

39. Schools in Bloomington

Although Bloomington was a small community, it offered a number of options for entertainment, even from its earliest days. There was a large Tafton Band in 1860. Gene Messmore, an accomplished musician, organized and led the first Bloomington band. Because the band members had no money to purchase music, much of their music was written from sample coronet parts which they got free. Once when the Ringling Bros. Circus from Barabou came to perform at the Bloomington fairgrounds when it was still located just south of Canal Street, the Tafton band opened the performance and was the first band for the show because the Ringling Bros. Circus had no band at that time. Fortunately, the Tafton Band was able to borrow the elaborate Patch Grove band wagon, and the surprise performance for the Ringling Bros. Circus was a great hit.



Tafton Band Circa 1860

BLOOMINGTON HARP ORCHESTRA Bloomington, Wisconsin	
Seward Garthwaite.....Harp Wm. Hart.....Cornet Frank Riese.....Violin L. H. Pritchett.....Clarinet Ora N. Brodt.....Trombone and Trap Drums	
Music for any Occasion Concert or Dance	
We do not split up and play two jobs the same night.	
Write For Dates	

Bloomington Harp Orchestra Circa 1900

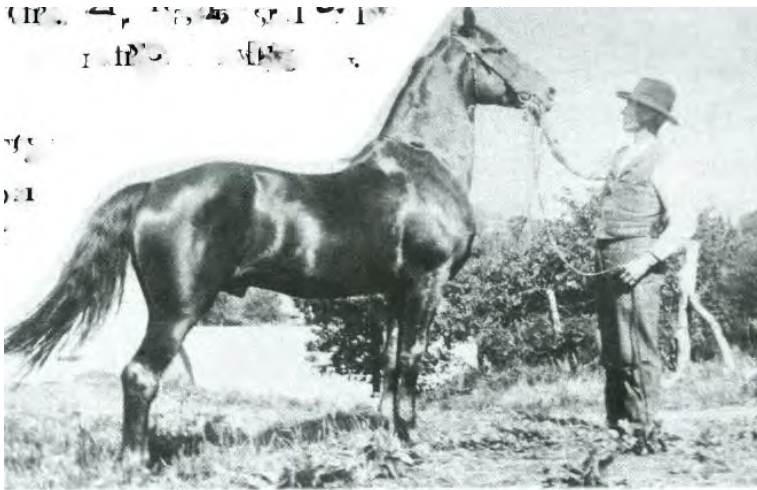
There was also a Bloomington Harp Orchestra in 1890, with Seward Garthwaite on the harp, Wm. Hart on the cornet, Frank Riese on the violin, L.H. Pritchett on the clarinet, and Ora N. Brodt on the trombone and trap drums. They offered “Music for any occasion, Concert or Dance” and said they do not split up nor play two jobs on the same night.

There were regular exhibitions at the Art Hall, as well as dances, shows, and theater performances. There were also shows and theater performances in other venues like the D.F. Brown Hall and the Opera House on the second floor of the Sprague building, even unexpected or exotic ones like this: "Japanese actors to appear at the Sprague & Hatch City Opera House." There were pleasure rides in the auto bus to nearby attractions and towns like Prairie du Chien. There was a bowling alley, an active local 10-man Baseball Team, and Live Pigeon Shoots that were attended even by men from neighboring towns.



The old bandstand in town was a favorite place to view parades through town, like the one on August 28, 1912. As a fair publicity stunt "Thirty automobiles and the Bloomington Band will go on an excursion through the area next Monday to present a program of music and speeches at each stopping place." There were visitors at the hotels, exhibits and books at the library, wrestling matches at Welsh's garage, and always the exciting horse races watching

champions like Earl King. And it seemed there was always something going on at the fairgrounds.



Earl King With Trainer

The annual agricultural fair was usually a big event. Typical entertainment at the fair to "entertain and amuse all patrons" might include attractions like the Ewing's Ladies Military Band, Wooster's Big [Horse] Racing Feature, boxing tournaments, tug-of-war tournaments, baseball, races and field sports and a livestock parade, along with a variety of evening entertainments.

May 6, 1925 –
YES, THERE WAS GOLF AT THE FAIRGROUNDS FOR THREE SEASONS! *“The golf club has rented the fairgrounds this season and the boys (men) have leveled things down and fixed up the ground nicely for playing the game. A flock of sheep owned by Tony Meyer serves as the ‘lawn mower’ and keeps the grass down to lawn length.*”

Dec. 22, 1915 –
Advertisement:
“Live pigeon shooting match in Hoskins pasture at Bloomington on Christmas afternoon, December 25.”

BLOOMINGTON HOTEL
 Bloomington, - - - Wisconsin,
 Simon Woodhouse, Proprietor,
 Having refitted and built ample room for the accomodation of guests, I. am now prepared to accomodate them with
 Well Furnished Rooms,
 good beds and well supplied tables. Sample room. Attentive hostler; good stabling.

The progress of a small town and the vagaries and idiosyncrasies of one’s neighbors always provide a source of entertainment and enlightenment, even in earliest times, as we see by reading this 1881 *History of Grant County, Wisconsin, - Bloomington.*

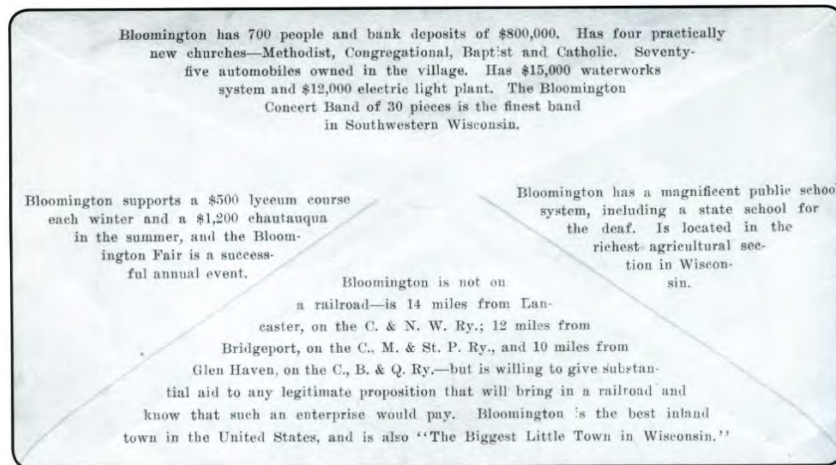
The growth of the village continued to be steady, even if at times somewhat slow. The mill property had passed into the hands of Cyrus Sargeant, who was at that time the wealthiest man in town, and through him under the management of Woodhouse & Thomas. Under the charge of these gentlemen, it became a valuable adjunct to the growth of the village by making a ready market for the large amount of grain then being grown in the township. Trade naturally flowed into this direction, and new business houses sprang up one after another, nearly all of which remain till the present time.

Of accidents or visits from the scourges that had made such havoc in other sections, Bloomington, or Tafton, as it was then known, was comparatively free. Of the former class, there had been two examples in the early days of the town. The first, which startled the steady-going citizens, came near having a disastrous ending. The firm of Benham & Glines had been succeeded by Benham & Osborne, the senior partner of which one winter’s day was called upon for some machine oil. This, unfortunately, was contained in a can similar in size and shape to the can which held powder, the store being, as was customary in those days, one of those all-embracing affairs where anything, from a needle to a horse and dray, was to be had. Mr. Benham seized, as he supposed, the oil can, but finding the oil would not run, sat it upon the stove in the store to warm. Taking it up in a few moments, he turned the can up to see if the oil would run, when there poured forth a stream of powder, followed by a blinding flash and a loud report, which brought those in the vicinity quickly to the scene. A strange sight met their eyes; the front of the store was shattered and torn as if it had been the target for a heavy bombardment; the force of the concussion had lifted the plates which supported the rafters, and displaced them several inches, besides raising the studding from the floor, while the innocent cause of the disaster lay blinded and senseless on the floor. He was carried to his home, where it was found that the sight of one eye would be permanently destroyed, but from other effects of the explosion he soon recovered.

The second affair of the kind followed only a short time later, at a donation party given to Elder Lewis, in the “mill-house.” While all were assembled on the upper floor, engaged in conversation and the harmless sports characteristic of these gatherings in early days, the floor suddenly gave way in the center, forming a gigantic mill-hopper, down which the assembled throng were thrown helter-skelter to the floor below. The tables that had been in preparation for the coming meal saved the victims of the accident from anything worse than a few contusions and a bad scare. The oyster

soup was also placed hors du combat by the introduction of a foreign substance, but aside from a few trifles of this nature, the damages were merely nominal, and the incident was afterward productive of more mirth than grief.

The origin of Bloomington's name is also interesting. The name was chosen in 1867 after the agricultural "blooming" that occurred in the area when a local blacksmith patented a device for sewing oats. There was always an element of civic pride and self-promotion that wove its way through the history of Bloomington, as we see on the next page in a May 11, 1914 postcard and a 1916 mailing envelope. The postcard says, "This is a nifty town, you bet. I've never found one better yet. If you were here I think I'd stay. And maybe I shall anyway." The accomplishments recorded on the mailing envelope really are quite remarkable for a small town of 700 people in 1916, particularly in the areas of electricity and waterworks, and in the sheer number of automobiles owned by residents, seventy-five. Mr. Welsh must have made his fortune selling Ford automobiles in only a few short years!



"The Biggest Little Town in Wisconsin"

The envelope says: "Bloomington has 700 people and bank deposits of \$800,000. Has four practically new churches – Methodist, Congregational, Baptist and Catholic. Seventy-five automobiles are owned in the village. Has \$15,000 waterworks system and \$12,000 electric light plant. The Bloomington Concert Band of 30 pieces is the finest band in Southwestern Wisconsin. Bloomington supports a \$500 lyceum course each winter and a \$1200 chautauqua in the summer, and the Bloomington Fair is a successful annual event. Bloomington has a magnificent public school system including a state school for the deaf. It is located in the richest agricultural section in Wisconsin."

Few small towns of the time attempted something as grand as the Tafton Collegiate Seminary. Let's read this account from the above-mentioned 1881 *History of Grant County*.

As has been seen, the higher institution of learning at Bloomington was Blake's Prairie Institute, opened by Rev. M. T. Allen, M. A., in the early part of January 1857. The school afterward passed under the charge of Prof. Parsons and Mrs. Parsons, both of whom had achieved a high reputation as educators. The school was first held in the Cole Building, on Congress Street. The Trustees of the school, however, did not allow it to remain here for any great length of time, but, recognizing the

advantages that would undoubtedly accrue to the village by the establishment of such a seat of learning as was plainly possible with Prof. Parsons, as its guiding spirit, commenced the erection of a two-story frame structure that was afterward, for many years, known as the academy. Upon its completion, the school was removed to this location, and had soon established a reputation that was much more than local. Students flocked in from every quarter, the academy having at one time an attendance of over two hundred. This added in attracting attention to the village. The English branches, mathematics and languages were taught at the academy, employing several teachers in addition to Mr. Parsons and wife. Unfortunately, just at the time the institution was at its zenith of excellence, differences broke out between the Professor and his supporters, which resulted in the former retiring from the Principalship. Mrs. Parsons continued in charge for a short time, when she in turn retired. Prof. Parsons afterward left Bloomington and took charge of the schools at Dubuque, going from there to Freeport, where he remained for some time, being at present engaged in the insurance business at Detroit, Mich. After Mrs. Parsons, came a succession of teachers who taught for a short period each, including Messrs. Lukens, Brooks and others. The building remained standing on the original site until 1878, when it was purchased by the Congregational society and remodeled for church purposes.

Let's spend a little time talking about early public school education in Bloomington. The account below is again from the 1881 *History of Grant County*.

The first school district in what is now the township of Bloomington was organized in the year 1844. The first schoolhouse built in the township was built in District No. 4, and was a log structure. The building at this point was afterward known, and is yet, as the "old red schoolhouse," and could its old walls speak they would have many a weird tale to pass in slow procession before the astonished listener. The first teacher to hold rule on the wooden throne and deal out "birchings" and learning with impartial hand was D. Angerlist. The schoolhouse first used by the children of the young village was located about three-fourths of a mile west of the village, but, in 1857, it was moved into town and placed on the site of the present one, where it remained until outgrown by the rapidly advancing tide of emigration flowing into the new town, where the present building – a plain stone structure, two stories in height with accommodations for one hundred and fifty pupils – was erected at a cost of between \$6,000 and \$7,000. The number of children of school age in the township is 433, of which number, 208, or nearly one-half, reside within the confines of District No. 1. The present school is classed as a graded school, employing three teachers. A portion of the old schoolhouse still remains, serving as the rear portion of Mr. Max Kolb's residence.

We will remember the concept of the country school system in New Vienna. The Grant County country schools system serving Bloomington was very similar, with small country schools in each District.



Bloomington School District #2 Thornton School



Blakes Prairie Dist. No. 5 School

Below are photos of the Red School, the first school in the township in 1844, and the “Rock School”.

Red School No. 4: past and present

This is how the Red School (District No. 4) looked in 1903. Some of the students are (front, from left) Carson Scott, Roy Martin, (unknown girl), Florence Scott (Brown), Lena Scott (Brandt), Milton Martin, Harry Yager and Jay Martin. Behind Harry Yager is Wilbur Scott.





The Rock School



The large stone school house known as the Rock School was completed on October 18, 1870. The above photo is an early photo of the Rock School showing its original tower. The front had two doors, one for the girls' classroom on the second floor, and the other for the boys' classroom on the first floor. The school was last used by the school district as the industrial arts shop before being sold.



The "Old" Bloomington High School

The Old Bloomington High School was built of brick in 1886 on "The Village Park." This building was removed in 1924 and replaced by a new school building housing all grades. The Salmagundi Club led a fund drive to finance moving the Seth Thomas tower clock to a new clock tower built on the rock school.

As we have seen, Daisy Brooks was the first graduate of this Bloomington High School in 1886, the year it was built.



St. Mary's School

The first St. Mary's Catholic School where your Daddy went to school was started in 1913, two years after your Daddy was born, and it was in the original rectory, with the teaching nuns living upstairs. The new red brick building in the photo to the left here was built in 1919 and your Daddy started there when he was eight years old. By the time you came along, this school would no longer hold all the Catholic students, and a new school

was built, the one you went to. All the schools in Bloomington were shut down on February 21, 1912, because of Scarlet Fever and they remained closed for a few days to be thoroughly disinfected. Bloomington was unique among small Wisconsin towns for having both a School for the Deaf starting April 19, 1906, and a school for the blind starting on September 6, 1911. The Salmagundi Club was pivotal to both of those endeavors.