

THE BEGINNING OF TAMARACK

Tamarack grew up out of the extensive peat and tamarack covered bogs when Northern Pacific Railroad laid tracks from Duluth to Brainerd. Until that time the area was inhabited by Chippewa and the seasonal trappers who traveled rivers and traded at the Northwest Company Trading Post on Big Sandy Lake. The main river route was from the St. Louis to East Savanna, Savanna Portage to West Savanna, Prairie River and via Big Sandy Lake to the Mississippi.

Track was laid on tons of sand and gravel buoyed up on the peat by mattresses of brush covered with tiers of corduroy (Spruce poles laid side by side). The first site of the town was two miles east of the present site, by the gravel pit and was called Sicottis, after the man who built the railroad turnstile there, Bill Sicottis. Northern Pacific needed more water for its engines and dug a wide well at the present site of Tamarack. Sicottis moved over and supplied wood to the N.P. and built a trading post.

The Post was a 30 by 60-foot building made four logs high (eight or nine feet). A train depot was built a bit further west along the tracks west of the current railroad crossing across the tracks from the Post and water tower. The railroad made a new contract for wood with A.L. Cole of Motley. Sicottis went out of business and his building was used as a hovel for oxen by the loggers moving in to the area. It was eventually replaced by the Newby Hotel.

In about 1874 Jay and Frank Clark moved into the area, homesteading in Section 30. Frank went to Cloquet and married Lidia Jackson, brought her back to Tamarack and they became the first family in the area.

The logging business began to peak, logs were sent by a system of rivers down to Minneapolis. In 1890 George Merwin built a shack, the second building in Tamarack. In 1892 the area started to draw a larger population including the family of Marcus Nelson, who was instrumental in much of its development. The summer of '94 was incredibly dry and vast amounts of brush left by loggers were like tinder to the fire that raged through the area in September. Many buildings and wildlife were lost, but nowhere was the loss of life felt in such great numbers as in Hinckley, which became the namesake of the fire.

Family names; Barrott, Wing, Carlson, Anderson and Hagman appeared in the area in the late nineties. Another family, known as the Tingdale Brothers brought a store business into Tamarack and was also instrumental in the town's growth. E.L. Douglas started the Sandy River Lumber Co. store. Several houses sprung up and a hotel run by Mike Howler. A man named Thompson built a sawmill and the Simpson Hotel. A blacksmith shop went up and a garage. At this time Marcus Nelson had several small mills running with a hundred to onehundred fifty men and 50-100 teams, shipping in one year 10,000 cords of cordwood, 20,000 cords pulpwood, 328,000 ties and 1,000,000 cedar posts.

A church was built in town followed by a bank and by 1913 a school. By this time the town had many homes, an elevator, potato warehouse and lumber shed, large sawmill and planing mill. People began to realize they could also prosper by advertising the many area lakes as recreation havens.

In 1918 another devastating fire swept through the area and burnt much of what was a booming area. It caused a depression that dampened the growth previously known in Tamarack. A land boom occurred for a short time bringing more families in. Irlene Kelley (later Cyrus) opened a store and a creamery was added, Chas. McDonald opened a store on the site of the present Sam's Grocery. The town's four stores did a fair amount of business as the town had a population of a few hundred, but collections were poor, adding to a decline in growth. Postal service increased and an area once swamp and brush established a mail route and looked forward to home owned electricity and paved streets.

NOTE: This information was taken from Aitkin County Heritage book.
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