

History of Gordon

In the beginning this was an untamed wilderness; rivers and lakes and glimmering pools; vast wastes of endless green forests extending westward to the prairie country. To this untamed land came the trader, missionary and soldier. Again their ghostly campfires seem to burn, and the fitful light is cast around on Lord and Vassel and black-robed Priest mingled with wild forms of savage warriors, knit in close fellowship on the same stern errand. That errand was to wrest this wilderness from the primeval sleep of centuries.

The St. Croix river and tributaries was long an ancient trade route and war path of the Chippewa and Sioux Indian tribes. The struggle between these savage tribes was finally settled in a last great battle on this river, when the Chippewa warriors under Chief Buffalo defeated the Sioux whose defeated band retired to the prairies to fight the last great Indian wars against the white invader.

It was truly the land of Hiawatha, where members of the so-called lost tribe of the Turtle clan hunted, fished, trapped, fought and persued their ancient culture and worshipped their pagen gods.

To this great northwest territory came the early French explorers and missionaries; one to claim the wealth of the new country for France and the other to spread the gospel of Christ and claim its children for Christianity. Thus it was that the white man's civilization spread westward.

It was in September of 1860 when two canoes rounded a bend in the St. Croix river seeking a landing. This was the last year of peace for this nation for four long, bitter years of civil war. The leader of this group was one Antoine Guerdon of the LaPointe Trading Post on Lake Superior. The purpose of this voyage was to renew relations with the Chippewa Indians in the Northwestern part of Wisconsin, thus extending the fur trade for the Northwest Company who had its post at LacDuFlambeau.

As a result of this landing at the spot where the Eau Claire river empties into the larger St. Croix, Guerdon, or Gordon as he was later called, decided to establish a trading post here to accommodate the Indian tribes who trapped and hunted in this valley of Two Rivers. Another factor in the decision to settle at this point was the increasing demand for lumber in the westward expansion that was only delayed by the Civil war. Two years earlier a military road was cut through this area connecting St. Paul, Minnesota, with the lakehead at Superior.

During the winter of 1860-61 Gordon purchased a tract of land from the Wisconsin Land and Improvement Company and the Henry Rice Land Company. He then sold his interests at LaPointe and built a Trading Post at this place that the Indians called Amick, The Beaver, in the Chippewa tongue. During the following years Gordon's store furnished the Indian trappers with supplies in exchange for their furs. All trade goods were hauled in either from St. Paul over the Mail Route by ox teams and horses or from LaPointe by boat, first through the Brule-St. Croix Portage and later out of the newly established port of Superior. Some years later Gordon was to acquire an interest in the first sailing vessel to haul cargo on Lake Superior. This was the famous ship Alegonquon which was later destroyed by fire.

Antoine immediately constructed a log dwelling near the Eau Claire river which was used both as a home and Trading store. This Post became a supply point and a stopping place along the St. Paul to Bayfield mail route. It was here that the Chippewas brought their fur and game to trade for food and other white man's goods. Gordon became their spokesman and counselor and managed to control the more savage of these wondering bands in times of provocation and stress. He also was called upon to provide food and shelter when the hunting was poor and the snows of winter deep.

In addition to the material good that was accomplished by Mr. Gordon, who was a deeply religious man with an above average education for the times in which he lived, he provided these children of the forest with some of the fruits of a civilized society by teaching them to read and write and worship God in the white man's way. A log building was constructed where the children, both Indian and White, received the rudiments of an education during the days of the week and religious instruction on Sunday. Mr. Gordon, who as a young man was choir master for the now famous Northwest Missionary, Bishop Barage of the Roman Catholic church, conducted these services with the prayers and songs of the Church. Many years later, his grandson Philip Gordon, was to become a noted Indian Priest, to fulfill a dream that Antoine Gordon himself cherished as a young man.



**“Mr. and Mrs. Antoine Gordon,
the founders of Gordon,
Wisconsin in 1860, would have
liked King Midas Flour.”**

In the year 1874 a small church was built and later served by a group of Franciscan Fathers from Bayfield. The most notable of these priests was Father Oderic who is still remembered by many of the older residents of this area. He served these people for many years, coming to Gordon from Bayfield and Ashland. Father Crostrom also served this north country. He has an especially noted place in the History of this Indian Country by virtue of the fact that he translated most of the Bible into the Chippewa language. The translation was written on birchbark and now is in the possession of Northland College at Ashland. These missionaries accepted the hardships of their task as an inevitable part of their mission. They traveled by canoe and on foot during the summer months and snowshoes during the winters. Their struggle was a long and valient one.

Mail service was established after the St. Paul Bayfield road was completed. An Englishman by the name of Dingley, who was related to Gordon delivered the mail under contract from the government. In the early years the Bergin Hotel was built as a stopping place along the mail route for the mail carriers, lumberjacks, Indian traders, land lookers and settlers. A few years later the Smith Hotel was built and served this community for many years as a Boarding House and Hotel. Both of these landmarks are now gone. Around the turn of the century a formal Town was created and the name of Gordon written into the record books. The village then became a unit of Douglas County at about the same time.

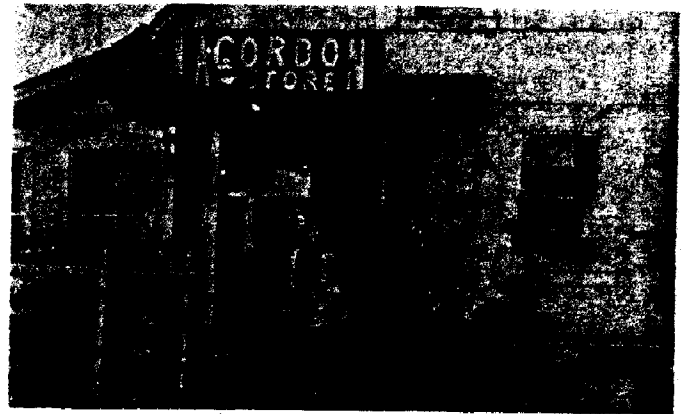
In the year 1882 the Northwestern Railroad extended a main line from St. Paul to Superior. Antoine Gordon deeded the right-of-way through the village of Gordon. A depot was built at its present site and the first train stopped there in that year. This event accelerated logging operations and brought settlers into the Gordon and Wascott areas. The Town of Wascott came into being around the year 1900. Between 1906 and 08 the Soo Line Railroad built its grade and tracks running through Gordon just west of the Eau Claire river. The line connected Chicago with the Lakehead ports.

Following the Civil War and the beginning of westward expansion the vast pine lands of the north were explored and opened up. The demand for wood in the prairie country to the west brought into being the big lumber companies. Gordon became the chief supply point and log outlet for these timber operations. The first logger to cut timber in the St. Croix River Valley was a man by the name of Long. He logged with ox teams and floated his logs down the St. Croix river to Stillwater, Minnesota. That city became the terminal for timber cut around the Eau Claire River, St. Croix River, Eau Claire Lakes, Lake St. Croix and the Moose River country west of Gordon. Mausser-Sauntry and Werhauser were the chief big operators cutting timber out of Gordon. These companies had many large camps in the vicinity of Gordon, Wascott and Solon Springs. Gordon became the chief supply point for these camps in the winter and the river drives in the spring. Lumberjacks, horses, oxen, beans, flour, hay, whiskey, canthooks, axes, saws, salt pork and sourdough all went out from here to the back forties and the big woods to make the logs.

Most of the timber barons and the now forgotten lumberjacks followed the timber from the east to make daylight in the Wisconsin woods. These men, with names such as Craig, Carlson, Harding, to name a few, with many others have since become legend in the story of the forests. Places such as "Deadman's Creek" "Frozenman's Bridge" "Sauntry's Pocket" and "Sixmile Dam" mark the now forgotten paths of these men who harvested the pine lands. The last log drive went down the St. Croix in 1912. After that, logging took on a new face and a new emphasis.

Those who have lived in the forest clearings were often at the mercy of great forest fires. The great fires of 1886, 1889 and 1910 left their mark on this part of Wisconsin. Fire-scarred trees, brush clearings and vast acres of second growth cover remained for years to mark the destruction of much of our timber resources. The Town of Gordon also suffered from fires. The year 1913 saw a part of the town destroyed by a fire. Forest fires often swept in on a high wind. In the early years fire was considered a normal hazard of living and fires in the timberlands often rolled unchecked, unless homesteads, lumber camps, mills and villages were threatened. Water, manpower, horses and simple hand tools were the only defense against this scourage. These and rain, subsiding winds, and the Lord's help saved this village of Gordon many times in the early years.

In the month of May of the year 1907 Antoine Gordon died at the age of ninety-eight. His passing marked the end of an era. He and his family are buried in the cemetery on the hill overlooking the river valley that he marked for his home over a half century before.





Gordon Whalen, great grandson of Antoine Gordon was born to Agnes and James Whalen in 1907 in Gordon. He attended grade and high school here and State Teachers College in Superior. He also attended college in Denver. He taught in the Gordon High school for several years. He is at the present time connected with the Conservation Department. Mr. Whalen has been interested in the study of History, especially the Civil War Period, which was the time of our founding. Mr. Whalen resides with his wife Irene in Gordon.



Son of William Gordon and Grandson of Antoine Gordon, Phillip was born in the community of Gordon in 1885. He was educated at the Catholic Mission School at Odanah, Wisconsin. He became a student at the old Superior Normal School and attended what is now Northland College. From there he entered St. Thomas College in St. Paul, Minnesota. He became a noted athlete while at St. Thomas and was a star on the school's basketball and football teams. He was graduated with honors in 1908. After graduation he began his studies for the Priesthood, first at St. Paul Seminary then at North American College in Rome, Italy. He spent two years studying at the University of Innsbruck in Germany. Upon his return to the United States he completed his education at St. John's University and was ordained a priest at Superior Cathedral on December 13, 1908. After serving as an Indian missionary for a short time in the diocese of Superior he returned to continue his education and attended Catholic University, Washington, D.C. He then became active in Indian affairs and gained attention as a speaker and traveled throughout the country in behalf of the Indians. Later served at Centuria, Wisconsin as a beloved parish priest. He was a friend of the great and near-great in all walks of life, statesmen, cabinet members, cardinals, soldiers, scientists, businessmen and just plain people. Father Gordon died in 1948 and is buried in the Catholic cemetery at Gordon.

