

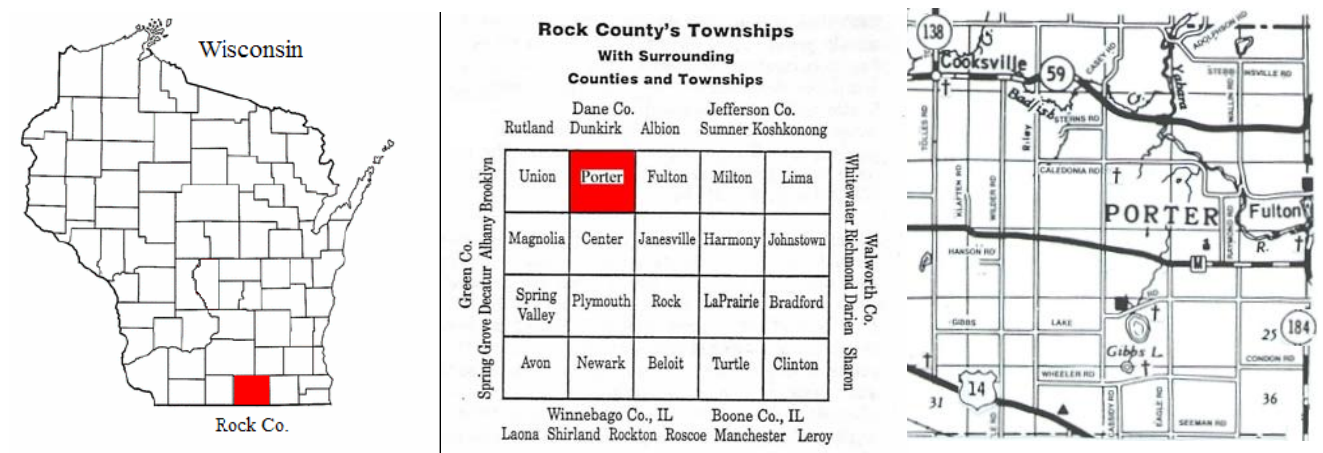
# Porter Township Guide

Published by the Rock County Genealogical Society

This guide contains the eleventh township in a series of twenty township resource guides. It is intended to be of use to those doing genealogical or historical research in Porter 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 to the Rock County Genealogical Society, 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 used by RCGS research volunteers and individual genealogists and historians. Copyright 2005 RCGS

See more general resources relevant to all Rock County Townships at:

[http://www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/rock\\_twps.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/rock_twps.html).



## Resources for Porter Township, Rock County, Wisconsin

### Town of Porter:

- Town No. 4 North of Range No 11 East of 4<sup>th</sup> Meridian

### Physical Features:

(from early Twp maps and Cooksville quadrangle Topographical map)

- Muskrat Lake (sections 1 & 2)
- Mill Pond (section 2 by STEBBINS & EDWARDS Mill)
- Catfish Prairie
- Catfish Creek, now known as Yahara River
- Spring Creek (section 6)
- Mill Pond (section 6)

- Badfish Creek
- Spring Run Creek (section 10)
- Caledonia Springs (section 15)
- Grass Lake (section 19)
- Big Spring Lake, now known as Gibbs Lake (section 27)
- Little Spring Lake, now known as Little Gibbs Lake (sections 27 & 34)
- Lake Run Creek, (now Gibbs Creek); between Catfish Creek (now Yahara) and Big Spring Lake (now Gibbs Lake)

## Place Names of Porter Township:

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Former Name</b>	<b>Section</b>
•	Cooksville	Cooksville	6
•	Cooksville	Waucoma	6
•	Stebbinsville		3

The unincorporated village of Cooksville is located in section 6, ten miles west of Edgerton and about seven miles northeast of Evansville. The village is known as Cooksville, but it actually consists of two adjacent plats, divided by Main Street. The western side of the village was platted as Cooksville in 1842 by its founder John COOK. In the same year, COOK erected a sawmill on the Badfish Creek, which he sold in 1844 to John SHEPARD, who added a gristmill which was completed in 1847.

In 1846, Dr. John PORTER visited his holdings and asked Alanson E. VAUGHN, of Union Township, to plat a village to be called "Waucoma," based on an Indian name meaning "clear water." The original plat of Waucoma consisted of fourteen square blocks, including a public square donated by Dr. PORTER to be used by the inhabitants of the village as a common.

Cooksville is situated on the Badfish Creek on the edge of a prairie. Early 1850 records from the *History of Rock County and Transactions of the Rock County Agricultural Society and Mechanics Institute, 1856*, reported the existence of Waucoma Academy, a Congregational Society (Rev. Francis LAWSON minister, but no church), one tavern, three stores, one sash and door factory, two shoe stores, one blacksmith shop, one tailor shop, one cabinet shop, and one post office (John B. COLLINS, Postmaster). Dr. W.W. BLACKMAN was the physician.

## History of Porter Township:

The town resides in the northwestern part of Rock County, with its northern boundary Dane County. At first, the township was included in the organization of Union Township. By an act of the legislature, approved February 2, 1846, it was organized into a separate township by the name of Oak. A year later, on February 2, 1847, the township was separated from the Town of Union, after the platting of Cooksville and Waucoma. The township was made to include Township 4, north of range 11 east, which is its limits. The name change was made to honor one of the principal land proprietors in the town, Dr. John PORTER.

The first settlers were Joshua WEBB, William WEBB, John RHINEHART, John WINSTON, Joseph OSBORN, Robinson BENT, Charles STOKES, Solomon GRIGGS, John R. BOYCE, John COOK and Daniel COOK. A list of early farmers shows, among the largest, Daniel LOVEJOY, Horace FESSENDEN, Samuel POUND, Jerome VAUGHN, John WHITE, Earle WOODBURY, Levi SQUIRES, C. VAUGHN, Robert MERVIN, J. P. MILLER, William WEBB, J. POUND, Roger SHEPHERD, Dennis McCARTHY and Stephen ALLEN.

In 1854, the town officers were: John WINSTON, Chairman; Horace FESSENDEN, Thomas VAN PATTEN; Harrison STEBBINS, Town Clerk; John R. BOYCE, Treasurer; Edward GILLEY, Assessor; W. W. BLACKMAN, Superintendent; Benjamin HOXIE and John R. BOYCE, Justices of the Peace.

There are two settlements within the limits of this township, Cooksville and Stebbinsville, each containing stores and blacksmith shops. The township population in 1850 was 881, in 1855 was 1165, in 1900 was 1417, and in 1905 was 1224.

The township raised the most tobacco in the county: 946 acres in 1907 and 914 in 1908.

Sources for place names and history of Porter Township: *Rock County History* published in 1879 and 1908, *Cooksville A Guide*, and *History of Rock County and Transactions of the Rock County Agricultural Society and Mechanics Institute, 1856*.

## Schools in Porter Township

- Forest Academy School District No. 1
- Yahara Joint School District 1 (Porter, Center, & Dunkirk Townships)
- White Star School Joint District No. 2 (Porter & Center Townships)
- Eagle School District No. 3
- BARRETT School Joint District No. 3 (Center & Porter Townships)
- RCGS has a school history of Barrett School published by Origins, Janesville, WI, Includes the names of teachers 1867-1962, names of students with their ages, a visitor's log, school census for 1917- 1922, and attendance 1929-1943.
- WILDER School District No. 4
- LIENAU School District No. 6 (classroom photo 1952)
- Joint District 5-8 (Dunkirk and Cooksville)
- Stevens School Joint District No. 7 (Porter & Center Townships)
- MILLER School District No. 8
- Stebbinsville School Joint District No. 9 (Porter & Dunkirk Townships)
- MILLER School Joint District 8 & 9 (Stebbinsville School burned in 1942 and was combined with District 8, MILLER School).

## Churches

- **The Prairie Church or Porterstown Parish Catholic Church** was organized by Dennis McCARTHY in 1842. The log church, which burned in 1867, was replaced by a frame church, which was razed for salvage in 1948.
- **The Free Baptist Society** used a room in the gristmill as a meetinghouse before 1845.

- **The Methodists** established a circuit in 1847 and had regular meetings at several place in the townships.
- **The Congregational Society** was the ministered in the mid 1850s by Rev. Francis LAWSON, but the Church was not established until about 1860.
- **The Cooksville Congregational Church** was dedicated Dec 18, 1879 and closed in 1939. Larry REED of Cooksville currently owns the building.
- **The Norwegian Lutheran Church** of 1892 had its first sanctuary and was associated with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century immigration of Norwegians into the area. The initial building of 1892 was lost by fire; rebuilt in 1896-1897. It is now the Cooksville Lutheran Church.
- **Cooksville Lutheran:**  
Mailing address: 11927 W. Church Street, Evansville, WI 53536; phone 608-882- 4408  
Location: village of Cooksville; Denomination: Lutheran; Records: at the Church;  
Organized: 1892.
- **St. Michael's Catholic Church:**  
Location: section 10, Caledonia Road, east of Casey Road. Also known as the Prairie Church or Porterstown Parish; Organized: 1842; Records: possibly Saint Joseph's Catholic Church, which was built in Edgerton in 1859; Extinct.

## Newspapers Covering the Area

The newspapers for Evansville, Stoughton, Edgerton and Oregon should be checked for news coverage, depending on what part of the township the person resided. The Eager Free Public Library of Evansville has newspaper microfilm for all the newspapers. Evansville has had several newspapers during its lifetime, which carried Porter Twp. obituaries and news:

- *Evansville Review*
- *The Badger*
- *The Enterprise*
- *The Tribune*
- *The Evansville Post*
- *The Hub* of Stoughton was first published of Nov 9, 1881.

## Cemeteries

(all information was obtained from RCHS)

- **Ball Tavern Cemetery** (began: about 1846); Section 31, highway 14 & Tolles Road; Contact person: David VINEY, 10100 West State Rd 59, Evansville, WI 53536
- **Cooksville Cemetery** (Old Waucoma, begun: about 1861); Section 6, Church Street, Cooksville; Contact person: John JULSETH, 11333 N. State Rd 138, Evansville, WI 53536. Bodies and stones were moved to this site early in the 1860's from the first cemetery located between the Cooksville Store and the mill. A photocopy of burial records, dated 1893-1963, written in Norwegian from the Norwegian Lutheran Church, entitled "Funerals," is at Rock County Historical Society. The records contain place of birth, date and place of death, date and place of burial, and age of the deceased.
- **Fulton Village Cemetery;** Section 13, Caledonia Road west of county road H; Contact person: Fulton Cemetery Assoc., c/o James RAYMOND, M & I Bank, PO 5000,

Janesville, WI 53547-5000. RCGS has photocopy of burial inscriptions with name, date of birth and death, and some relationships. RCGS also has a program entitled "Memorial Service 2005" with names of veterans and conflict.

- **GIBBS Burials**; Section 27; Extinct
- **St. Michael Cemetery** (begun about 1842); Section 10, off Caledonia Road, east of Casey Road; Contact person as of 2005: James M. MESLER, 608-884-3720. RCHS has a 64 page photo album, with 189 color photographs of tombstones, created by Margaret R. McCARTHY.
- **Wheeler Cemetery** (South Porter Cemetery - begun: oldest gravestone 1831); Section 34, Wheeler Rd, south of Eagle Rd; Contact person: David VINEY, 10100 West State Rd 138, Evansville, WI 53536.
- **Unnamed cemetery**; Section 17, Wilder Road, north of county M; Extinct.
- **RICHARDSONS Burials**; Section 8, Riley Road, exact location unknown
- **BRAGG Burials**; Section 29, Gibbs Lake Road, west of Forest Academy schoolhouse; Extinct.

## Funeral Homes in Porter Township:

There are no funeral homes in Porter Township. Families were serviced by funeral homes from Evansville, Edgerton and Stoughton, and possibly Oregon.

## Resources:

Primary Repositories:

- Hedberg Public Library (Janesville)
- Edgerton Public Library
- Rock County Court House (Janesville)
- Rock County Genealogical Society (Janesville)
- University of Wisconsin-Whitewater – Area Resource Center
- Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison)

Additional Resources:

- Collections at Rock County Historical Society:
  - **The ATWOOD-RANEY Cooksville Collection**, filed as "Cooksville, Marvin RANEY," (call no.: SCR/CO/R16h) is the most complete record in existence of any Rock County community. The collection contains data on the early settlers & their holdings, including census and land records. The nine scrapbooks are a valuable resource, but there is no index. Family surnames are currently being entered into genealogical software, which will make these records more user-friendly. The last entry was made in the mid 1980s.
  - **Porter Township Tax Assessment**
  - **Affidavits for Porter Township Homestead Exceptions**
  - **Mustering-in Certificates for Porter Township**
  - **Porter Township Poll Lists**
  - **Applications and Descriptions for National Register of Historic Places**
  - **Porter Twp. Plat Maps 1858, 1873, 1891, 1904, 1917, 1928 and misc. until 1996**
  - **Minutes and Annual Reports of Porter Town Meetings 1859-1923**

- **Porter Township Town Clerk Records**
  - **Clerks Register Alteration of School District Boundaries 1878-1942**
  - **Cooksville Old Settlers Registers 1923-1950 (names, addresses 1946-50)**
  - **Cooksville Old Settlers Registers 1901-1950**
  - **Scrapbook: Mrs. Thomas CASSADY c. 1930, 27 pages**
  - **Scrapbook: Town of Porter, by Ethel SAYRE RAYMOND, 1949-52**
- **The Cooksville Lutheran Church** has the following records for individuals who were members of the church: birth, death, marriage records, funeral records, and membership records.
  - **The Eager Free Public Library**, of Evansville, has the notebooks from Marilyn JONES BAILEY, deceased, of Porter Township, which includes cemetery indexes, newspaper clippings, census records, etc. The EFPL also has the newspaper microfilm of the newspapers, which carried Porter Township obituaries and news. The Library also has family files on some Porter Township relatives.
  - ***Choice Seeds in the Wilderness***, by Lillian RUSSELL PORTER, descendant of the founding PORTER family, published 1964, 207 pages. The book is based on the diary of Eliza BACON PORTER, which covers the time frame of 1845-1898.
  - ***Cooksville A Guide***, compiled by Richard P. HARTNG, RCHS, 1984, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, is a guide to the village of Cooksville, including the plats of Cooksville and Waucoma, and related sites in the adjacent townships of Porter and Union, in Rock County, and Dunkirk, in Dane County.

### Knowledgeable Individuals:

**Bill HANTKE** of Edgerton, [behanke@att.net](mailto:behanke@att.net), has a personal database called The Edgerton Area Family Tree which has almost 90,000 people entered from Edgerton, Evansville, Cooksville, Albion, Koshkonong, etc.

**Larry REED** of Cooksville, the Cooksville historian, [lreed@chorus.net](mailto:lreed@chorus.net), inherited archival material from earlier historians, plus has added to the collection. He has photographs, diaries, genealogical research, historic architectural research and other records.

**Jennifer EAGER EHLE** of Cooksville, [hopkins@litewire.net](mailto:hopkins@litewire.net), is a genealogist who is familiar with Union, Porter and Magnolia Township records.

**Ruth Ann MONTGOMERY**, of Evansville, [rmontgomery@litewire.net](mailto:rmontgomery@litewire.net) is the Evansville historian and an Access Newspaper Archivist. She is willing to help people who have problems with the online resource for newspapers: <http://www.badgerlink.net>, link to Newspaper Archive. Her telephone number is 608-758-6693.

Compiled by Jennifer Eager Ehle and Ruth Anderson