

Wood County Place Names

By Robert S. Rudolph

Vesper Junction, Ahdawagam, Plank Hill, Big Bull Falls—these are just a few of the nearly 700 place names in Wood County, Wisconsin, whose meaning and origin Robert S. Rudolph discusses in this engaging study. And in doing so, he sheds light on the settlement and subsequent history of an area in Wisconsin which was important in the state's early development.

Settlers were first attracted to this central Wisconsin area in 1831 by the abundant source of water power in the Wisconsin and Yellow rivers, and the dense stands of pine. Lumber mills were built along the rivers, and communities soon developed. After the 1870s, as the railroad lines pushed into the area and steam replaced water as a supplier of power, communities were formed near railroad depots. The railroad and its ties to markets stimulated agricultural production; the county's cranberry industry is now one of the nation's largest. Today there is a dependence on the rivers by the pulp industry. Many of the county's place names reflect this historical background of lumbering, railroading, and farming.

Listed alphabetically, the names include, in addition to towns and cities, such features as rivers, creeks, flag stations, schools, railroads, and many others. Rudolph analyzes the names to determine their probable derivation and interpretation. He also provides spelling variants; the approximate date range of the use of the name; the precise location of the named feature (in terms of quarter sections of surveyor's townships wherever possible); and the several names used over the years.

Rudolph's findings have been gathered from extensive sources—maps, county histories, editions of local newspapers dating back as early as 1858, state gazetteers, records of early censuses, notes of the original surveyors, and histories and records of the railways. He has also interviewed numerous residents of the county and has made personal observations of the major sites.

This useful handbook will be fascinating to those curious about American English and the diverse ways the language is used to name places. *Wood County Place Names* will be a welcomed addition to books on the history of Wisconsin.

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