

HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF ZACHOW

(Basis for “talking history” for Zachow model layout in Depot)

Sources: Henry Dirks History, Register of Deeds Office-Shawano County, C&NW Railroad, Interviews with individuals.

The founding of Zachow was largely due to the expansion and development of the farm industry in Wisconsin in the late 1880's and early 1900's and the expansion and re-routing of the railroads during this same period as they developed their lines.

W.C. Zachow was a successful businessman from Cecil, Wisconsin who conducted a cattle, land, and farm equipment business from that Village. The Chicago & North Western Railway added a route in 1903 to their line running from Green Bay to Eland Wisconsin. This changed the life for many communities along that route including Pulaski and Shawano and numerous smaller towns.

W.C. Zachow determined that this new route had the potential to offer a more efficient place to handle his cattle and equipment business and purchased 80 acres of land in the area that was to become Zachow. In 1905 he sold 14 acres of his land to the Chicago & North Western Railway to establish a right-of-way for a passing siding and a future industrial siding. This enabled the railroad to build a Depot, a Section House and support buildings, as well as a Standard Stockyard in 1906.

Prior to this, the general area was known as “Netley” due to a post-office having been established a mile north on Cty. Rd. F in the Bramschreiber grocery store. In addition, the first cheese factory in “Netley” was located on the corner of Cty. Rd. F and the main road into Zachow. This was built by Wallace Mills. Also the Zion Lutheran Church was built near the Bramschreiber grocery store in 1900. The Ole Hansen cheese factory is thought to have been built in 1902 which later became the Graf Creamery and the Zernicke Sawmill also preceded Zachow in that it was built in 1903. The latter two were in the area where Zachow ultimately ended up due to the railroad expansion.

Due to the efforts of W.C. Zachow the new settlement appropriately became known as Zachow. He, Martin Zernicke, and Bernard Reinke had the area platted in 1906 with the Zachow Plat, the Zernicke Addition, and the Reinke Addition. Property was then sold to many individuals and businessmen and a mini building boom commenced in 1907 with most of the so-called downtown being constructed all in the same year.

Within ten years a hotel with dance hall and bar, a combo grocery/department store, two taverns, two grocery stores, a hardware store, a bank, and a blacksmith shop were built. Also part of the initial growth was a feed and lumber business, a planing mill, a gas and oil distributing company, a cheese processing business, an auto dealership, and a pickle sorting station. The small village even had a doctor in that Dr. Pfiffer set up an office in the Genske home known in 1949 as the William Westerfeld home.

Along with the commercial development many homes were being built with the development generally following the original 1906 plat. The Zernicke Sawmill provided much of the lumber used in the expansion of the farms in the area when the farmers hauled their logs to the mill to be custom cut to their needs.

The new village of Zachow was largely self-contained and was a pleasant place to reside and work. The population remained something over 100 for many years. The 1949 model represented here is Zachow during the last part of its so-called "heyday". The vibrancy was still there during this period along with a fierce pride of ownership.

The railroad's decline in the 1950's and subsequent abandonment of its lines had a profound effect on this little town, as did the improvement of roads and autos making the new shopping areas, and employment opportunities, in other places easily accessible.

Today most of the businesses in Zachow are gone and the village has become a quiet bedroom community with most people commuting to other towns for their employment and personal needs. However, many of the original structures are still in place today with most of the business places having been converted to residential units. Many small communities throughout the United States have undergone a similar economic transformation like the small village of Zachow.

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Dean D. Proper