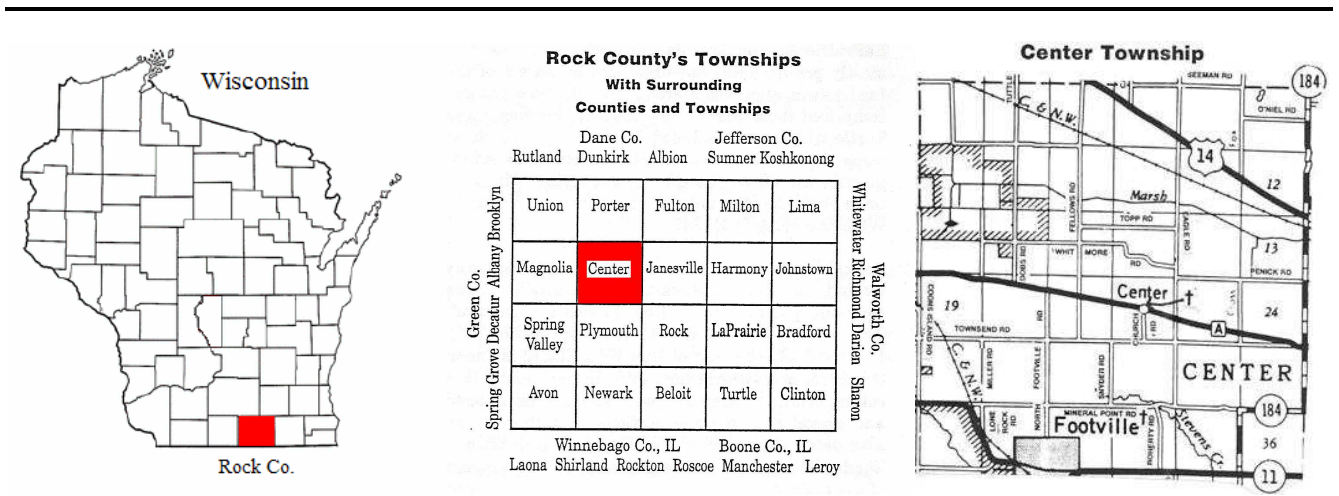


Center Township Guide

Published by the Rock County Genealogical Society

This guide contains the eighth township in a series of twenty township resource guides. It is intended to be of use to those doing genealogical or historical research in Center Township, Rock County, Wisconsin. Besides being published here, the resource materials collected for each Rock County township will be placed on file in the RCGS Library located at the Wilson King Stone House on the grounds of the Lincoln-Tallman House Restorations. Additions and corrections to this information are welcome and should be sent by email to the Rock County Genealogical Society at rock_wi_genealogy@yahoo.com or by US Post to RCGS, P.O. Box 711, Janesville, WI 53547. These additions and corrections will be put on file and added before final publication of the compendium of Rock County Township Guides in the future. These materials will be available and much-used by RCGS research volunteers and individual genealogists and historians. Copyright 2007 RCGS. See more general resources relevant to all Rock County Townships at: http://www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/rock_twps.html.



Resources for Center Township, Rock County, Wisconsin

Town of Center

- Town 3N Range 11 E

Physical Features

- Marsh Creek

Place Names of Center Township

Name	Former Name	Section #(s)
• Footville (northern part)		32
• Fellows Station		4
• Center		22

History of Center Township

The town of Center is situated in the northwestern portion of the county. This is one of the best farming towns in the county, being mostly prairie land. There are several fine streams and a beautiful creek in the town. Such desirable situations for farms are scarcely found in the county. In the north part of the town, there are some oak openings and very fine marsh for cutting hay. The farms are mostly under a high state of cultivation. Janesville is the nearest market, being about six miles from the center of the town.¹

The Beginnings

By an act of the Territorial Legislature of Wisconsin, approved December 7, 1836, townships 1, 2, 3 and 4 north of ranges 11, 12, 13 and 14 east of the Fourth Principal Meridian (afterwards the towns of Newark, Plymouth, Center, Porter, Beloit, Rock, Janesville, Fulton, Turtle, LaPrairie, Harmony, Milton, Clinton, Bradford, Johnstown and Lima) were taken from Milwaukee County and constituted a separate township, called Rock.

By an act approved June 21, 1838, townships 1, 2, 3 and 4 North of range 10 east, (subsequently the towns of Avon, Spring Valley, Magnolia and Union) were added to Rock Township. Though enlarged, the new Rock Township remained attached to Racine County for judicial purposes.

In the spring of 1842, the system of town government was first adopted. Rock County was divided into 7 townships. Center Township then included that portion of the town of Janesville west of Rock River; all of Plymouth and Spring Valley; south half of Center and south half of Magnolia.

During the session of the Legislature of 1846-47, Magnolia, Janesville and Spring Valley townships were formed and the 1847-48 session released that portion which is now Plymouth from Center. The south half of Porter was given to Center in that same Legislative session, thus forming the townships as we now know them.

Therefore, the early settlers of Center were also early settlers in the towns of Magnolia, Spring Valley, Plymouth and Janesville (west of the river).²

Center Township in 1850

Information gleaned from the 1850 Center township census: 626 residents: 292 females and 334 males. There were 119 families with 340 children age 19 and under. Property (for the 96 who claimed property) ranged from \$200 to \$6500. There were 158 farmers, 5 carpenters, 4 blacksmiths, 1 clerk, 1 cooper, 2 Congregational ministers, 1 physician and 1 shoemaker.

¹ Combination Atlas Map of Rock County, Wisconsin, Everts, Baskin & Stewart, Chicago, 1873, p. 61.

² Portrait and Biographical Album of Rock County, Wisconsin, Acme Pub. Co., Chicago, 1889 p. 1006.

Eighty-one residents were born in a foreign country, 545 born in the United States, the greatest number (237) were born in New York, and 68 were born in Wisconsin.

Some of the early families from New York were: ADEE, AMES, ANDREW, BAKER, BALIS, CHRIST, CORY, CRALL, DAVIS, DIBBLE, HELMS, LOUCKS, HOSMER, SMITH, STEVENS, SNYDER, and WEBSTER. From Pennsylvania: COFFMAN, CRALL, FOCKLER, MUNICH, NELSON, and WALLIHAN. From Connecticut there were: BEACH, FOOT, RICHARDS and SILVERTHORN, Valentine BECK, J. WARNER and D. DOHS from Germany, HONEYSETT and NOTT from England, CLELAND, CULLEN and McCLURE from Ireland, and CROUCH from Canada.

Immigrants Arrive

In the 1880's immigrants, mainly from Pommern, arrived, first working on farms for the Yankees, then buying the farms from the early settlers who were retiring and moving into town. Immigrants from Ireland arrived with the railroad.

Fellows Station

Fellows Station was a stop on the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad between Evansville and Janesville. Fellows Station was planned and built simultaneously with the rail line in 1886 located about 10 miles west of Janesville.

Center Store

The Old Center Store stood for many years as a sentinel and reminder of the past. It had a hitching post outside for the horses, a large lantern, which was lighted to cheer the passer-by and to invite them to spend a few moments talking or buying things they needed. The store had a large upstairs and a storeroom in back that was needed to accommodate all the merchandise, used for trading. G. D. SILVERTHORN and John E. DAVIS purchased flour by the carload, had it shipped to Footville via Chicago & Northwestern railroad and split the carload. Center store kept the flour in a double-boarded room, so as to keep out rodents and insects. Coffee beans were shipped by the barrel. Kerosene was in great demand in the early days and it was stored in tanks and a hand pump was used to pump it out into the kerosene cans of the customer. Tobacco was sold by the plug and long flat bars were cut into the number of plugs the customer wished to purchase. During the day, farmers would come into the store, pull up their chairs in front of the old pot-bellied stove and discuss the issues of day while waiting for their mail. Often they would talk until 12 or 1 in the morning, when the old coffee grinder would be started and cheese and crackers would be brought out for them. The store has had many owners. A gasoline pump replaced the hitching posts and the old lantern was replaced with electric lights. The store fixtures, such as the counters were disposed of several years ago during the housing shortage of WWII when it was used for living quarters.³ Eugene BENASH was the last owner of the property. The store closed in the 1940's and the building was razed in the 1960's.

Post Office

The owner of the Center Store normally served as postmaster. The first post office was opened in Center on May 20, 1850. Jeremiah ROOT was the first postmaster who served

³ Janesville Gazette, November 30, 1960, p12

two months. Others who served as postmaster were John WALLIHAN, Abraham CANFINANE, William KOPLIN, John CROSS, Ira PARMLEY, Marshal PARMLEY, James NORTON and Joshua CONRAD. John E. DAVIS was the last postmaster at the Center Store as the Post Office was discontinued on June 29, 1901 when rural free delivery from Evansville was started in the area. Ben HUNGERFORD of Evansville was the first carrier of the area. Residents of Center were served in 1860 by four post offices - Center, Footville, Leyden and Osborn. Mail in recent years, has been by rural delivery from Janesville and Evansville.

Telephone

Soon after 1900 farmers in the West Center district built their own lines. They were lines 12 and 16. The Grant FISHER home served as a sub-station and someone in his family had to connect line 16 to line 12 in order for 16 to get the operator in Footville.

Center Grange/Town Hall

The Center Grange was built east of Bethel Cemetery in 1887. In 1908, the members of the Disciple Church (better known as the "Campbellites") soon after their church had been destroyed by fire, sold the church lot for \$1600 to the Center Grange. The Grange Hall was then moved across the road. In 1915, Center Township bought the lot and building from the Center Grange for \$1,275. This hall was used until 1959-60 when a new hall was erected on the same location. The old building was sold to John CASEY of Footville. The Henry & Eliza WELLS family reunion was the first reunion held in the new hall in 1961.

Creamery & Cheese Factory

There was a creamery/cheese factory located west of the Center Store from the 1880's to 1935. It was called the FRANER Cheese Factory.

Lone Rock

Pictured on many post cards early in the 20th century was a large rock called "Lone Rock" or "Old Maid Rock". Three layers of stone compose its height of between 20-25 feet and it looms majestically from the surrounding level prairie. In 1972 a geologist from the University of Wisconsin stated that the pillar of St. Peter sandstone had eroded to its present shape in the past 30,000 years since the Wisconsin stage of glaciations. There have been several theories about its formation and beginnings. All agree that the pillar had been formed by erosion since the ice sheet withdrew. At the turn of the 20th century, the area was a favorite picnic spot for neighborhood families who drove in horse and buggy to enjoy the peace and quiet near the stately rock that stood as a lone sentinel. It is located in the NE corner of Section 31 in a triangle between Mineral Point Road, County Highway B and Lone Rock Road. The property has recently been purchased and the area has been restored to a natural wild flower prairie and can again be viewed from the surrounding roads.

Schools in Center Township

The first school near the village of Footville was held in the log house ½ mile north of Footville on the E. A. FOOT property. Julius GILBERT was the first teacher in 1848. A year later, a school was built on land that later became the Owen SNYDER farm. The building was moved to Footville and school was held in it until the Methodist Church was built. At that

time the basement of the church was used for school purposes. The church burned in 1875 and a new schoolhouse was erected on the present Footville school site. (David MEEHAN sold 2.16 acres for \$300 to the Joint School Dist. #1 of Center and Plymouth located on S ¼ SW ¼ Sec 33 in Center. It adjoined the ME Church lot.) The Footville School served grades 1 – 10 until the district was combined with Orfordville. Footville Elementary School (now in the Village of Footville) is the only surviving school in the Town of Center.

In 1862 Rock County had its first superintendent of schools, Rev. J. I. FOOT of Footville. Center had five schools within its boundaries.

1. Union School (known as East Center or Crall School was established in 1848 for pupils in the northwest portion of the township in Section 23.
2. West Center School located in Section 22 was built in 1873 and closed in 1961.
3. Barrett School, established in 1858 and located in Section 2, closed in 1962.
4. Bog School, established in 1867, located in Section 30, closed in 1962.
5. Brown School, established in 1858, located in Section 24.

These schools were sold to private parties and have been remodeled into homes.

Churches in Center Township

The **Methodist Episcopal Church** was organized in 1846 by E. A. FOOT, F. A. BEACH, E. F. RICHARDS and Abel AVERY. The church was built in 1856. It burned in 1875 and was rebuilt on its original site. It remains standing in Footville, but has been unused since February 26, 1995 when the congregation merged with the Orfordville Church. It is now called the New Horizon United Methodist Church.

The old **Congregational Church**, known as the **Grove Church** began as a Sabbath school in 1847 and the church was built in 1854-55, on a lot deeded to them from Andrew and Belva STEVENS, next to the Grove Cemetery in Section 34. From 1847 until the discontinuance in 1905, the Grove Church received 274 members. The first members were S. A. KING, Keturah KING, A. H. AMMERMAN, Mrs. Betsy CORY, Mrs. Isabelle CLELAND and Mrs. Olive LINCOLN. The church was sold on September 1, 1955 to McKinley SNYDER and was razed. It had been unused for 50 years.

The **Church of Christ in Center**, also called the **Campbellite Church** was located on County Trunk A where the Center Town Hall now stands. It was established in 1846 by Curtis and Ira PARMLEY, Elder WALLIHAN and Rev. Henry HOWE. They began meeting in homes and schools in 1853, until a frame church structure with a steeple was built on a hill in 1861. The Center Church was destroyed by fire in 1906 and work was discontinued in 1908 when members helped to establish the First Christian Church in Janesville and others united with the Church of Christ in Footville.

The **Church of Christ** in Center, organized a congregation in Footville in 1869 for the convenience of its members who lived south and west of the village. Both congregations were served by the same minister. The church was built on Galena Road in Footville (Center Township) in 1875. It burned in 1909 and was immediately replaced by a newer, more modern building. In the late 1950's, land was purchased on the east side of Footville for a new church. The building was completed in October 1959, when the congregation marched

from the old building to the new church for dedication. The former building and lot were sold and is now an apartment in Footville.

Court records in Janesville show that on March 10, 1873, Frederick DREPHAL and his wife sold to the Trustees of **Zion Church of Center Township** land in Section 16 for a church. Most of the members were German. Records cover a period from 1888 and no mention is made of when the church was built. It was moved to County Trunk C near Evansville in the late 1920's and is currently in use and called **Peace Church**.

The **Roman Catholic Church, St. Augustine**, was organized in the spring of 1869. Land had been obtained in 1856 but the Church was not built until 1869. In 1969 ground was broken for the new church located in Center Township on Haberdale Drive, now in Footville.

Zion Lutheran Church was organized in 1884 by Rev. John SCHLERF, Pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Janesville. It was built in Section 22 and is on Church Road just off County Trunk A, 6 miles west of Janesville. The church edifice was completed in 1885 and has been in continual use since that time. It is currently the only church in Center Township, as the Church of Christ, and St. Augustine Catholic Church are in the Village of Footville.

Cemeteries in Center Township

There are two cemeteries in Center Township:

One acre of land for the **Center Cemetery Association** was purchased in Section 34 in 1847 from David DAVIS and Andrew & Belva STEVENS for \$1. Additions to the cemetery were made in 1854, 1878, 1908 and 1956. The name was changed to **Grove Cemetery Association**, in 1921. The earliest burials were infants – Nancy WEBSTER, age 1 year 10 months, on March 18, 1847, and the infant son of Elan DOUGLAS on October 25, 1847. The cemetery contains the graves of the earliest settlers and is still in use. It is located on Roherty Road.

Bethel Cemetery, Section 22, is located next to Center Town Hall, on County Highway A. On April 6, 1852, Wendel FOCKLER sold to the Trustees of Center Cemetery Association for \$1 the original one acre of land (20 rods by 8 rods) for the cemetery which is located in the E1/2 NW1/4 of Section 22. The earliest burial seems to be that of Harriet WITHAM, aged 10 months (daughter of W. & R.G.) on September 1, 1850.

The cemetery consisting of 158 lots was registered and surveyed on the 15th of January 1908, indicating that an addition had been made to the original acre. It has been enlarged at least twice since. The cemetery is still in use.

Funeral Homes in Center Township

There are no funeral homes in the Town of Center. Nearby communities of Evansville, Orfordville and Janesville would be used by residents of the community.

Newspapers in Center Township

Newspapers which serve the area are: The Janesville Gazette, the Evansville Review and the Independent Register of Brodhead.

Sources

The information compiled here was found in resources from:

- Rock County Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 711, Janesville, WI 53547
- Luther Valley Historical Society, 158 Depot St., PO Box 253, Footville, WI 53537
- Hedberg Public Library, 316 South Main Street, Janesville, WI 53545

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