three grain elevators were in operation until wheat growing was wiped out by the chintz bug in the early 1890s. Blueberries, cattle, hogs, and butter were shipped to Chicago and other cities. Many social activities occurred in Rusk such as parties, musical concerts, a Dramatic Society, the Odd Fellows Lodge, and a dancing school.

In February of 1892, the Dunn County Insane Asylum opened in the township. The Dunn County Poor Home and Poor Farm was located east of and adjacent to the asylum. By 1924 the Poor Farm contained over a thousand acres. The asylum became the Dunn County Hospital in 1972. In 1974, that portion of the town containing the hospital was annexed to the City of Menomonie. There is a Potter's Field where people from the Asylum and hospital are buried 40 rods north of the former Dunn County Wayside Park.

At one time, there were 10 rural schools in the Town of Red Cedar, including the Beyer Settlement School, Clear View, Little Elk Creek School, Lone Pine School, Rusk School, Cedar Falls School, and Ney School. Also, the Apostolic Lighthouse Church, Bethel Baptist Church, Cedar Falls Church, Holy Pentecostal Mission Church, Little Elk Creek Lutheran Church, and St. Katharine's Evangelical Lutheran Church developed in the township. Currently, there are three cemeteries located in the township: Cedar Falls, Beyer Settlement, and Froen.

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