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THE

OLD SCHOOL BELL

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History of Medina

by Bill Scherer

In 1853, the Traverse de Sioux Treaty opened up the region west of the Mississippi River to white settlers who were attracted by the huge stands of timber and the availability of land for farming. When government surveyors installed section corner posts in Township 118 – Range 23 in July1855, they noted the kinds and sizes of timber and other vegetation like cranberry bogs and tamarack marshes. The general summary of their findings:
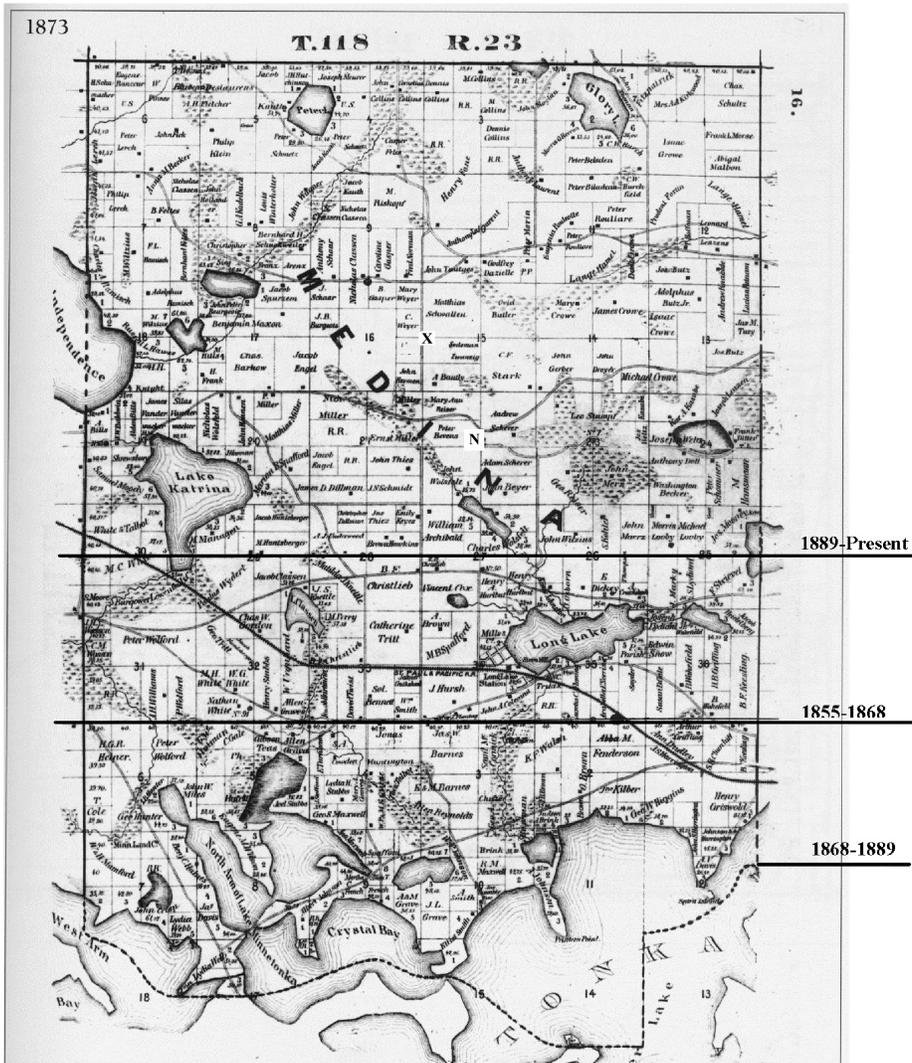
• The township was entirely timbered in oak, sugar maple, linden, elm, etc.
• Soil was second rate and the surface level
• There were a number of lakes. (Note that several of them have been drained since that time)
• The marshes were generally fine for grass
• There were already a few settlers there
• There were no roads except a county road passing through sections 36 through 31 (now generally Watertown Road)

Several family histories note that the original settlers bypassed land further to the east to settle in the better timber in the area that is now Medina. In addition to providing wood for buildings, fences and winter heating, the trees provided potential sources of income. Several area farmers cut oak, elm or maple for barrel staves or hickory for barrel hoops at the cooperage in Tamarack (later to be called Long Lake). The maple trees provided sap that could be cooked down into maple syrup or maple sugar. While many families tapped the maple trees each spring the Wolsfeld family made a much larger business of it at their home on the shores of lake that now bears their name.

A few settlers arrived in the township in 1854, but many more came over the next few years so that by 1860 much of the land had been claimed. Prior to 1858, there was no local government but the settlers got together and formed support groups. The first marriage occurred in 1856, when Sebastian Kohler married one of the daughters of Anton Baumeister.

On April 10, 1858, County Commissioners gave Township 118 – Range 23 an official designation as "Hamburg Township" in preparation for the first town meeting which was to be held on the same day Minnesota joined the Union as the 32nd state – May 11, 1858. At this first meeting, 37 residents met in the home of Valorious Chilson, one of the first settlers in the Perkinsville area. Chilson was the chairman. Andrew (Andreas) Scherer was elected moderator and William Hillman clerk of the meeting. Resolutions were offered to organize school districts, define legal fences and regulate the running of stock at large. Also at this meeting, George Reiser offered a resolution to change the name of the township to "Medina," after the Arabian holy city that was in the news that year. The resolution passed unanimously. Township officers were also elected:

• Supervisors – Valorious Chilson (chairman), C.W. Burchfield and George Reiser
• Town clerk – W.F. Hillman
• Assessor – L. Lenzen
• Collector – Andrew (Andreas) Scherer
• Overseer of the poor – Joseph Lenzen

Map showing the location of the southern border of Medina Township in the 1800s. The middle (1955-1868) line shows the original border. The lower (1868-1889) line, which extends through Lake Minnetonka, was the border before Orono was formed. The upper (1889-present) line represents the current southern border. "X" is the location of the old town hall. "N" is the location of the current city hall.

- Justices - James Crowe and William Archibald
- Constables - Leo Stumpf and Adolf Butz
- Overseer of roads – B. Gasper

Medina's early European settlers were chiefly German, English and Irish (in the southern part of the township) and French- Canadian (in the northeast). The first generations tended to group according to their language ties for church, school and business as well as their personal lives.

Like most townships, Medina was originally laid out in a six mile by six mile square grid that was divided into 36 sections, each consisting of a square mile. The township of Excelsior was immediately to the south of Medina. Half of

Excelsior was north of Lake Minnetonka and half to the south.

In 1868, the St Paul and Pacific Railroad extended westward from Wayzata through Medina with stations at Long Lake and Maple Plain. For the residents of the northern portion of Excelsior this development along with their remoteness from the rest of the township led to a vote to become a part of Medina. Medina now included an area of about 50 square miles – much larger than most townships.

This new addition to Medina was mostly populated by people of English or Irish descent as was southern Medina. The rest of Medina was mostly German and they still used that language at home, in church and in much of their daily lives. By 1889, the old portion of Excelsior as well nine sections of the original Medina Township that were mostly English speaking, voted to form a new township called Orono. Medina was reduced to twenty seven square miles. These new borders would remain until 1940 when Loretto also voted to become a separate municipality leaving Medina with about 26.5 sections or 16,960 acres.

Roads:
When the first Medina settlers arrived, the only road passed through the southern part of the township (now in Orono). After that, there were only Native American and game trails. These trails were not straight, but followed high ground to avoid the swamps that were common throughout the area. As settlers moved in, they extended roads to their property. The next person would extend it a little further to reach his property and so on.

The early settlers were required to devote a certain amount of time on road construction and maintenance as part of their taxes. Most of this work in the beginning was on east-west roads that would run to Minneapolis and St. Paul. The trail that ran from the falls of St. Anthony to the forks of the Crow River became known as Rockford Road and eventually evolved into State Highway 55. A branch of

Rockford Road that ran to Lake Independence was known as Perkinsville Road and evolved into County Road 24.

Gradually a road system was developed, although most of them were county roads. In addition to county roads 19 & 24 which remain today, there was CR48 (now Medina Road), CR87 (Willow Drive), CR88 (Tamarack Drive) and CR9 (Hamel Road). Local citizens were responsible for the remainder of the roads. This evolved into a system of four "road bosses", each responsible for a quarter of the township roads. Local farmers bid to maintain the roads and smoothed them regularly with horse-drawn graders. In the 1960s, Leo Leuer bought dedicated road maintenance equipment and bid for all four of the "road boss" districts. He continued to contract this service to the village until the city developed its own public works department in the mid-1970s.

In the early history of Medina, there were four small commercial areas within its current borders: Perkinsville, Ditter's Store, Feltes' settlement and Lenz – each with its own post office. They also had churches, schools and stores.

Perkinsville:
In 1854, John & Needham Perkins, Quaker brothers from North Carolina, settled on the south shore of Lake Independence. They were some of the only white men in the area since real settlement of the area didn't start until the following year. The brothers built a hotel with the first post office in Medina. It opened on 15 May 1856. The Monticello and St Peter Road was surveyed through Perkinsville that same year. In 1857, they platted out a town with about 500 lots. Half the town would be located in Medina and half in Independence. They went about selling lots. That year, the town had the hotel, a store, school, sawmill, a brick yard & kiln, blacksmith shop and a sash & door factory - and about 50 residents. It was the commercial center for the early settlers. But 1857 was also a year of financial panic and most of the lots never sold.

In 1868, the St Paul and Pacific RR came through and bypassed Perkinsville. A train station was set up at Maple Plain, about a mile south of Perkinsville. The town died. Today, much of it is within Baker Park. The rest is in the residential area between Maple Plain and Lake Independence.

Ditter's store & dance hall and Holy Name Church:
The Catholic parish of Holy Name of Jesus was incorporated in 1864 when a small log church was built on the southeast shore of the lake that is now named after the church. Land for the church had been donated by the Lenzen, Mooney, Hansmann, Luby and O'Brien families. A new frame building was completed in 1875 and the old log church was used as a school through 1879 when it was remodeled as a residence for the priest for a few years. It was torn down in 1893. The second church burned down in 1911 and was

Ditter's Store: The Ditter home is at right. The store is at left with the dance hall above.

replaced later that same year. That building still stands as part of the Holy Name building complex.

About 1870, Francis Ditter bought 25 acres on the east shore of Hansmann's (now Holy Name) Lake. He built a 22X40 foot store attached to his house. He opened a post office in the store on 27 Sep 1887 that got its mail twice a week and a dance hall upstairs. In addition to dances, plays were presented on the dance hall stage. Because of its location only a few hundred yards north of Holy Name Church, the Ditter place was a very popular gathering place. The post office closed with the advent of Rural Free Delivery in 1901 and the dance hall was closed, except for special events, after Ditter's death in 1904.

Lenz (Hamel):
Older maps of Medina show a town call Lenz located at the junction of two Indian trails: the north/south trail from Shakopee to the junction of the Crow & Mississippi River (roughly County Road 101) and the east/west trail that later became Rockford Road. Rockford Road formed the main street through town. The town probably got its name from Leonard Lenzen, who built a mill on Elm Creek and set up the post office on 5 Jan 1861.

The area had been settled by French Canadians that had spread from the Osseo and Medicine Lake areas that had been settled a couple years earlier. The town boasted several businesses: Authier's Shoes, Beaupre's Wagon Works and the Huot Grist Mill among them.

St Anne's Catholic Church was founded on land donated by J. O. Hamel in 1875. The local French-Canadian Catholic population did not feel comfortable in the German speaking churches at Holy Name or Loretto or at the Irish church in Corcoran. The first full time priest arrived in 1879. That same year, the church was improved and rectory built. The current church was built in 1933.

The area was platted as a city as early as 1879, but its efforts to incorporate failed, in part, because of the complication of straddling the borders of both Medina and Plymouth.

Like so many times in history, things changed with the arrival of the railroad. In 1884, the Lange Hamel family gave land to the Minneapolis & Pacific Railroad (Soo Line) for the train depot to be located down the hill from the main street. The family asked that the station be called "Hamel," and the name stuck. Train service began in Dec 1886 and the station remained in operation until 1963.

At the turn of the century, Hamel boasted a school, two hotels, the Church of St. Anne's, a hall for the Ancient Order of United Workman and numerous stores. One of the businesses was the Sheridan tavern and rooming house which had been established by Jim Sheridan about 1893. The post office was located in the tavern through 1936. Sheridan had previously worked as jailer at Mpls court house and served as an unofficial law officer for Medina.

In the 1950s, Highway 55 (as Rockford Road was then called) was rerouted to the north and the town began to shrink. To this day, people call this area of Medina, Hamel. It still has the post office that serves a large portion of Medina under the name Hamel, Minnesota – not Medina.

Feltes' Settlement (Loretto):
This community started in 1867 when Bernard Feltes donated 10 acres of land to build the log church of Saints Peter and Paul on what is now Hamel Road about a quarter mile east of County Road 19. Some of the other founding families of the parish were Arens, Gasper, Klaers, Klapprich, Schumacher and Spurzem. The church was located near the old section of the parish cemetery. A frame church replaced the original log structure in 1876 and the parish was incorporated on 18 Jun 1878

District 62 School today. The building is now located on private property and is used as an exercise facility.

By the mid-1880s, it was clear that the railroad was going to pass about a mile north of the church and development moved to the new location. Loretto station was established and the town of Loretto was platted on land first owned by Anna Becker and Peter & Philip Becker. While the railroad was being built, Anna Becker carried food out to the construction workers – often for a mile or two in either direction from town. In appreciation, the railroad workers offered to name the town "Becker" but she wanted a more

religious name and at the suggestion of the parish priest recommended the name Loreto after a holy city in Italy. Somehow, an extra "t" was added leading to the current spelling. The first train arrived at Loretto in Dec 1886 and a post office was established on 6 Apr 1887. Within a short time, the town had a saw mill, a feed mill, a hotel, blacksmith, shoemaker and a general store.

The first full time priest arrived in April 1882 and a house built for him in town. The church was still on the hill a mile out of town. It was not until Oct 1893 that Becker family donated land in town for new church and the rectory was moved to town. First school was built in the 1890s. The current church built in 1903, the rectory in 1914, the school in 1922 and the convent in 1929.

In 1940, Medina ceded away land to Loretto, when it was finally incorporated. Loretto is entirely surrounded by Medina. It is the only one of the original four commercial areas to survive as a legal entity.

Schools:
By the late 1800's, there were seven schools in Medina. Each of them was a small one-room building that covered grades one through eight. For much of the 1800s the school year only ran for four to five months over the winter and if a teacher could not be located, may not have met at all. Schools were close together because most of the children walked to school and would have been unable to go very far during the winter months.

The District #7 or Reiser School was established in 1862 and was located on what is now County Road 24 about a half mile east of Tamarack Drive and covered most of the southeast portion of Medina. Attendance at this school almost disappeared after 1919 when the parish school at Holy Name opened.

The District #61 school was located on what is now the bend in County Road 19 east of Maple Plain. It was established before 1873 on the south end of Perkinsville. It covered the southwest corner of the township. This district extended into Independence and Orono.

The District #62 or Spurzem School was located to the north of Spurzem Lake on what is now Hamel Road and Tomahawk Trail. The school had been established before 1879. It was about a mile east of Feltes' Settlement. Children from the west central part of Medina went here.

The District #63 or Pouliot School was located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Hamel Road and Arrowhead Drive. The school also had been established before 1879. This district covered much of the northeast quadrant of Medina except for the area around Hamel.

The District #90 or Jubert School covered the northwest portion of Medina. The school was located just inside the township border at the junction of Highway 55 and Pioneer Trail. Much of this district was in Corcoran.

The District #125 or Dillman School was established in 1889. It was on the east/west bend in Homestead Trail. The district extended into Orono.

The District #127 or Hamel School was located in Hamel and extended into Plymouth.

A special note should also be made of the District #50 (Wolsfeld School) which was established in 1858 to the south of Wolsfeld's Lake on County Road 6. While its original location is now in Orono, it was in Medina when it

The old Medina Town Hall. This building was built in 1898 on what is now Willow Drive. The property was located just north of the geographic center of the Medina at the time. The building did not have running water and was heated by a wood stove. It was used until 1974

was built. The building has been restored and is now located at the WHCPA.

These small school districts were closed when Minnesota consolidated school districts in 1950. Today, most of Medina is in the Orono School District with the remainder in the Wayzata, Delano and Rockford districts.

On 26 May 1955, a hundred years after the arrival of the first settlers, Medina changed its status from a "township" to become a "village". But in many ways the place was the same:
• Medina was still mostly a farming community.
• Citizens still met for public business in the small town hall on County Road 87. The hall still had no running water and was heated by a wood stove.

• Locals still referred to roads by old names not marked on a map - names like "Reiser's Cross-Road" or "Mooney Lake Road". All the roads except County Roads 19 & 24 were still gravel.
• Homes did not have street addresses. Mail was delivered to a route and box number. Residents had to give directions to their homes from known landmarks.
• The local police officer was still the elected constable.
• People still worshiped in the same three small wood framed churches.
• The new village was still populated by the same old Medina names like Arens, Hamel, Fortin, Laurent, Merz, Reimer, Roehl and Scherer.
• Local farmers served as "road boss" to maintain the roads.

By the time the status went from "village" to "city" on 1 Jan 1974, however, things were changing fast:
• Dairy cows were giving way to horses and century old farm houses to suburban housing as farms were sold off.
• Streets were given new names and signs were installed in 1970. More and more roads were now paved.
• A new city hall was built – this one with running water and central heat.
• The police force was hired by the city. No election was needed.
• Baker Park had been formed on the shores of Lake Independence in the 50s and was expanding in all directions.
• Most of the pioneer names were still around, but they were now becoming a minority.

While Medina can be described today as a wealthy community, none of its residents has a Medina address or sends their children to a Medina public school. Despite all that history, or perhaps because of it, Medina is almost an invisible city.