

HISTORY

The Village of Athens is located in an agricultural area of North Central Wisconsin approximately 25 miles northwest of the City of Wausau.

Athens, originally Black Creek Falls, was founded by Fred Rietbrock in 1879 who operated a sawmill and provided the economic base throughout the early years. The village was surveyed and plotted in 1882, with a village square being laid out in the center of the village. This village square, with a bandstand which provided concerts for the early settlers and mill workers, is still the main focus of the village today. The village was named Athens in 1890 by Mr. Strupp, based on his love of classic Greek and similar topography of Athens, Greece. The Village of Athens was incorporated in 1901, from parts of the townships of Bern, Halsey, Rietbrock, and Johnson.

During the early years, the Village of Athens thrived on the timber industry. Besides the timber industry, Mr. Rietbrock was instrumental in encouraging strong and hardy Germans and Poles from foreign lands to come to America and settle in Athens, clean the land, develop it into good farm land, and own it.

By the early 1900's, Athens had three sawmills operating, a Central Hotel, three blacksmith shops, general merchandise store, hardware store, two planing mills, stave and heading mill, Flour Mill, paint and decorating shop, men's clothing and tailor shop, livery stables, harness shop, cheese factory, cigar store, electric plant, bowling alley, three grocery stores, a bakery and confectionary store, doctor office, dentist and veterinary offices, three other hotels with taverns, a Catholic, Lutheran and Christ United Church along with Catholic and Lutheran schools, public grade school and a high school started, along with construction of a railroad built by Rietbrock from Abbotsford to Athens, named the Abbotsford North-Eastern Railroad. The railroad was dismantled in 1971. The Athens Central Park Association was started in 1907. The first park named "Schuetzen" was developed for picnicking, target practice, and general park purposes in a grove two miles north of Athens.

As the lumber industry declined, agriculture gained importance. Production and distributing these farm products now play an important role in Athens' economy. Additionally, a local industrial park was developed in the 1990's to diversify the employment opportunities for village residents and expand the tax base.

The Village is comprised of approximately 2 square miles of land which is currently being used for residential, agricultural, commercial, governmental, industrial, transportation and recreation purposes.

The Village's residential development is concentrated in the central area along and close to the major roadway, State Highway "97". It is bounded by two creeks on the north and south sides which meet along the east side, and provide the village with special physical features.