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## WATONWAN COUNTY

Lying only a short distance north of the Iowa line, Watonwan County, in southwestern Minnesota, is much like the Tall Corn State agriculturally. Corn and hogs dominate the farming picture, but dairying is increasing in importance as a source of income, being naturally favored by factors such as the abundant growth of forage crops and the plentiful supply of fresh water from small lakes and streams for the stock.

Hardships of the pioneers, who lived in sod houses, ate gopher soup, and fought Indians, are but dim memories cherished by the oldest settlers. Though only three-quarters of a century have passed since the last Indian scare, the prairies have been transformed into a thickly populated and prosperous farming district.

Modern machinery with which to till the soil, conveniences such as electric light and power, and labor-saving devices for the home have removed the last vestiges of pioneering days. Schools, churches, libraries, the newspaper<sup>s</sup>, telephone<sup>s</sup>, radio<sup>s</sup>, the clubs and organizations, which round out culture and social life on the farm, have now become so commonplace as to be taken for granted.

Good roads have shortened the distance to trade centers and shipping points and have cut marketing costs. Paved highways lead to the Twin Cities, primary market center of the State.

Easily accessible markets and a productive soil are the factors making for agricultural prosperity in Watonwan County. The cereal and forage crops common to this section of the country produce well. Corn, oats, barley, hay,

flax and wheat are the chief field crops. These are converted into livestock and livestock products, and marketed in the form of pork, beef, dairy and poultry products, and yield an income in excess of \$3,000 average per farm.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

Broad crop diversification makes crop failure virtually impossible, and in the produce he sells the Watonwan farmer is marketing a finished product, the price of which remains steady and close to a par with goods he must buy at the store. Under the general decline in price levels, land in this county has been forced down to the low average valuation of \$70 an acre, or \$12,376 for the average-sized farm of 176 acres. The high income yielded by these farms pay<sup>s</sup> well for the labor expended and gives a generous return on invested capital.

Farms can be rented each spring, the moving season for tenant farmers, and Watonwan County offers opportunity for the industrious renter to become a landowner.

The swing toward dairying and specialty crop cultivation is bringing about a rapid reduction in the acreage of farms, and these more intensive farming methods yield a high acreage income while requiring a smaller investment of capital for land.

#### PHYSICAL SETTING

Watonwan County is just west of center in the second tier of counties north of the Iowa line. Martin County lies on the south, Cottonwood is on the west, while Brown and Blue Earth bound the north and east sides. St. James, the centrally located county seat, is 100 miles southwest of the Twin Cities.

Topography: The area of the county is 435.45 square miles, or 278,639.92 acres, of which 1,635 acres are under water. Only the small lakes and creeks break the contour of the gently rolling prairies, which range in altitude

from 1,300 feet at the highest point in the southwest corner, down to 1,000 feet.

Drainage: The north and south forks of the Watonwan River, having their sources in Cottonwood and Martin Counties, traverse the county in a general east to west direction, and after receiving numerous small tributaries they join and flow to the Minnesota River.

In 1930, 60,452 acres of land were artificially drained.

Wood Lake in Adrian Township is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles long and is the largest in the county, followed by Kansas and Long Lakes. There are a number of smaller lakes scattered throughout the county.

Soil: The soil is mostly a fertile, black clay loam, from 1 to 3 feet deep, and it is underlain with a clay subsoil. There are few rocks and the land is easily worked and very productive.

Watonwan soil types are classified as follows:

Till plains of clay loam	270 sq. miles	64.8 percent.
Pebbly clay loam	90 sq. miles	21.6 percent.
Till plains with sandy coating	30 sq. miles	7.2 percent.
Sandy outwash plains	20 sq. miles	4.8 percent.
Swamps and bogs	14 sq. miles	3.3 percent.
Gravelly knolls and stony loam	10 sq. miles	2.4 percent.

Climate and Rainfall: The long growing season of about 150 days, during which temperatures are high and rainfall plentiful, favors the rapid growth of spring plantings. Winter temperatures are prevailingly low.

The following chart taken from the 50-year record at Fairmont (alt. 1,187 feet), in adjacent Martin County, is representative of the climatological conditions in Watonwan County.



## CLIMATIC RECORD

MONTHS:	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Annual
TOWNS: Fairmont (alt. 1187)													
Precipitation in inches	.80	.97	1.41	2.23	4.05	4.34	3.56	3.74	3.62	1.85	1.51	.90	28.98
Temperature (Fahrenheit)	13.8°	17.1°	30.1°	46.0°	57.5°	67.3°	72.3°	69.8°	61.9°	48.9°	32.9°	20.3°	44.8°

SETTLEMENT AND  
RACIAL ORIGINS

The first settlement in the county was at Madelia in 1855. Immigrants from Germany and the Scandinavian countries settled in the northern part of the county, while Yankees from Indiana and Wisconsin together with Irish immigrants chose land to the south.

In 1858 a party of young Englishmen established a colony at Long Lake, and laid claim to land on which they proposed to build a city after constructing a canal from the lake to the river. This canal plan did not materialize, nor were settlers attracted to the townsite. The promoters did not turn to agriculture for a livelihood, and all left except John Kensie and family. Norwegian families quickly took up the abandoned claim and Kenzie was employed as a school teacher. The schoolhouse was a sod shanty and the schoolmaster received \$25 a month for the 3-month term.

Stockades were erected at several points in the county during the Indian outbreaks of the 1860's, and even after the Sioux were subdued the "wild west" flavor lingered. In 1876 the notorious outlaws, the Younger brothers, were captured near Madelia after they, along with Jesse James, had staged a spectacular raid on the Northfield bank. The reward for their capture was divided among the 42 riders of the posse, each receiving about \$45.

In 1930 Watsonwan had a population density of 29.5 persons per square

mile. Of the total population, (12,802), 12.1 percent were classified as foreign-born, the Norwegian, German and Swedish nationalities predominating.

COUNTY ORGANIZATION AND SUBDIVISIONS

Watonwan County was established in 1860, and Madelia was made the seat of county government. For 18 years it remained the county seat until the offices were moved to St. James by legislative action. In an election the voters rejected the move, but a second election held in 1878 gave a majority to St. James, the largest and most centrally located town. St. James in 1930 had a population of 2,808 and it is incorporated as a city. Other towns are: Butterfield, Darfur, La Salle, Lewisville, Madelia, Odin, and Ormsby, all of which are incorporated as villages.

The county is divided into 12 townships and 62 school districts.

TAXES

Property taxes have been reduced substantially during the depression years, the levy, which was \$515,641 in 1931, had been lowered to \$402,283 in 1935. Property values for tax purposes over the same period declined from \$10,483,257 to \$7,453,124, and the tax rate was raised from 48.58 mills to 53.28 mills.

Indebtedness: Debt of the county and its subdivisions in 1935 was \$705,633.65, or \$55.12 per capita. This sum was 9.47 percent of the total taxable value. The debt of the county government itself was only \$264,375, the remainder being indebtedness of the municipalities and school districts.

Delinquency: Delinquent taxes in January 1936 amounted to \$108,694. Of the 1934 assessment, \$28,805, or 7.33 percent, was uncollected.

MARKETS AND TRADE CENTERS

The primary market center of the State, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and South St. Paul, the packing center and industrial suburb of the State Capital, is a <sup>100</sup> hundred miles to the northeast and is easily accessible by truck over paved highways or by rail. Sioux City, Iowa, and Sioux Falls, S. Dak., important livestock-marketing centers, are about equidistant to the southwest.

Mankato, ~~"the hub of southern Minnesota"~~, and New Ulm, bustling secondary market centers, are located in the adjoining counties.

Within Watonwan County, St. James offers all the shipping, marketing, and shopping facilities of a busy county seat town. The smaller towns serve smaller trade territories, but are important as shipping points, most of them having elevators, stockyards, and creameries.

COOPERATIVES  
(and canneries)

Cooperative Creameries handle the bulk of dairy products and are *located* as follows:

Butterfield Co-op. Cry. Assn.	Butterfield
Darfur Creamery Assn.	Darfur
Farmers Creamery	Odin
Purity Ice Cream & Dairy Assn.	St. James
Godahl Creamery Assn.	St. James
La Salle Creamery Assn.	La Salle
Lewisville Farmer Co-op.	Lewisville
Madelia Creamery Assn.	Madelia
Sveadahl Creamery Assn.	St. James
St. James Creamery Assn.	St. James

Five elevators, two insurance companies, one oil company, three retail store associations, and two telephone exchanges complete the list of cooperatives.

TRANSPORTATION

Three railroads traverse the county and touch on ten shipping points.

The Minneapolis and St. Louis, going north and south, and the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha, going east and west, intersect at St. James, while the Chicago and North Western crosses the western part of the county.

Good paved or graveled highways reach all towns. State 60, paved and bituminous-treated, crosses the county from east to west and passes through the county seat. ~~The paved highway~~ State 15 goes north and south near the east county boundary, and is paralleled by State 4, which crosses the center of the county passing through St. James.

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS  
AND AGENCIES

Near Madelia, the State department of conservation maintains a pheasant-breeding farm which raises thousands of birds each year and stocks all the counties of the State. The modern electrical incubation plant has



a capacity of 50,000 eggs, and the Madelia game farm is one of the largest in the Nation.

A visit to the Tilney farms near St. James would indicate to a prospective buyer the possibilities of Watonwan County farm land. These farms, developed by a New York financier named Tilney, are run on the factory efficiency plan and are now under the management of State Senator Roy Crowley of St. James.

Churches Lutheran churches are the most numerous, there being five at St. James and one at Madelia. Six other religious denominations support a dozen churches in the various communities.

Schools In the 62 districts of Watonwan County are 63 schoolhouses, insuring that no farm is far from the district school. During the year 1935-1936, the country schools employed 66 teachers and had an enrollment of 1,147 pupils. High schools and graded elementary schools in the towns of St. James, Madelia, Butterfield, and Lewisville, with 1,507 pupils enrolled, employed 56 teachers. Lewisville has a graded elementary school.

Clubs and Organizations The Farm Bureau is active in Watonwan County aiding in the solution of technical farming and marketing problems, and its youth auxiliary, the 4-H clubs, function in the education and inspiration of future farmers.

FAIR Late in August each year the Watonwan Agricultural Society sponsors a fair which is held at St. James. Prizes are awarded for the best exhibits in livestock, poultry, vegetables, seed, grain and for the best entries in domestic arts.

FARM INCOME In 1930 the farm income for the county was \$4,691,653, an average of \$3,170 for each farm, nearly \$1,000 above the average for the entire State. Of this amount, 68.86 percent was derived from livestock, 42.79 percent being the revenue from livestock sold and the remainder, 26.07



percent, was from the sale of livestock products such as milk, cream, and eggs. Crops accounted for 21.19 percent of the farm income, forest products contributed but .02 percent and the balance, 9.93 percent, was in products consumed by the operator's family.

## CENSUS REPORT

An average Watsonwan County farm, according to 1935 statistics was 176.3 acres in extent, and at \$70.21 an acre, it was valued at \$12,376 for land and buildings. About 124 acres were cultivated, and the remainder was in pasture, barnyard, and wood lot, or lay fallow. The crop land was divided into 51 acres of corn, 34, oats; 19, hay; 7, barley; 6, flax; .9, rye; .6, mixed grain; .5, potatoes. Stock on the average farm consisted of 24 cattle, 24 hogs, 10 sheep, and 5 horses.

## AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

Population (1930).....	12,802
Area.....435.45 square miles.....	278,639.92 acres

County Seat - St. James  
Population 2,808

Farm Development

Number of farms.....	1,536
Land in farms.....97.5 percent.....	270,520
Average size of farms 176.3 in 1935 and 181.2 in 1930.	

Farm Values

Average value per farm, 1935.....	\$ 12,376
Average value per farm, 1930.....	17,705
Average value per acre, 1935.....	70.21
Average value per acre, 1930.....	97.70

The Tax Picture

Total taxable value, 1935.....	\$ 7,453,124
Total general levy, 1935.....	402,283
Average tax rate in mills.....	53.28
Total debt of county and subdivisions.....	
Per capita debt.....	705,633.65
County bonds.....	55.12
Ratio of debt to taxable value.....	264,375
	9.47 percent

Farm Mortgage and Tenancy

Mortgage debt of owner-operated farms.....	\$ 3,013,985
Percent of owner-operated farms mortgaged.....	61.6 percent
Farm tenancy ratio.....	42.3 percent

Farm Income (1929)

Total farm income.....	\$ 4,691,653
Average farm income.....	3,170

## Sources of income:

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Livestock.....	\$ 2,007,674	42.79
Livestock products.....	1,222,822	26.07
Crops.....	994,330	21.19
Forest products.....	864	.02
Products used by operators	465,963	9.93
	<u>\$ 4,691,653</u>	<u>100.00</u>

Livestock Holdings (1935)

<u>Animals</u>	<u>Farms Reporting</u>	<u>Number</u>
Cattle	1,453	38,070
Horses and mules	1,414	8,008
Swine	1,367	37,981
Sheep	302	15,156

Crop Census (1934)

<u>Crop</u>	<u>Farms Reporting</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Bushels</u>	<u>Tons</u>
Wheat	246	3,088	32,919	
Oats	1,364	53,439	1,181,202	
Barley	675	11,389	184,366	
Rye	82	1,377	9,697	
Flax	567	9,736	74,806	
Mixed grain	49	959	18,994	
Hay		29,623		26,479
Corn (harvested)	1,461	78,599	1,411,901	
Potatoes	1,205	828	54,691	



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TOPIC: St. James Lutfisk Day  
SUBMITTED BY: Ruth Lambert  
NO. OF WORDS: 240

The St. James Lutfisk Day, which attracted from 5,000 to 10,000 persons, after being dropped for a time during the depression, is expected to be revived in the fall of 1936.

The festival is usually held in the first of October in St. James city park under the sponsorship of the St. James Commercial Club.

(more)



The event was first held on October 3, 1927 as a day of entertainment to bring farmers and people of the community together. St. James is a Scandinavian community and the people love lutefisk. The festival was so successful that it was given wide publicity in Norway as well as in this country.

Lutefisk is a fish similar to the American codfish. It is almost a national diet in Norway. The lutefisk comes in barrels. Each fish weighs about five pounds. The fish is dipped for a minute in boiling water and then served. Its pure white flesh is delicious served with melted butter. Usually, coffee, buns and potatoes are served with the fish. Ten thousand pounds of lutefisk was served at the second event in 1928.

The Lutefisk Day got to be such a big event, and cost so much money to stage, that it was dropped for a time during the depression. However, it is expected it will be revived in the fall of 1936. The last time it was held ~~the~~ the expense to the business men was \$1,200.

Bibliography: All information from E. C. ~~Velum~~  
Velum, St. James Commercial Club, St. James, Minnesota.

TOPIC: St. James, Minnesota  
SUBMITTED BY: Ruth Lambert  
NO. OF WORDS: 1,056

*Duplicate 7 A*

St. James, county seat of Watonwan county, a city of 2,808 population, is about 130 miles southwest of the Twin Cities and about 40 miles north of the Iowa-Minnesota border.

Transportation:

St. James is served by the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha and the Minneapolis and St. Louis railroads. Southwestern Stages has its depot at the Sweet Shop. The airport, a half mile northeast of town, is marked and has hangars. Highways are M.60 and 4.

Hotels:

Hotels include the Boston, 69 rooms, 11 baths, with rates from \$1 to \$1.75, and the New London, 40 rooms, with rates from \$1 to \$1.50.

Tourist Camp:

There is a cabin camp on M.60 southwest of town.

History:

The first settlement in the county was made in 1855 in and around what is now the town of Madelia. (A-376 and 379)

The northern part of the county was first settled by Germans, Norwegians and Swedish. The central part was settled by Americans from Indiana and Wisconsin. There were also Irish in the central area. Schools in those early days were usually sod shanties and the teachers were men. They were paid \$25 per month for the three month term. Board and room cost a dollar a week. (A-380)

Watsonwan county was organized in 1861 but had been created by the legislature in 1860. The county seat was first at Madelia. (A-381)

For 13 years Madelia remained the seat of the county government. The offices were removed by legislative action to St. James but at the election which was called for approval or disapproval of the ~~removal~~ change by residents of the county, the voters rejected the move. However, in 1878, when another election was held on the same question, the vote was in favor of St. James. (A-395,396)

Hon. William Estes, in 1890 consul to Jamaica, was from Madelia.



There were stockades at Madelia, ~~MM~~ Lake Hanska, North Branch, Long Lake, and at the farm of Ole Jorgenson after the Indian outbreaks of the 1860's. (A-434)

Early in 1858 a party of young Englishmen came and claimed the timber lands and proposed to found a city at the end of Long Lake. There were going to build a canal from lake to river and use the water to run a saw mill and grist mill. One of the English, John Kensie, a scholarly man of well-to-do family, built a log house at the south side of the grove near the lake. Another lake was named for Kensie. The name has now been corrupted to "Kansas". The English colonists did not work and soon found themselves almost without food because their proposed "city" had not attracted settlers. For some time they lived on corn bread and gopher soup. When even that food became scarce, all but Kensie and his family left. Kensie became friendly with the Norwegians who came family by family and took up the abandoned claims of the other English. During the winter of ~~1858-59~~ 1859-60, he taught the children of the new settlers. (A-436) (See map)

St. James was plotted in 1870 when the railroad went through.

The notorious outlaws, the Younger brothers, were captured near Madelia in 1876, soon after the robbery of the Northfield bank. The reward for the capture of the outlaws was divided among 42 possemen and each recieved from \$45 to \$48. (A-560 to 569)



The cornerstone of the Watonwan court house was laid in 1895. (A-577)

Points of Interest:

See map for location of English "city" project of 1858 and of Madelia near which the Younger brothers were captured and where the county seat was located for 13 years.

A county historical society has been organized and probably will mark other places of interest.

Industries:

St. James is ~~mainly~~ mainly a railroad center but there are several agricultural industries in the city. There are creameries, hatcheries, and livestock shipping associations.

Hospital:

The hospital at St. James is at 405 Armstrong Blvd.

Recreation:

Guests may play on the St. James golf course by paying a small greens fee. The Princess Theatre, on the main business street, is a modern motion picture house.

Pheasant hunting near St. James is excellent.

There is a swimming pool near M.60 southeast of the city.

The city library is at Armstrong Blvd. and 2nd.

Publications:

The Watonwan County Plaindealer and the St. James Courier, both weekly, are published here.

Environs:

The country around St. James is flat to rolling and a good diversified farming section.

Other Information:

The county fair is held in August.

Bibliography:

A--John H. Brown, editor in chief, History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties; B.F. Bowen and Co. Inc., Indianapolis, Ind.; 1916.  
Mrs. Will Curtis, vice-president of the historical society, c/o Watonwan County Plaindealer, St. James, Minn.  
Members of the staff of the Plaindealer.  
Others who were in authority to give information.

Map and Legend are attached.

(End of St. James, Minnesota, account)

POINTS OF INTEREST IN WATONWAN COUNTY

1. Location of English "city" project.
2. Madelia, for 13 years county seat. Younger brothers, outlaws, were captured near here.

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Minneapolis.Minn.

Topic:Watonwan County

#### WATONWAN COUNTY HISTORY

Watonwan County, having a population of 12,802, is situated a little west of the central meridian line of the state. It is in the second tier of counties north of the Iowa line and is bounded on the south by Martin County, on the west by Cottonwood County on the east by Blue Earth County and on the north by Brown County, from which this county was originally carved. St James, its county seat, lies 120 miles west of the Twin Cities and the distance from the west line of the state to the Dakota border is 80 miles.

This county is included in the ninth legislative district, the sixth state judicial district, and belongs to the Second Division of the United States District Court and is also within the confines of the Second Congressional District. This county is entitled to one representative in the Minnesota House of Representatives, and, in conjunction with Martin county, sends one senator to the State Senate.

The county is named after the river of the same name, the headstreams of which flow through it. According to the Rev M. W. Adams the name means "Fish bait"

EXPLORERS. Nicollet's map and report, published in 1843, gives the first reference to Watonwan river. This indicates that Nicollet traversed the land which is now Watonwan county. There is no other reference to the visit of any explorers or camping places they might have in this region.

Pre SETTLEMENT AND INDIANS. This county is not noted for any Indian



## Watonwan County

villages but for many scores of years the Sioux, often called the Dakota Indians, roamed over this part of southwestern Minnesota. They camped along the streams and hunted over the plains of what is now Watonwan County on their way to the Pipestone quarries. These Sioux were part of the Sioux Nation which occupied Minnesota and were about 80,000 strong. They were divided into four bands, viz., the M'day -wa- kon-ton or Spirit Lake villagers; the Wak-pay-ku-tays or leaf shooters; the Si-si-ton and Wak -pay-ton. The Winnebagoes, about 1800 in number, had their headquarters close to Watonwan county -near the present site of Mankato- in 1854. ~~They fished in the waters of Watonwan and hunted over the~~  
~~plains.~~

was

The county ~~is~~ a natural grassland prairie without trees except along the streams. Its rich and nutritious grasses attracted bison, deer and other animals. In turn the plentiful supply of wild animals caused the Indians to pause along the waters of the Watonwan and camp while the braves hunted. When the Indians camped they lived in circular conical huts called tepees. These tepees were supported by poles, so arranged as to leave an opening at the top for the escape of smoke. Before the advent of the whites the tepees were covered with Buffalo hides. Later they were covered with a coarse cotton cloth. A fire was made in the center for cooking purposes and warmth. The camp kettle was suspended <sup>↓</sup>~~over~~ over this fire. The squaws did most of the work, and of course all the cooking, while the braves hunted and brought in the food in the shape of dead animals.

Before the fifties the Indians were of the opinion that this land belonged to them and that the invading whites, who scratched up the earth for the purpose of farming, were interfering with their means of ~~livelihood~~ of making a living. In various ways they showed resentment at the occupation of land in this territory by whites. The whites realized this and brought pressure

the United States Government to intervene in their behalf. This was done by the government with the result that on June 22nd 1851 a treaty was signed at Traverse des Sioux, under the terms of which a vast tract of land in Minnesota and Iowa was ceded to the United States for which the Indians of the Sioux Nation \$1,665,000. Part of this sum was to be paid in cash and the balance in annuities, extending over a period of fifty years. The annuity money was divided into cash which was paid to the Indians and in goods of various kinds and in funds for the development of agriculture, for educational purposes and other uses. The Indians reserved a strip of land along the Minnesota river, ten miles on either side.

**EARLY SETTLEMENT.** After the settlement with the Indians there was a rush of settlers from the east and south to Southwestern Minnesota. As there were no railroads into Watonwan county and the distance to the nearest market towns - New Ulm and Mankato - were too great in those days of the ox team that profitable farming was out of the question, the settlement of this region was slow. It was 1885 before the first recorded settlers were H.B. Sherman, T. Fitch, and J.N. Barker. They squatted along the river bottoms and engaged in some farming and stockraising. In the year 1856 C.N. Pomeroy, Elizabeth Olds, Edward Taylor, Stephen P. Benjamin, John C. Sprague, James M. Hudson and Thomas Rutledge. Many of these early settlers came in covered wagons and other conveyances over the Spirit Lake trail which would its way from Iowa up through up through Jackson and Martin counties into Watonwan and out of the county at the northeastern end towards Mankato. Later many came by the military road which was built between St Paul and South Dakota, which entered the county at the northeastern corner and passed through it until it left the county at the southwestern border.



Very few of the early settlers had much more than a team of oxen, a crude wagon and the most primitive household and farming tools. Where timber was plentiful along the streams they chopped down trees and built log cabins. Later ~~as~~ they built ~~log~~<sup>sod</sup> shanties when the better locations along the rivers were occupied. The river settlers had timber for fuel and were close to water while these <sup>on</sup> who had to build shanties ~~in~~ the prairie had to sink wells and haul firewood from the banks of the streams. Sometimes wild hay was ~~twisted~~<sup>twisted</sup> into thick ropes and used for fuel. Those early settlers farmed enough land so that they could produce enough vegetables for the family table and enough oats and other forage to be fed to the work animals. It was then out of the question to raise corn, wheat or potatoes as cash crops to be sold because the distance to New Ulm and Mankato, the then trading centers was too great in those days of slow transportation. Many times farmers spent a week going to and returning from the towns mentioned, carrying camping equipment and cooking utensils along so that they could eat and sleep ~~on the~~ during the journey.

The principal industry engaged in by the first settlers was that of stockraising, firstly because Watonwan was a great prairie county where grass was plentiful and secondly because the beef cattle could walk to market. Outside of salt, sugar, tea and clothing and powder, the early settler did not need to buy much ~~more~~ at the store. The fuel for his motive power - oxen and horses - came from his land in the shape of oats, hay and grass. The raw material for his wagons and carts came from the nearby groves. His overcoats came from the beaver and ~~mink~~<sup>muskrat</sup> skins obtained from animals he could find in any stream. Bathtubs, ~~refrigerators~~<sup>refrigerators</sup>, gas or ~~electric~~<sup>electric</sup> ovens and radiators and other ~~gadgets~~<sup>gadgets</sup> popularised by modern salesmanship and advertising, were not regarded as necessities then.

#### INDIAN WARS

RETARD SETTLEMENT. The uprising of the Sioux under the leadership of Little Crow in 1862 halted settlement in Watonwan County until after the battle



Wood Lake and the hanging of the Indians at Mankato. The fear of the raiding Indians drove the early settlers of Watonwan County towards Madelia where there was a company and sometimes a regiment of soldiers to protect them in the rough and ready stockades erected there. While most of the early settlers of Watonwan county fled to Madelia and stayed there until the danger of loss of life, due to Little Crow's revolt had passed, many also fled to Mankato, where they believed there were more people and better protection in the event of a hostile attack on the part of the Indians. Some idea of the extent of the panic that pervaded southwestern Minnesota at this time can be gleaned from a report sent by Lieut.-Gov. Ignatius Donnelly, to Gov. Alexander Ramsay, from St Peter on August 26, 1862. Donnelly's report states:

"You can hardly conceive the panic existing along the valley. \*xxxxxxx  
In Belle Plaine I found sixty people crowded. In this place leading citizens assure me that ~~that~~ there are between 3,000 and 4,000 refugees. On the road between New Ulm and Mankato are over 2,000; Mankato is also crowded. The people here are in a state of panic. They fear to see our forces leave. Although we may agree that much of this dread is without foundation, nevertheless it is producing disastrous consequences to the state. The people will continue to pour down the valley, carrying consternation wherever they go, their property in the meantime abandoned and going to ruin."

The country along the river in the vicinity of Madelia was the most thickly settled district in Watonwan county at the time of the uprising and it was not strange that the Indian raids should be in that neighborhood. In the early days of the rising a skirmishing band of Little Crow's army visited Watonwan county and killed many settlers living on the outskirts of ~~Madela~~ Madelia. Along the south fork of the Watonwan river this same band raided the habitations of dozens of people and plundered and killed several of the inhabitants.

About this time a crude fort was built near Madelia under the direction of

Watsonwan county

Captain E. St Julian Cox, famous Indian fighter and later Judge in Southwestern Minnesota. This fort was built of logs and was large enough so that, besides the soldiers, the refugees could be accommodated inside its walls. Many of the male refugees had rifles and were prepared to defend the fort with the soldiers should an attack take place. However, it was felt that ~~there were~~ reinforcements were needed, because of the fear of an attack of a large number of Indians, and an urgent call for more troops was sent to Fort Snelling. The result was that Colonel Theodore Potter was dispatched with a company of soldiers for the purpose of reinforcing the garrison stationed at the Madelia fort. Colonel Potter describes the situation that called for the aid of his sixty soldiers, in the following language:

"I was ordered to take sixty men and make a forced march to Madelia where a party of Sioux had mass massacred several people, and report to Captain Cox, who with his company of 30 day militia, had been stationed there for two weeks with orders to build a blockhouse or log fort for the protection of that extreme border settlement."

"We took the way along Loon and Crystal Lakes over an unbroken prairie most of the way until twelve o'clock. When we had to make the last five miles through a drenching rain and so dark that we had to have a man go on foot with a tallow candle to lead the way"

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when Colonel Potter's company reached Captain Cox's headquarters near Madelia. They found the blockhouse finished except the ~~the~~ roof. <sup>they were informed</sup> On their arrival, ~~that~~ four persons were killed within sight of the fort but the garrison was too weak to rescue them. Col Potter's men brought the dead bodies into the fort and buried them ~~neaby-~~ nearby/. Four miles from the fort the raiding Indians killed John Armstrong, a pioneer settler, by shooting him with steel pointed arrows. They also killed



## Watsonwan County

two children of Mr Patterson in the same vicinity. A few rods away they killed a Mr Peterson and made a captive of his child. The identity of this band of Indians started a lively guessing contest but the best informed believed them to be from South Dakota because they used steel pointed arrows.

There was a large settlement of Norwegians close to Madelia. A member of this settlement called at the fort one day and reported that four members of his family had been killed and that he escaped with a wounded arm, which he exhibited to the soldiers. He also reported that the Indians were making their way <sup>up</sup> ~~the~~ the river where twenty five families were located.

After the decisive battle of Wood Lake captured Indians were taken to Mankato and tried for the depredations they committed in southwestern Minnesota counties. Twenty five Indians who had taken part in the massacres and raids around Madelia were tried and it was shown that they had killed seventeen persons and wounded many more and that they had captured two white women and took them away for a distance of fifty miles. When they heard that Sibley was driving the warriors westward into South Dakota they killed the women in reprisal. The chief of this party was one of the Indians hung at Mankato, December 26, 1862.

The reason for the revolt of the Indians under Little Crow seems to be clouded a good deal in the histories and legends written and passed down during the closing decades of the past century depending on the viewpoint or the bias of the historian or relator. Perhaps the fairest accounts of the rising are to be found in the History of Minnesota written by Judge Flandrau, who was familiar with the Minnesota river country as an Indian agent and afterwards a commander of the troops sent to suppress the rebellion, and in the History of Redwood County by Franklin Curtiss-Wedge, in which the author went into great detail showing the dalliance of the officials in Washington in sending the money



to the agents so as to enable them to pay the annuities to the Indians at the times stipulated in the treaty of Traverse des Sioux.

After the treaty was signed the invading whites settled in many places in southwestern Minnesota with the result that the Indians, driven into the reservation specified for them in the treaty, had a scantier means of livelihood than they had when they roamed at will over the lands of southwestern Minnesota which they considered theirs from time ~~immorial~~ immemorial. Not being schooled in the natural methods of wild animal conservation known to the Indians, the whites in destroying the wild animals and causing them to migrate to safer and more congenial climes to the west, also destroyed <sup>one</sup> of the most staple articles of food consumed by the Indians - meat. The result was that the Indians were reduced to dire straits bordering on starvation when they gathered to receive their annual payments and ~~and~~ quantities of food. They got little food and no annuities when they gathered outside the Upper and Lower Indian Agencies in Yellow Medicine County. The rank and file Indians then formed "Soldiers Lodges" in the proceedings of which no chief was allowed to participate. The dread spectre of hunger and the agitation within the "Soldiers Lodges," due to the failure of the government officers to perform their part of the treaty, caused the revolt with its attendant misery and loss in Watonwan county and southwestern Minnesota.

With the defeat of the Indians and the restoration of ordered government most of the settlers who took refuge in Madelia and other cities outside the county returned to their farms. The ~~passage~~ passage of the Homestead law of 1862 also gave an impetus to the settlement of the county. Many of these early settlers came from Wisconsin, Indiana, Iowa and there were many Norwegians in the county in the sixties.

1870

With the coming of the railroad to St James in ~~1871~~ there was an increase of settlement all over the county and the townships through which the road passed had their vacant land rapidly filed on by homesteaders.

LAND OFFICES. The land offices located at Mankato and New Ulm were the principal places where filings were made for the government land in the county.

After the required period for residence on the land and the proper amount of the claims were put under cultivation claimants applied for patents. Notices were published in county papers that the homesteader with his witnesses would appear at the land office at a specified time and submit proof. This was always an event of importance to the homemaker. Very frequently he negotiated a loan on his land at this time and when he received his patent from the General Land Office in Washington, signed as it was by the President of the United States of the period, he handed his patent over to some bank or loan company, executed his mortgage and received the money he wanted for needed improvements.

National origins Very many of the present residents of the county are descendants of the early settlers and homesteaders. A survey of the national origins of the people of the county made in 1930 showed that the people of persons Watonwan are descendants of ~~people~~ of the following ~~racial~~ racial groups in the following numbers: British 326; German, 1,909; Swedish, 1,431; Norwegian, 2,145; Danish, 146; Slavic, 352; Finish, 2.

Grasshoppers . Watonwan county was visited by great swarms of grasshoppers in 1872. They destroyed everything in the shape of crops and the settlers suffered much in consequence, but their courage did not fail them



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nor their belief in the future of the country did not become dimmed. Next year they planted ~~lxxx~~ a large acreage but the grasshoppers of the year before had deposited their eggs in the soil and as soon as the heat of midsummer of 1873 warmed the ground the grasshoppers again hatched out and again destroyed the crops. Before the grasshoppers came there were hailstorms which did much damage to the crops in certain sections. One settler in the vicinity of Madelia stated that the farmers in his community, during their first years as homesteaders, were "hailed out" and the next few years when the grasshoppers came, they were "Ate out". This and other setbacks caused a relief situation to arise in the county during the last half of the seventies. In 1877 the state sent the farmers of Watonwan county \$798.00 for the purchase of seed grain the Board of County Commissioners distributed the seed grain amongst the farmers. Again in 1879 the legislature took official cognizance of the suffering of the people and sent the Commissioners \$2,453.50 to be distributed for the <sup>ur</sup>purchase of seed. Because of the destruction of the crops ~~thex~~ many pioneers of this period lived on sand hill cranes and wild geese. Carrots were baked and used as a substitute ~~for~~ coffee.

In the eighties and the ninties<sup>e</sup> the industrious disposition of the population combined with the natural fertility of the soil of the county began to bring results in the way of increased crops. Prosperity increased and the population began to <sup>jump</sup> from 2,434, in 1870, to 5,995 in 1885, to 7,746 in ~~1890~~, 1890, to 11,496 in 1900.



COUNTY ORGANIZATION. What is now Watonwan county was a part of Brown county until 1860. About that time pressure was brought to bear on the members of the state legislature to carve a new county out of the southern part of Brown county. The result was that a bill was introduced in the legislature, section 3 of which provided: "That then and thereafter said county of Watonwan shall be established as above described"(Minnesota Laws for 1860 Chap 13, page 60) In due time the law was passed establishing the county and was approved February 25th 1860. A provision in the act stipulated that an election should be held where a majority vote was required to ratify the establishment of the new county. The voters of Brown county(which then included the area now called Watonwan county)decided the question at the polls November 1860,with a very large majority in favor of ratification.

The county was organized in the spring of 1861. J T Furber,C.M.Pomeroy, and Ole Jorgenson were appointed the first county commissioners. Madelia was recognized as the county seat in the Act of the legislature and so remained until 1878 when St James won that honor. In the fall of sixty one a county election was held at Madelia,resulting in the election of the following county officers: Probate Judge,John Travis;Sheriff John Chase;Auditor Chas G.Mullen;Treasurer,C.M.Pomeroy;Register of Deeds,Joseph Flanders; County Attorney ,Daniel Bush;Coroner Notts Jensen;County Commissioners, Halvor Torgenson,Louis Vorwick and Thomas Russell.

Choice of County seat After enjoying the prestige of being the county seat for a period of thirteen years after the county was organized,Madelia found a competitor in the rising city of St James. Because of its location in the geographical center of the ~~state~~ county,St James found supporters in most of the townships nearest to it. Because of this support a bill was introduced and passed in the state legislature removing the county seat from Madelia to St James. The new law ordered an election to be held in 1874,for the purpose of determining the location of the county seat. This election

showed 995 against removal and 603 for. But when the question was again submitted to the voters in 1878 the vote was for removal (to St James) 594, against 371.

Courthouse . The first courthouse in the county was in the village of Madelia. Besides housing the county records and officers, the local Attorneys maintained their offices there. In 1895 the citizens of the county voted on a bond issue for the erection of a new county courthouse to be erected at St James with the result that the present one was built.

Postmasters and mail routes The first mail route in the county was a very primitive one when compared with the present magnificent system of motorized mail delivery in every section of the county and nearly every farm home today.

The first mail route was over an irregular route from Mankato to Sioux City, Iowa. The first man who carried mail over this route was Jens Torsen who lived in the Rosendale settlement. In the summer months this mail carrier with the mail bag and a sack of provisions tied to the saddle. When the winter came the weather was too severe for the pony to travel and because the trails were frequently covered with snow the stopping places were too few. This mail carrier then travelled on showshoes and skis. Besides the Rosendale postoffice there ~~one~~ was one at Jackson and another at Spirit Lake. At these settlements the mail carrier stopped to leave and take mail and rest and stock up with provisions before proceeding with the rest of his journey.

In the fifties and sixties there was no railroad in the county and scarcely a bridge over the Watonwan or Blue Earth rivers. The nearest flouring <sup>was</sup> mills ~~were~~ at Mankato and South Bend was the nearest trading post. It was in such a setting that the first postoffice was established at Rosendale. The first man to preside over this outpost of the government, as postmaster was Nils Torsen.



Schools and Teachers When children began to increase in local settlements the pioneers began to think of schools. There were no school boards or school Superintendents in the earlier days of Watonwan county and bond issues were unthought<sup>t</sup> of. Many of the first schools, which were sod shanties, were erected by the cooperative labor of the people of the immediate community. Some of the schools were held in houses. Helen Adell Sergeant, afterwards Mrs E.Z.Rasey, taught school during the year 1870, in a spare room of her father's house. She had an attendance of about 20 pupils. Later she attended the State Normal School at Mankato and was the first woman Superintendent of Schools in Watonwan county. The first school superintendent was inducted into office in 1869 and was named George W. Tate.

The school teachers of the sixties were paid only \$25.00 per month and worked only about three months per year at the occupation of school teacher. They could obtain board and room in the early farmer settlements for one dollar per week. Perhaps none of the first teachers of the community had a degree from a University or a diploma from a teachers college. But they were persons of education and refinement. One of the most notable of these was John Kensie, who was the only one of a colony of young Englishmen to remain behind to become a farmer and incidentally one of the county's first teachers. This colony, which came to Watonwan county and settled along the shores of Long Lake in 1868, took up timber claims and told all and sundry that they intended to establish a great city - called New London - at the end of the lake. But hard times interfered with their plans and ~~at that time~~ being tired of the rough life of the pioneer they went to the cities.

The earliest schools in the county were located in the Madelia district. Mr H.H. Huggins, who taught at Adrian, was one of the first teachers. He was afterwards elected sheriff. Mr George Knudzen was one of the first teachers



of Madelia. Afterwards he was elected County Auditor and he served in that capacity for twenty years. Thomas Thurston had charge of the schools of Riverdale and Rosendale townships for several years. He ceased to be a schoolteacher when he was elected County Recorder, a position which he filled for 20 years.

The first schools in the Rosendale township were taught in 1869 and 1870. Henry G. Sergeant taught in the winter of 1869.

The first school in St James was organized in 1871.

In 1875 there were thirty five school districts in the county, of which twenty six were in session and located as follows: Long Lake 3; South Branch 3; Antrim 3; Feldon 3; St James 3; Odin 2; Rosendale 2; Adrian 1; Madelia 2; Riverdale 2. The number of pupils enrolled in the schools of the county during summer were 676.

The most famous member of the teaching profession in Watonwan county was W.S. Hammond, who later became a practicing lawyer, County Attorney, Congressman and Governor of the state. He was the first superintendent of the of school district No 1, in Madelia. A fuller account of his life is given in the biographical chapters in the final pages of this brochure.

Watonwan county had even private schools during the days that the grasshoppers ravaged the countryside. In 1874 an advertisement appeared in the Madelia Times of the opening of a "Select School" to be taught by Professor A.C. Harrison, principal, and Miss C.I. Mead, as assistant and teacher of music. The advertisement stated that the principal would accept produce in lieu of money.

Parents saw an opportunity

(over)

Wantonwan County.

to give their progeny some "Higher education" and a goodly number were enrolled in Professor Harrison's "Select School" when it opened April 20th 1874.

To the dismay of the good people of the town the Madelia Times, in its issue of May 16 following, printed a startling story about the Professor and his assistant under the following Hearstian headline:

"A RASCAL AND A DEAD BEAT"

Under the above appeared the following interesting story:

"The quiet of our village was somewhat ruffled the later part of last week by a disgraceful matter coming to light."

"A little over a month ago a young man, calling himself A C Harrison, came to town and advertised that he and a lady acquaintance would begin a private school on April 20 th. He had a wife and four children and in due time they came and took rooms at the Flanders House. In two weeks Harrison sends his wife and kids to Ohio, stopping on the way at Winona".

"Harrison who had been very gallant to his assistant was noted to be more so. Letters were obtained to show that he was tampering with the affections of the young lady under the pretense of love. He declared to the girl that since meeting her his love for his wife had grown cold; that he was going under an assumed name, his right name being Arthur Morris"

"Colonel Vo<sup>u</sup>ght did not admire these proceedings and promised to expose Harrison. At first the charges were denied but when letters were produced, that he had written to Miss Mead, he considered it time to leave and made his exit by the rear door of the hotel, taking with him the tuition money which many of the patrons had paid"

To complete this choice bit of early day rural "Americana" it is only necessary to state that the Assistant to the Professor left a few days later on being informed that her mother was ill, because, as the editor intimated, "She could not stand the shock of the news" This terminated the school.

Schools and Teachers, cont'd

From the early school system ~~has~~ the modern schools have evolved . The rickety sod shanties ,with their hand hewn desks ,~~have been replaced by~~ and wood burning stoves in the center of the classroom ,have been replaced, in the cities and villages by magnificent brick and stone, steam heated structures, equipped with spacious classrooms ,lavatories, cloakrooms even auditoriums where the old get instruction during the evenings . The teachers of the present day ,while they may not be more intelligent than those of the sixties and seventies are able to hang diplomas from the Normal Schools and degrees from the Universities proclaiming their knowledge and indicating how they convinced the school boards that they should be paid more than six times as much as the teachers of an earlier day. The humblest schoolhouse now in Watsonwan county is a well built frame structure within a convenient distance of the farmers homes.

Today there are 62 school districts in which there are 63 schoolhouses. During the year 1935-6 the rural schools employed 66 teachers and had an enrollment of 1,147 pupils. High Schools and graded elementary schools in the towns of St. James, Madelia, Butterfield and Lewisville, with 1,507 pupils enrolled, employed 56 teachers.

Churches and Ministers      The first attempt at an organized religious society was a Methodist Episcopal class formed in Madelia in 1857. It laid the foundation of a large number of churches and communicants of this persuasion in various parts of the county.

The Madelia Luthern Church was organized in 1870 by Rev N Olson. The first presbyterian congregation was organized at Butterfield Township in 1896 by the Rev J.P. Thorkveen.

The Swedish Evangelical Church was organized in 1870 and located five miles east of St .James.



Churches cont'd

Madelia had the first catholic church building in Watonwan county and Father Pribel was its first pastor. From his headquarters in Madelia he also attended to the spiritual wants of another congregation in St James. Father Pribel was succeeded by Father Elshorst, who moved the priest's residence to St James. From that point Father Elshorst attended services for catholic parishioners in Madelia, Mountain Lake, Windom and Heron Lake. In 1872 a new catholic church was built at Madelia at which Father Wirth celebrated the first mass.

Father Durward, who had long been a priest in the county, entered the Trappist order but returned and became the first Hermit in Minnesota. He lived in seclusion, cooked his own meals, took care of his own garden, had an altar in his house at which he celebrated mass and was his own mass server.

The first Methodist church (Episcopal) was organized at St James by Rev J.R. Andrews in 1871, ~~Madison~~. A church building was erected during the same year at a cost of \$1000.00. The present edifice was erected in 1895, costing \$14,000. The first sermon preached in St James by a minister of this faith was delivered by Rev W.I.W. Cunningham. The Methodist Episcopal Church of Madelia, referred to previously, was organized by Theopolis Drew in 1857. The present church in that community was erected in 1896, costing \$15,000.

The Calvary Episcopal Church at St James was organized in 1887-8. Christ's Episcopal Church was organized at Madelia in 1873 by Rev D Livermore.

The Trinity Evangelical Church of Madelia was organized October 28th, 1870, by the Rev T.H. Hattrem. This denomination has churches at La Salle, Rosendale Township, St James and other points in the county.

Watsonwan County History.

CHURCHES (cont'd) four districts:viz, Martin Nelson District, Homre District, Olaf Olson District and Madelia District.

The German Evangelical Lutheran St John's Church at Darfur was founded August 5 th 1907, by August Goring and A.A.Uhlhorn.

St John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Branch Township was organized June 13, 1887, by Rev C Ross of Willow Creek, Minnesota.

The Presbyterians organized a church in St James about 1870. The first service was held in a box car.

The Christian Church was organized in Lewisville in ~~1897~~ 1877 by Archibald Law. This congregation erected a church in 1892.

The Church of Christ in the village of Madelia was organized in 1896 by J K Shellenberger and a \$4,000 church was erected the same year.

The oldest Norwegian Church (Lutheran) in the county was organized in Rosendale July 2nd 1859 by the Rev Fredericksen and forty members.

Long Lake Norwegian Lutheran Church was organized in 1859 by Rev T.H. Dahl. The Albion Norwegian congregation was organized in 1871 by the Rev Thor Hatrem and the first church was built in 1871. The St Olaf congregation of this church was organized in 1891. The congregations of St Olaf, Butterfield, Rosendale, Long Lake and Albion are all combined in one having the same parson and parsonage.

The Norwegian Lutheran Church at St James was organized in 1873 by the Rev L Green. A Church building, costing \$19,000, was erected in 1896. A parochial school is ~~maintained~~ connected with the church.

The Swedish Evangelical Church was organized at St James - five miles from the town - August 5th 1870, by the Rev P Carlson. Others were organized at Kansas Lake 1871 and St James 1884 by the Rev P Eckman, chairman, and another at Darfur 1914 by the Rev C W Samuelson.

The First Menonite Church in the county was organized at Butterfield by John Sawatzky, Jacob Harder and David Falk. The Salam Church of



this denomination, in Butterfield, was organized July 17, 1896.

The First Baptist Church at St James was organized by the Rev Cone in 1871. He held his first services in a railroad car.

#### Church Picture today

The churches and their denominations in Wantonwan County today are as follows:

Town	Presby- terian	Metho- dist	Episco- palian	Baptist	Disciples of Christ	Misc	Catholic	Lutheran
Lewisville	0				1			
Butterfield	1					1		
Madelia	1	2		1	1		1	1
St James	1						1	5
Calvary			1					
TOTALS	3	2	1	1	2	1	2	6

#### FIRST PROFESSIONAL MEN.

PHYSICIANS .The first physicians referred to in the records of the county are Dr W D Smith ,who was in Watonwan County in 1870 and then paid by the county commissioners as the County Health Officer. Dr Geo Christopherson shows in 1868 and Dr Stoddard in 1870. The first physician to practice in St James was Dr E Cottrell. The following are the names of early day doctors and the dates they registered in the county for the practice of their profession:

Charles O Cooley, Madelia, registered 1883.

Thede Kirk St James

Chas R.Bacon St James ,, 1884

W.H.Shaver Madelia ,, 1883

Henry H.Herring 1884

Henry H.Grosbach St James 1885

William H.Rowe St James 1884

Henry H. Munger St James 1891

Lawson L.McCurdy Madelia 1897

Knud M.O.Leigan St James

E.M.Johnson St James 1898

Joseph N.Flynn Madelia 1901



A Medical Society was organized in the county January 10, 1900, with Dr. Cooley as president.

LAWYERS. J. W. Seager, the oldest lawyer in the county, came to St James in 1869. J. L. Lobben became a partner of his when the latter was admitted to the Bar in 1896. J. J. Thorenton was reputed to be the first lawyer that "hung out his shingle" in the county. W. E. Allen came to St James in 1884, taught school for a year or two and was admitted to practice law in the state in 1892.

P. H. Burns practiced law in the county for many years. Ashley Coffman practiced at St James. Albert Running began to practice in the same city in 1906.

In 1916 the county seat had the following Attorneys: J. W. Seager, Al Running, J. L. Lobben and Ed C. Farmer. Madelia A. C. Remele, C. J. Eide. Lewisville Joseph Davies.