

Olmsted County Places - Kalmar Township

KALMAR township, organized in May, 1858, bears the name of a seaport in southern Sweden, noted for a treaty made there July 20, 1397, uniting the kingdoms of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

Source:MINNESOTA GEOGRAPHIC NAMES Their Origin and Historic Significance

This is one of the best and earliest settled towns in Olmsted county. The south fork of the middle Zumbro river winds across in many a graceful curve, entering about the middle of the western side and leaving as it passes into New Haven, at the village of Genoa, across the center of the northern boundary. Its banks are handsomely wooded, the northern one being often very abrupt and the southern skirted by beautiful vistas now made fruitful by the hand of the husbandman.

About one-third of the area is thus occupied by excellent timber, and the remainder is gently rolling prairie. The village of Byron, near the southwest corner of the township, occupies a high and handsome site, being 260 feet above the level of Rochester. Early residents relate that its site was bare of bush or shrub in 1855, but now its fair face is almost hidden by groves that have been planted; and but for its church spires and elevator, which loom above the trees, the traveler would never suspect its existence when a mile away.

The Zumbro river furnished power for several sawmills which dotted its banks in the early years, and they found ample employment in furnishing materials for the cabins of early settlers. But the railroad has brought lumber from the pine forests of northern Wisconsin, and the mission of the local sawmills has ended. During the summer of 1855 I. S. Whitcomb, James A. Blair and Michael H. Staats built a sawmill on section 8, and two years later converted it into a gristmill; this was swept away by the spring freshet of 1866, and never rebuilt. The first death in this vicinity was that of a young man named Lockwood, who took cold while digging for the foundations of the mill, and died in August at the house of a friend named Richardson, across the line in Dodge county. The only manufacture now carried on in the township is that of flour, at what is known as Middleton's mill, on section 17.

The first marriage and death within the limits of Kalmar occurred in the family of James Canfield. On August 4, 1855, his infant son, James G., died; and the mother, Margaret, expired on the 7th. On the following Christmas, Mr. Canfield was married to Mariva Bonner. James Bucklen, Esq., of Rochester, had been engaged to perform the ceremony, and got lost in crossing the prairie, which was not then, as now, dotted with groves, etc., to serve as landmarks. Becoming impatient at the delay caused by his non-appearance, the groom sent for Rev. D. L. King, who lived within two or three miles; but before Mr. King could get ready and reach the scene of action, Mr. Bucklen had found his way and tied the knot. The former, however, came in for a share of the wedding supper. Canfield was shot while in the United States service during

the war of the rebellion, and none of his family are left in the town, his widow having removed to Dakota.

The first birth of a Caucasian child occurred July 24, 1855, being a daughter of D. L. King, who was christened Ruth Ellen. She married A. C. Waldron, and now resides at Spencer, Iowa. Charles D., eldest son of F. C. Whitcomb, was born on December 11 of this year.

This town is described in the United States survey as T. 107, R. 15. It is bounded on the north by New Haven, a heavily wooded township elsewhere described in this work; Cascade, a prairie region, lies east of it; on the south is Salem, a wealthy farming region; and west is Mantorville, in Dodge county. The soil of Kalmar is a rich prairie loam, underlaid by a clay subsoil, and is as near everlasting as any soil ever made. It shares somewhat in the general failure of wheat which has characterized southern Minnesota during the last four seasons. The shortage has not been as great here as in some other townships, however. A good deal of attention has been given to stock-raising and dairying of late, and most farmers are independent of grain-raising. A cheese factory at Byron, and another at Olmsted on the line between Kalmar and Cascade, are doing a flourishing business, and furnish an excellent market for the milk of farmers. Some attention is being given to the improvement in breeds of horses and all sorts of stock, and many are almost exclusively engaged in raising the various kinds of domestic animals.

This township was settled largely by New York and New England people, and contains at this time probably a greater proportion of the pioneer residents than any other town in the county. Many of the early settlers had previously dwelt in Illinois and Wisconsin.

In October, 1854, D. L. King, F. C. Whitcomb, and Marinus King visited this town and took up claims, the former on section 17, and the others on section 29. Messrs. King and Whitcomb still reside on their original claims. They returned in 1854 to their Illinois homes, and came here with their families in the spring of 1855. . . During the same year claims were taken by Almeron Randall, Israel Devine, John Colwell, Alpheus Merritt, George W. and Ensign Chillson, Obediah Gilbert, Norman Haight, Judge Olds, Gaylord Hurlbut, Benjamin McDowell, and others. In 1855 came Ira S. Whitcomb, Samuel McDowell, Nathan Bowman, Isaac Dodd, James, John and Darius Ellison, Richard Middleton, Jerome Harrington, Joseph Edmunson, George and Dudley Sinclair. During the summer of 1855 a school was maintained in a claim shanty on section 12: Miss Ann Losinger was the teacher. This building was shortly moved to section 36, New Haven, and school was kept in it there. Thus arises the claim that Miss Losinger taught the first school in both townships.

Methodist church.—Rev. D. L. King, the pioneer of the township, was a Methodist deacon ordained in Illinois, and he early set about the organization of a class here. This was effected in the fall of 1855, at the house of Judge Olds. Mr. King was made class-leader. The other members were his wife, Lorenzo Gilbert and wife, Obediah Gilbert and his daughter, Alvira. During this year Mr. King preached at Mantorville, Rochester, and at various houses in this town. In 1858 a class was organized at a meeting held in Ensign Chillson's barn, and this was the nucleus of a society which now holds meetings and Sabbath school in the town hall.

The first sermon at Kalmar, as the location of the sawmill on section 8 was called, was delivered by Rev. Nelson Moon, of Oronoco, on the occasion of the funeral of Mrs. F. C. Whitcomb.

In the fall of 1867 a class was organized at Byron by Rev. Chambers, and a strong society has been ever since maintained there. In 1873 a handsome frame church was built, at a cost of \$3,000.* The structure is fifty feet long by thirty-two in width, surmounted by a proportionate spire. Its audience-room is eighteen feet high and will comfortably accommodate 250 persons. The society also possesses a pleasant parsonage, built at a cost of \$1,000. The last of its debt, \$300, was cleared off in the summer of 1883. The society now includes a membership of sixty persons. Many losses in numbers have occurred through the restless inclination of people to emigrate toward the setting sun. Its Sunday school numbers nearly seventy-five pupils, and is prosperous. This charge also includes Douglass station, and embraces 100 members. The people are large-hearted, and do their share in caring for the poor and unfortunate, and in contributing to home and foreign missions. The following are the names of the pastors who have officiated here, with the years of their service: B. Y. Coffin, 2.; E. Forbes, 3.; J. N. Liscomb, 3; A. C. Keynolds, 2; Milton Akers, 3; B. F. Capehart, 1; G. W. Barnett, appointed last conference.

BAPTIST CHURCH.

The religious tendencies of Kalmar people were early cultivated, and are in a thrifty condition now. As early as June, 1857, Richard Middleton organized a Sunday school, which he conducted for two successive summers, in the loft above his store on section 17. On his removal to Rochester, two years later, he resigned his superintendency, but the school was maintained. It was non-sectarian, al though Mr. Middleton was an earnest adherent of the Baptist church. During the second summer the school was held in his house.

The first meeting for the organization of the Baptist society was held August 21, 1857, in a grove near Mr. Middleton's house, and eight persons were associated together as the Big Grove Baptist church. Their names were recorded as follows: Richard Middleton, Lucinda C. Middleton, Darius Ellison, Rachael Fisher, John Ellison, Prudence Hamilton, W. R. Woodward and wife. At a meeting on the 7th of November following, W. R. Woodward was elected clerk of the society, and it was decided to invite Elder Shepard of Wasioji, to preach to them. January 9 following, Woodward was also made deacon. In August, 1858, Rev. Erastus Westcott began to preach to this congregation. During the year following he delivered a sermon once in two weeks, and received for his services less than fifty dollars. This was the period of depression following the financial crash of 1857. One member of the flock lost over \$1,500 in mercantile operations at this time. Mr. Westcott had a farm near Rochester which afforded him sustenance, and he ministered to the spiritual wants of his flock without hope of earthly reward.

The first formal organization occurred May 12, 1860, at which time Richard Middleton and W. R. Woodward were made deacons, and the latter continued as clerk. During the existence of the society there have been about 225 baptisms, and 250 persons have been received as members. It now includes over 100 persons, and is in a prosperous condition, never having received a cent of aid from outside its own constituency.

The name was changed to Byron church after the organization of the village of that name. It had been previously called Kalmar church for some years. In 1871 the present handsome church edifice was built. It stands near the railroad track on the south side. It was built of the best quality of lumber, purchased expressly for that purpose in Minneapolis by Mr. Middleton, president of the building committee. William Waite, Joseph Dearborn, Hiram Fairbanks and Thomas Kesson were also members of the building committee. The structure is 55 X 33 feet in area, framed, and its auditorium is 18 feet in height. 275 persons can be comfortably seated in it. The Sunday school connected with this society is large and prosperous.

At the annual meeting, November 16, 1882, the following officers were elected: deacons, R. Middleton, L. W. Allard; clerk, W. H. Middleton; treasurer, H. G. Hurd; organist, Mrs. S. A. Middleton; Sunday school superintendent, Silas A. Middleton; assistant superintendent, H. Sparow; secretary, Francis Sinclair; librarian, Alma Roof.

SECOND ADVENT CHURCH.

This society was organized May 3, 1852, with nine members. Jacob Jacobson was local elder and H. P. Anderson clerk and treasurer. Besides the wives of these gentlemen, the society included George Peterson and wife, Henry Friis and his daughter Christina, and R. P. Barmstrup. Rev. Louis Johnson, of Sleepy Eye, officiated at the organization. Most of the preaching is done by the local elder. During the summer of 1882 the society fitted up a building—which had formerly been used as a dwelling,—donated for this purpose by a member, and has since held its meetings there. The membership now numbers twenty-two, and there is a sabbath school of thirty-five pupils, superintended by George Peterson.

There are now two postoffices within Kalmar township, one at Douglass and the other at Byron. Two offices were established in 1856. The first was at Bear Grove, one mile west of Byron's site, and Andrew J. Pritchard was made postmaster. He was shortly succeeded by Dudley Sinclair, and the office was moved a half mile east to Sinclair's residence. It remained here till its removal to Byron in 1865. The second postoffice was at Kalmar, and was supplied from Rochester once a week. John Kinsey carried the mail and James A. Blair was postmaster. This arrangement lasted but a few years.

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Township of Kalmar
Olmsted County
Minnesota

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