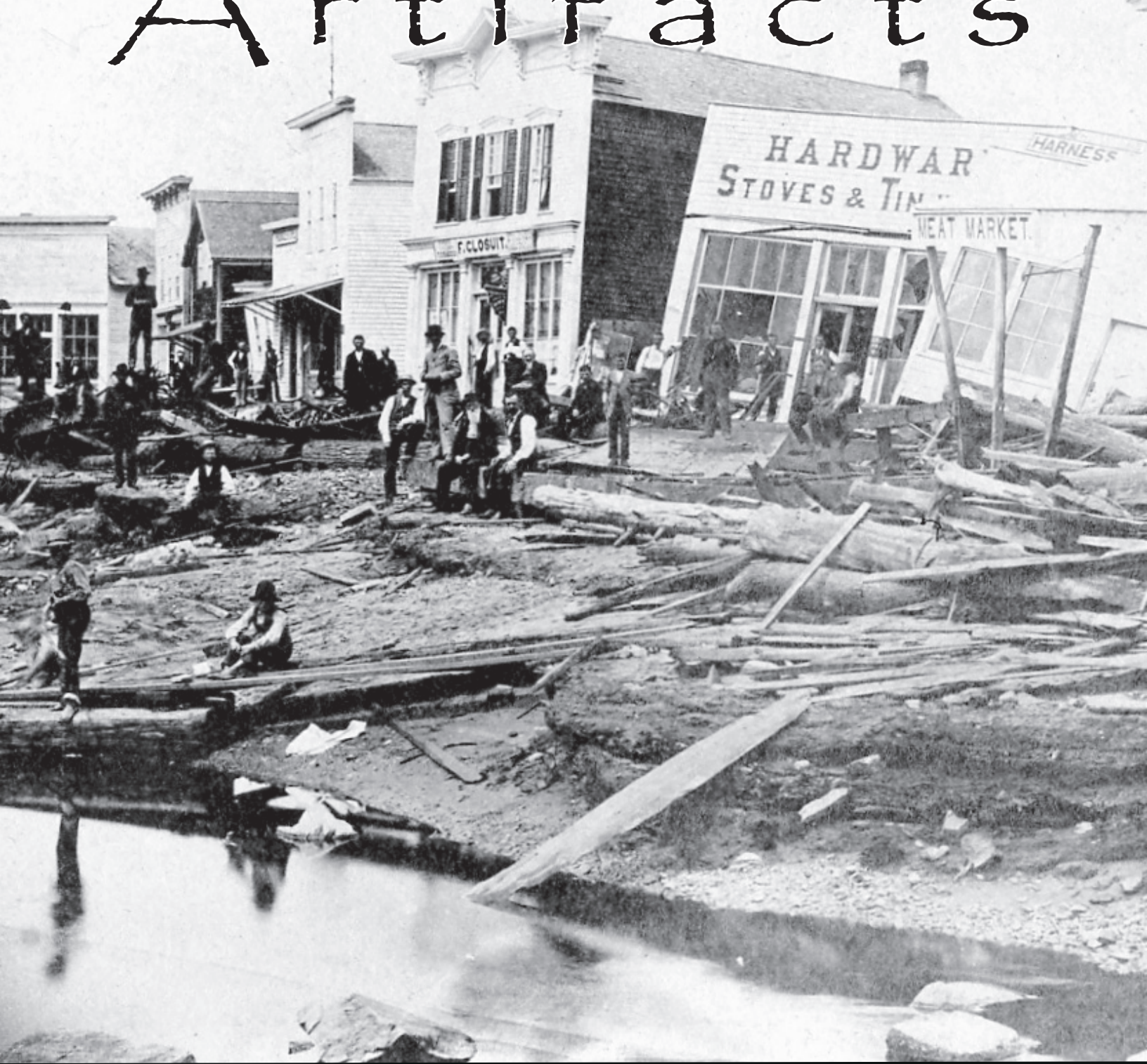




May 2009  
Volume II #21

River City

# Artifacts



Natural disaster? 1880s flood, photo from dump (see p. 12); John Billings, p. 2; Phil Brown, 3; Lori Brost, 4; St. John's Cookbook, 5; Dog Town by Joan Haasl, 6; Pops by Priscilla Witter, 7; Barn Dance by Gerald Johnson, 8-9; To Be Young by Joe Jackan, 10-11; Dumpster Diving (Photos), 12- 19; Frank Garber Co. by Earle Garber, 20-23; Artifact photo, 24-25; Howe Class of 1959 Photos, 26-27; Old Bone by Justin Isherwood, 28-29; 1924 Spring by LuVerne Conway, 30; Relics in the Attic by Ione Cumberland, 31; Uncle Dave, 32.



# John Billings

July 21, 1910 - March 25, 2009



John was born July 21, 1910, in Appleton, to Ben and Mary (Hasheck) Billings. He married Hazel Love on Nov. 19, 1934, in Chicago. She died April 22, 1995.

Following graduation from Lincoln High School, John was employed at Consolidated Papers Inc. for 18 months, then he entered the U.S. Postal Service on Nov. 1, 1929, and continued there as a letter carrier, acting postmaster, and supervisor until Nov. 1, 1969, a period of 40 years. In 1970, John took a position as bailiff in the Wood County Courts where, as chief bailiff, he would remain for 22 years until 1992.

In lieu of flowers, memorials can be given to the First Congregational Church-UCC or the South Wood County Historical Museum.

Ritchay funeral Home in Wisconsin Rapids is handling all arrangements.

John joined the First Congregational Church in 1924, and served there in many capacities that included several years in their Boy Scout program. John had a keen interest in the historic life of the community. John was involved and served as a volunteer at the South Wood County Historical Museum and loved to reminisce with its visitors. His recreational interests were hunting, fishing and golf.

John is survived by one son, John R. (Grete) Billings, Golden, Colo.; three grandchildren, David Billings, Victoria, Minn., Robert (Penny) Billings, Lakeville, Minn., and Rebecca (Gary) Braun, Prior Lake, Minn.; step-granddaughter, Denise Fletcher, Arvada, Colo.; stepson, Paul Brill, Brighton, Colo.; four great-granddaughters and one stepgreat-granddaughter. Also survived by personal friend, Susan Christenson, Apple Valley, Minn.

Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune obituary

Photo by Uncle Dave

The view from the second floor office was obscured recently as roofers replaced century-old roof boards with plywood and laid new shingles. It all started with the 2007 hailstorm.



### Farewell to a Friend



It is one of our valuable artifacts: the John Billings chair of Wisconsin Rapids history, where the friendly gentleman sat at the entrance to the Museum and told his wonderful stories to newcomers and old timers alike. In his younger years, John had lived across Third Street from the Witters of our beautiful SWCHC Museum building. Later, John knew both sides of the river as a postman and, as a court bailiff, he met a lot more of our citizens on both sides of the law. Having participated in several interview projects with John, including a fine video produced by Paul Gross, I know that no one had a better memory for our people and places. Thanks, John, for sharing almost a century of excellent memories.

*Phil Brown*



Board president and curator of the Den of Antiquity Phil Brown helps reinstall a bellows in the logging exhibit. Basement walls were reconditioned to resist water damage, thanks to a grant from Mead-Witter Foundation. Preservation is an ongoing process at SWCHC's 1907 landmark structure.



## The *Personal* Connection

By Lori Brost, Museum Administrator

Stories we write or share can bring back to life the Rapids of old when lives didn't seem as hectic and everyone seemed to have time to visit with neighbors, friends and relatives. We either knew or were related to just about everybody. To encourage that spirit has become a large part of what we do at the Museum—or "old library," as so many call it.

After the latest *Artifacts*, Andy Stublaski and his wife, Janice, came to talk to me about the photograph that had been used for the featured centerfold. Andy told me that the man shown holding a small snapshot camera, taking a picture of a group of children on a sleigh ride was his father, John Stublaski. Andy also shared with me how the happy activity was a yearly event for the Sunny Side School Group; they would go for a sleigh ride and then enjoy hot chocolate together.

Just recently, Larry Homann identified the horse and sleigh from that same picture as belonging to his father Mervin "Homer" "Happy" Homann.

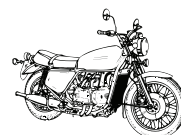
Another connection was made when Elizabeth Whyte read the letter from LuVerne Heger Conway and called to let me know that her father had been the on-site engineer who had built the Consolidated paper mill in Port Arthur, Ontario, that LuVerne referred to. In a recent letter, LuVerne mentioned that after reading the story about Sis Bouton, the two had a nice long conversation and shared their desire to see the Woody Swancutt story as a feature within the publication; be patient, girls.

Larry Bauer called to discuss logging stories and mentioned he had seen the name of my grandfather, Clifford Lewis, in *Artifacts* and wondered if it was the same Clifford that he had known as a neighbor and friend. And it is, a friendship that continues.

Ralph Lau was here last week to look at some of the Boy Scout pictures taken by Don Krohn that were brought to his attention by our webmaster, Barry Jens, and he recognized himself in one. In addition, he was able to identify his brother, his mother and even some old friends.

After the May 2008 issue, Ted Bodoh of the Queen of the Holy Rosary Mediatrix of Peace Shrine in Necedah, stopped to discuss the pictures he had seen of the Necedah Visions of Mary Van Hoof. The shrine group are now using some of those pictures within their own organization.

I enjoy hearing when these stories and pictures trigger a memory or remind someone of a friend they may not have thought of in a while.



*As the days are getting longer and warmer, as the grass begins to green and flowers start to come up and we see more people out enjoying the fresh air and the calls of the birds, we also hear another true sound of summer in the air, the rumble of motorcycles.*

*Whether you rode a Shovel or Panhead, were an Angel or Knucklehead, whether you were in it for the hill climb or the relaxation of the ride, I want to hear from you and see pictures of the bikes and hear stories from the days before great suspensions and built in radios and big comfortable seats, when a good day of riding meant you came home good and dirty. Brush the dust off the chaps, pull the vest out of the closet, inhale that biker smell ~ leather mixed with oil and fresh air, let it take you back and bring those stories out.*

# GREATER GRAND RAPIDS COOK BOOK.

COMPILED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE

## LADIES

OF

## ST. KATHARINE'S GUILD

OF

## ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

GRAND RAPIDS, WIS.

FIRST EDITION.

1900.  
GRAND RAPIDS TRIBUNE,  
GRAND RAPIDS WIS.

### BROILED PRAIRIE CHICKEN.

Skin chicken, removing wings, feet and head, clean and wash thoroughly but quickly. Separate legs from trunk, rub them over completely with lard and place in a covered frying pan upon back of stove to cook one-half hour, adding more lard when necessary. Separate back from breast and add back to pan after treating the same as legs. Lay breast upon a meat board and with heavy potato masher break breastbone, so the breast will be perfectly flat. Place in toaster over a bed of hard wood coals, turning frequently for twenty minutes. Then add breast to the frying pan with legs and add salt and pepper and pour one-fourth cup of butter over all, let brown and remove meat to platter, adding one-fourth cup hot water to pan, which is poured slowly over game. Serve immediately with currant jelly.

MRS. WM. KELLOGG.

Sharing their home every day, the staff and volunteers at the South Wood County Historical Corp. feel a personal connection to the Witters and their fellow Episcopalians, who contributed to the parish cookbook shown here, courtesy Phil Brown's Den of Antiquity. Patriarch Jere D. Witter founded the Bank of Grand Rapids and was a partner in most enterprises here. He only lived a couple years beyond the publication of this book. In 1907, his son, Isaac P. Witter, built the "Museum" as his home. As shown above, attitudes toward the savory *typanuchus* have changed.

## ..Bank of Grand Rapids..

WEST SIDE.

CAPITAL, \$25,000.

SURPLUS, \$5,000.

### ..OFFICERS..

J. D. WITTER, President.

ISAAC P. WITTER, Vice President.

F. H. JACKSON, Cashier.

General Banking Business  
Transacted. ♦♦♦♦♦

♦ Promptness, Courtesy,  
Accuracy, Liberality.

The Artifacts Connection

## Dog Town

*Steve Bakovka slept here*

By Joan Haasl

When we moved to Gaynor Avenue in January of 1952, we didn't know we had moved to "Dog Town." I found out when an old friend said, "Don't tell me you're living in 'Dog Town.'" I thought we were in Wickham's Addition.

He explained to me why the area that fanned out from 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue South had this nickname. He also told me that Bernard Musch Sr. was called the "Mayor of Dog Town." Fifty-seven years later when barking dogs wake me up several times a week I tell myself, you really do live in Dog Town!

Several of the houses in our area were built by Matt Carey: our house around 1913, also the Hesse house next door and the Race house on Wickham. Carey's will is attached to the deed to our house. It states he is making no provision in his will for his son because he provided for him when he came home from the "great" war. The will was written in 1936.

Some time after we moved in, a lady named Jennie Robinson asked if she could come in and see the house. She had lived here when she was a child. At the time there was no indoor bathroom. There was a pantry in the kitchen with a hand pump connected to the spring in the back yard. Springs were rare on the West Side.

The Sullivan family owned our house in the 1940s. They had three sons, Red, Chuck and Bill, who was in my high school class. A Bakovka family also lived here. A son wrote in the stairwell, "Steve Bakovka slept here."

When we bought the house, Roy and LaVerne Rued owned it and there were renters up and down. The George Yeager family was down and the Doug and Lil Tenpas were up. The friendship with Lil and Doug has lasted all these years.

I look out my porch window everyday and see the Armory. The flag tells me if it's windy or not. I went to dances at the Armory with friends. My sons played basketball there and two enlisted in the National Guard at the Armory. When my Dad got the contract to wire this building in 1940, none of us thought ahead to the time I would live in Dog Town and Dad would have grandsons playing in the last big job he would have as an electrical contractor.





## POPS

By Priscilla Witter

My sister-in-law, Barbara Witter, finally forwarded to me a copy of your 2007 February "Year of the Museum" so I could write to you myself. My brother, Dean, and I are the sole heirs of Isaac Witter. Dean had four children but I have remained unmarried for all these years. And I am now 78. I have lived abroad ever since my mother, Suzanne Gobel Witter, brought me to Europe in 1949.

I adored my grandfather, Isaac. He's one of the persons who stands out the MOST in my life. My mother always said that she married his son, but she should have married Pops (our pet name for him). He was so kind and so generous. He never forgot anyone. Not even the Catholic Church, with whom he disagreed most ardently.

Pops had "God Bless America" played at his funeral, because he considered himself as sincere a patriot as a Christian, and because he considered Irving Berlin as sincere a patriot. Pops was absolutely the best man I have ever known, despite his asking me to Wisconsin every four years just to keep a record of the votes of the REPUBLICAN conventions!

I adored him. I never adored my father, Jere D. Witter, however, though I was terribly fond of my older brother named after him, who died at home in Los Angeles several years ago and who had one daughter, Ann Cates, who lives in Kentucky and has two dogs and a horse. (We're very great animal lovers.)

Nothing from my grandmother or grandfather's house ever came to me. Father had it sold immediately. I never received even the lamps my grandmother Charlotte had promised me from her dressing table.

I remember the sound of the dining room. Marie putting the silver away, Christine getting dinner on and my hounding her because I had such an appetite. I remember stories about my Aunt Josie and others which Nana (my grandmother) used to tell on the sun porch. (Aunt Josie was a meter square and she came with someone who was just as big.) I remember the whole ducks (stuffed with wild rice) that we downed when the governors came. And I remember the lemon ice half way through.

I remember the back lawn. I can't remember whether they were from the sun porch dining room or from the kitchen but there were Lilies of the Valley running down to the water. Grandfather loved them. And an arbor over them. He and August did all the bouquets for the house. August [Kauth] was Mabel's brother and the last time I was there, he was working in Port Edwards. Grandfather kept him for the lawn and flowers and he took Mabel and Otto [Krumrei], Helen's parents (I am still in touch with her) to Los Angeles with him. Otto and my father were in school together and not friends, I was told.

Lordy, I've told you all about myself for three pages. My mother died over here, where I had a huge house with 170 cats. Now I only have two. Grandfather had a dog and birds before anyone. He was my guiding star.

*September 13, 2008*

*Edited for publication*

## Barn Dance at the Old Boles Farm

*Musical history in revolutions per minute*

By Gerald Johnson

In my early years, which were shaped by the Depression, poverty and “County Relief,” radio broadcasts perhaps played the largest part of developing a love of music. On the old “Boles Farm,” the Johnson family often sat in semi-darkness and listened to the WLS Barn Dance out of Chicago on our little battery operated radio. By the age of ten, I knew the Barn Dance stars by name, and had developed “favorites” such as the DeZurik sisters and Red Blanchard, a singer from Pittsville, Wis.

We didn’t listen to much other than the Barn Dance in an effort to conserve the battery on our radio, more often having my Mother read to us by lamp light from the books she had checked out at the West Side “branch” library in town.

When we moved in 1938 to the Johnson homestead at 411 Boles Street, an electric radio

expanded our listening from the WLS Barn Dance, which was still our huge favorite, to Sunday programming that included “The Shadow,” “Gang Busters” and a couple of spooky sci-fi programs, one I recall as “The Squeaking Door.”

Although we had moved, we still had no inside plumbing, telephone or central heating, and the Johnson family radio was still our primary entertainment source. In 1940, Wisconsin Rapids was granted a radio station license and a very new and novel communication breakthrough had arrived at our little town of 10,000. The studio was located downtown above the Nash Hardware in the Montgomery Ward block, and the public just

couldn’t wait to see the “live” radio broadcasts. In addition to a wealth of national live and recorded music that included the “Hit Parade,” now local talent had a much wider format that was often featured in local live programs.

The popular Roger Johnson Band (my brother) played on WFHR and interestingly, talented Dorothy Kolstra, who would later become my brother’s wife, once sang a duet with friend Mae Sonnenberg on radio WFHR! Other notables were Lowell School classmate, Marvin Teske, a fine pianist, and Joe Liska, a violinist who was a music teacher at Lincoln High School. Red Blanchard of the WLS Barn Dance, returned to Wisconsin to take

work at the new station, which provided him with almost unlimited access to airtime.

The radio station proudly hosted “open houses” for area school children, and my wife, Irene, remembers the excitement when the students of Immanuel Lutheran School were treated to a “field trip”

to the brand new radio station. By high school graduation time in 1946, my 78 RPM record collection grew rapidly (records were 39 cents at the time). Popular, country/western, and novelties made up the bulk of the collection.

Spike Jones was all the rage in the novelties, but some of his best songs, in my estimation, were not on shelves of the music stores. These were recorded on 16 RPM “transcriptions” available only to the national radio stations. Vernon Alpine, Ray Lecy, myself and other Spike Jones fans from high school, would bug the local radio personnel to play these transcribed songs for us when we visited the station. Usually the station personnel humored us



Red Blanchard  
1954 WLS Family Album



with a set up in an offside studio room and played the tunes for us. One Spike Jones classic was "The Great Big Saw Came Nearer and Nearer," a song that I pursued for over 20 years, but was unable to have copied for my collection.

About this time, a few houses down the road on Boles Street, was a talented musician named "Buck" Leverton. A whiz with a guitar, he often practiced with rhythm guitarist Joe Lukaszewski, with whom he performed on radio station WFHR. Since they sat on an open front porch, neighborhood music lovers gathered and had a chance to hear these talented men as they practiced.

During our stormy early courtship, I often carried albums of 78 RPM records over to the Bautz front porch in the basket of my bike, to be played on Irene's wind up portable phonograph. With the advent of 45 RPM and 33 RPM long play records in the early 1950s, the local record store continued to be well patronized. Records cost 52 cents and my collection grew rapidly.

Love of music carried over into my service in Korea, where the Armed Services Network beamed shortwave music to the troops. (See "Transoceanic" in the family history). Irene bought us a fine multi-speed record player/radio in 1952 while I was overseas.

Television was on the horizon in 1953 when I returned from Korea, and when we set up housekeeping on Chase Street in 1960, a black and white Zenith TV took the place of the radio, and the record player didn't get as much use.

In the 1980s, I gave up most of my large Spike Jones 78 RPM collection to Scott Manthey, the son of a coin collector friend. Time and brittleness has taken its toll, but in our basement rec room, we still have several hundred fragile old 78 RPM "vinyls" from that wonderful music era.

In the family archives are several 1940 era souvenir booklets remembering the WLS Barn Dance. In another archive is a very rare 78 RPM "picture" record of Lula Belle and Scottie singing "Have I Told You Lately That I Love You?"

Around the year 2000 our 45 RPM record collection was sorted and a printed check list made. Set up alphabetically by artist, the list is broken down into three categories: feminine vocalist popular, male vocalist popular, and a large country/western section. These are color coded and stored in old ten pocket 45 RPM record albums, and serve as a wonderful musical morale builder when played as Irene and I struggle with 1000 piece puzzles in the rec room.



In the year 2004, over-the-counter records are gone from the scene. A few 33 RPM albums are still offered, mostly by mail order. The cassette tape recordings that we began collecting as the records vanished are now largely being replaced by compact discs, and these CDs already replaced by digital music discs.

In recent years we have been picking up 45 RPM records of our liking at garage sales, usually for a dime each, then throwing away most of them, and salvaging a few that are not worn out. So, the gathering still goes on. The garage sales often offer used music tapes and videos, and of late also have had numerous compact discs, as the digital world moves along. (We do not buy them.)

Radio has little to offer us now. We seldom use our car radio, Irene listens to Christian radio WGNV with ear phones while riding the exercise bike, and we use radio music as background during our summer card games with friends. Living in the past is a way of life with Irene and me as far as music is concerned, we find few of today's popular songs we would bother to seek out.

## Great Time to Be Young

By Joe Jackan



From 1952 to 1956, I attended Lincoln High school in Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. Coming from the strict discipline of a parochial elementary school, my adjustment was not easy. I finally settled in and started to enjoy my new freedom, managing to avoid expulsion, but barely.

In my freshman English class, I said something disrespectful to Darrow Fox. For this I spent the next week in the cafeteria study hall during his class. Charles Spees and I had a love-hate relationship. He once forecast that I would end up in prison. The prophecy is unfulfilled, Chas. He was a great teacher and I really liked him.

Airplanes fascinated almost every boy in those days. Joining me in the "Balsa Butchers," the model airplane club at Lincoln, were my buddies Dick Morland, Dave Goetsch, Modris Ozols, and Dennis Jaecks. We were able to get a night once a month during the winter to fly our models in the field house.

Popular with teenagers during this period was the phrase, "crock of s---." Using 10-cent glider wings, I had built a biplane, christened BiCrock. One night I was flying BiCrock on control lines when I decided to do a wingover, pointing the plane straight up and flying directly overhead. Big Mistake!

The ceiling was too low and I only succeeded in tangling BiCrock in the girders. I won't describe how we got it down without getting killed.

In those days, you could propel your model with a Jetex engine. It was a solid fuel rocket. The fuel pellets made volumes of smoke when lit. One of our tricks was to light one these pellets and drop it in the storm sewer by the side entrance at Lincoln. Then watch the fun when teachers and students congregated.

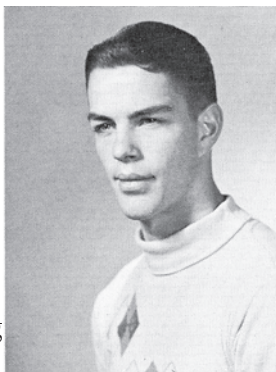
One day we came into gym class and

discovered a long rope stretching from one of the girders to field house floor. Coach J.A. Torresani had us taking turns climbing the rope while he went on to other business. We soon discovered that you could lean over the rail on the balcony and grasp the rope as it was handed to you. Then you could swoop across the floor like Tarzan. We all lined up to take our turn. "L.A." was ahead of me. As he prepared to launch, I reached over and pulled his gym shorts down to his ankles. He made a great spectacle, swinging across the floor in his jockstrap while the girls' gym class cheered. Fortunately, I could run faster than he could. Even Lincoln principal A.A. Ritchay or Rapids police chief Rudy Exner couldn't have saved me from him that day.

No one will forget Duke Hornigold stalking down the hall by the Chem Lab with an H<sub>2</sub>S generator in hand, leaving students coughing and wheezing in his wake. He had a large bone, rumored to be a human thighbone that he used to pound on his desk to bring the class to attention.

Johanna Kumm was another interesting science teacher. I think she used formaldehyde for perfume. You couldn't be squeamish in her Biology class, especially during frog dissection week. Mr. Carlson, our Physics teacher, liked to zap unwary students with his hand-cranked generator. Chas Spees lived on a busy street a few blocks from school. He had a large airplane propeller above his garage door. Imagine his surprise when it appeared the day after Halloween on his desk at school.

John Leuenberger had a Crosley. It was slightly larger than a baby buggy. He was always finding it in unusual places. Half a dozen boys could pick it up and take it anywhere. One day it wound up in the third floor boys' john. The wide staircases and double doors made it easy.



Joe Jackan  
1956 Ahdawagham

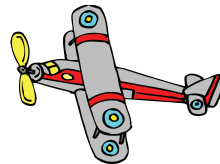
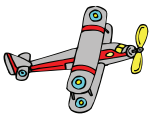




My friend Jim Baumgart had a new Harley Davidson KH. One lunch hour he asked me if I would like to go for a ride. As we left the parking lot across from the field house, Jim opened it up. I was holding on to the grab rail behind the seat. When he accelerated it felt like a giant hand had grabbed my shirt collar and yanked me back. My feet flew up and my back was horizontal over the taillight. The crowd hanging out on the sidewalk applauded. Needless to say, I had Jim drop me off far from my devoted fans.

When Bob Konkol wrote his name in cursive, the small “b” looked like an “f.” That’s how he became known as Bof. Just before the end of the school year, Bof brought some firecrackers to school. We discovered an ideal place to light them. The handball court above the stage in the field house was a giant echo chamber. Unfortunately, someone saw us going up there and reported us. We spent the remainder of the year in detention. When school resumed in the fall, to our relief, nothing more was said about it.

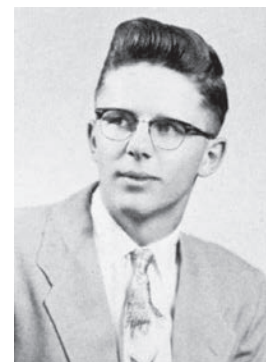
These are some of the adventures I had in my four years at Lincoln. It was a great time to be young, far from the bomb threats and massacres you hear about today. Our “gangs” built model airplanes or collected stamps. Hanging out was done at the Friendly Fountain. The girls were beautiful and the teachers put up with much mischief.



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Classmate: SWCHC board member Robert Zimmerman  
1956 *Ahdawaham*

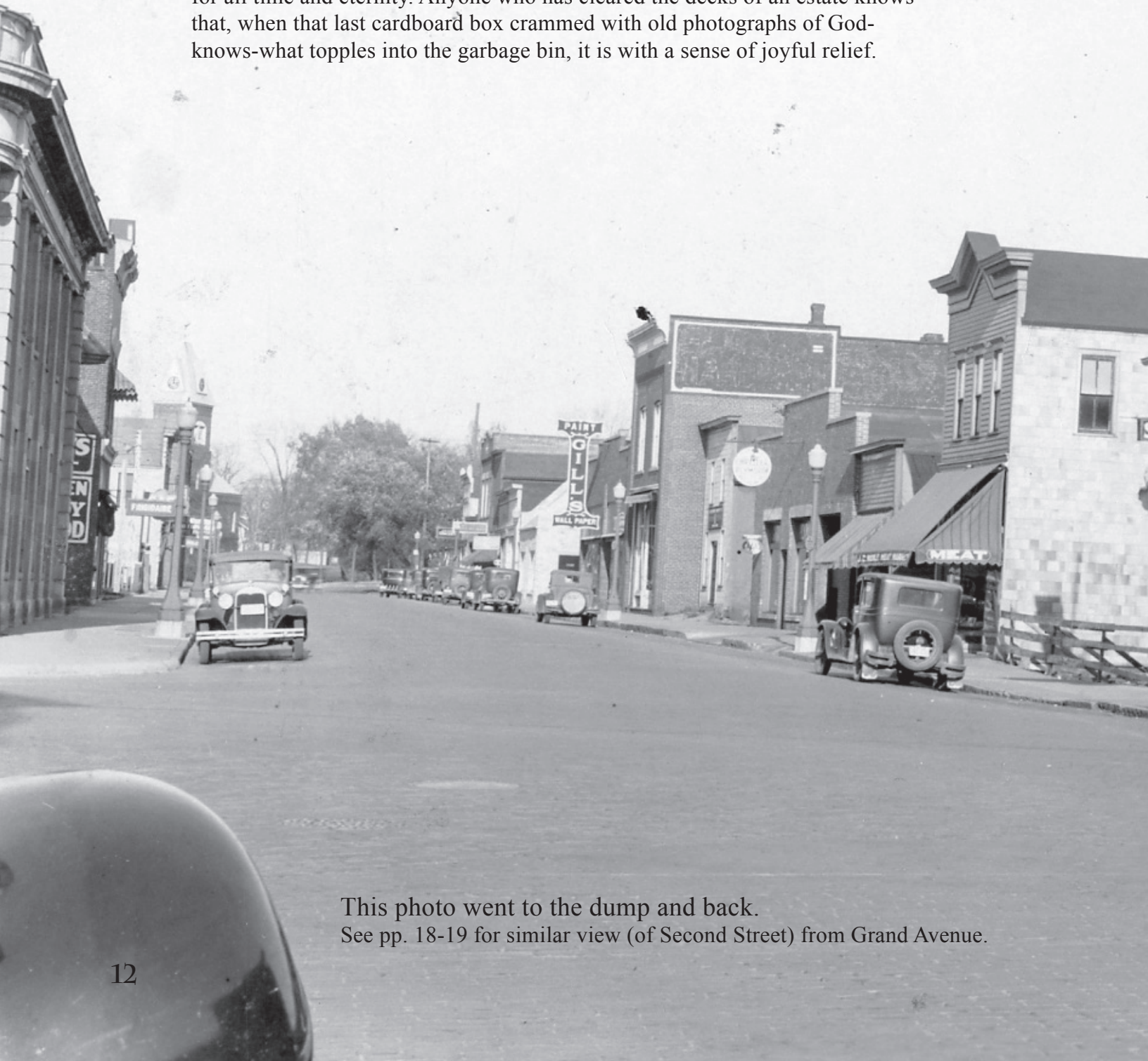
In 1997, Uncle Dave published *Just Like Bob Zimmerman's Blues: Dylan In Minnesota*. Bob Dylan’s birth name was Robert Zimmerman. His younger brother is David Zimmerman. Our Robert Zimmerman has a younger brother named David, a friend and classmate to *Artifacts* editor Uncle David (who had a cousin named Bob). In Bob Dylan’s graduation photo, he sports a “do” almost identical to that seen at right.



# Dumpster Diving

*Looking for Artifacts in all the wrong places*

For the desk jockeys of the history game, the practice of “archiving” demands acid-free paper, white gloves, academic seminars and, more recently, data management. As curators fiddle with mice, Rome burns. Outside the Ivory Tower, the garbage trucks haul away the detritus of governments, businesses, shops, schools and our own homes. To the home front marches an archive’s worst enemy, the impatient in-law carrying a broom and wearing a dust mask. One daughter-in-law from Florida can destroy the legacy of a River City family for all time and eternity. Anyone who has cleared the decks of an estate knows that, when that last cardboard box crammed with old photographs of God-knows-what topples into the garbage bin, it is with a sense of joyful relief.



This photo went to the dump and back.  
See pp. 18-19 for similar view (of Second Street) from Grand Avenue.



But this time, the cleansing was interrupted before the bonfire. The photograph on this page and those surrounding it teetered on the brink of oblivion. When there was such a thing as a municipal dump, that's where they were found, plucked from the stinking flames by a woman whose daughter called me ten or more years ago. Was I interested in some old pictures?





Saved from the Dump #2





## Before

East Side Wisconsin Rapids looking southwest on First Street North toward later site of Jackson Street Bridge. At right, from Hotel Witter toward viewer: Barnitz Beauty Shop, Jackson's Tavern, Wm. Rogers Plumbing and Heating, Eagles Club, Battery E Armory, IOOF (Odd Fellows) Hall, Cities Service Oil Co. Station. At left, from Hotel Witter: Deep Rock Oil Corp. Serv. Station, Wisconsin Rapids Motor Co., City Fire Department, Schmidt's Tin Shop, Wood County Outdoor Relief. *1937 City Directory.*





MAY 2009

SFD#3

ARTIFACTS





After the 1938 Armory Fire  
*November 14, 1938*  
(“Reporter” building was Odd Fellows hall.)







See pp. 12-13 for view further down the street, closer to old library.



Second Street, c. 1935, looking north from  
Grand Avenue and toward the "old" Library  
(near courthouse). Wood County Bank, right,  
Sugar Bowl restaurant prominent, left.



## If Not for the Big Bang

If not for the Jews of Arpin, there would be no “Uncle Dave,” *Artifacts* editor.

If not for a Frank Garber Co. ad in a newspaper, Donald Engel, a submarine welder at a Manitowoc shipyard, would not have applied for a job and the embryo of his son, Uncle Dave, would not have been transported here (to be born at Riverview Hospital).

If not for the Arpin settlement, Frank Garber, a Jewish immigrant, wouldn't have come to this area.

If not for cheap land in Arpin, Jews from Russia would not have joined an agricultural experiment sponsored by a Milwaukee philanthropist.

If not for the glaciers and their haphazard apportionment of rubble, there wouldn't have been cheap land in the Arpin cutover, ready to be promoted to the gullible.

If Frank and Bernard Garber had not asked young Earle to return here from a music career in Chicago, Uncle Dave wouldn't have been able to get trumpet lessons from him in 1962 and the two wouldn't be able to reminisce about how Don came here as a young father-to-be.

If not for PBS, Uncle Dave's talking head wouldn't have appeared in *Chosen Towns*, a documentary out of UW-Milwaukee, describing Midwestern communities such as that which included his benefactors, the Jews of Arpin.



Frank Garber Co. stockroom, c. 1945. From left: Bill Arnold, Donald Engel, Frank Radtke.



## The Life of a Company

By Earle Garber

What we've all been accustomed to is slowly shrinking before our eyes. As our industrial base is disappearing, *Artifacts* readers should enjoy reading how a scrap dealer (some folk, mostly kids, called him other names) dealt with change in his time.

Frank Garber, my grandfather, came by rail in September of 1912. The *Wood County Reporter* social column noted his arrival as a "visitor from New York."

One week later in the *Reporter* he was on his way to Pittsville to visit relatives who had arrived years earlier, including the woman he would describe as "Auntie." She had encouraged him to come to the U.S. Her husband would provide a wagon. He could peddle junk and trade the used equipment they acquired in this fast growing new country.

Frank had left his family in a city near the Russian Crimean peninsula. With his thick Slavic accent, others could know that he was a newcomer like themselves. As a child, I would sit in the curved-back wooden chair beside his desk while Frank told me stories and how he worked on elocution. "I stood in the mirror talking to myself," he would tell me, "to sound like the American I wanted to be."

On one of Frank's first trips, a farm customer grabbed for the horse's bridle. He looked into the horse's white vacant eyes, looked up at Frank, and said "Suppose that horse of yours strays a bit?"

Dripping wet on a humid fall afternoon, Frank pulled a rag from his vest, wiped his brow and nodded. He had been struggling, whipping his way west on Lincoln Road to Pittsville some 20 miles in sheer terror and confusion, wondering why until the farmer said, in Czech or Polish, "Sir, your horse is blind."

By 1917, a cigar or two bulging from his suit

coat, Frank made call after call at the local pulp and paper mills until Al Ross from Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. asked him to make an appointment. He recalled the day he walked into Ross's office.

Frank would tell me that Mr. Ross, "purchased and managed everything except raw materials. He bought the tools and piping and the railroad equipment, the engines and cars—when rails were as common as chicken tracks on the surface of the earth."

"Frank," Ross said, "the company has an old switcher, 1107, that

the boss wants junked. I believe it was brought down from one of the wood yards, somewhere up-north. It's a two axle, two by two, one heck of a job for you, lots of iron, you interested in salvaging it?"

Catching his breath, staying calm as possible, hanging on to the wood rocker office chair, Frank replied, "It would be a pleasure, Mr. Ross."

With borrowed acetylene and oxygen tanks and torches to flame-cut plates into strips, they hauled, sledge-hammered and crowbarred bolts



and rivets from the boiler and removed wheels from the axles to be sold to the Wisconsin Valley rail group. Frank and his crew reduced the rest of the monster to chunks portable enough to haul in wheelbarrows up planks, loading a gondola for shipment to a steel mill at Gary, Indiana.

In 1921, the market collapsed and steel mills began to shut down. Frank's orders were canceled. He told me he telephoned Nepco and, in an almost inaudible voice, croaked, "Mr. Ross, I'm in trouble, the market's gone sour, it's gone to hell – I can't pay you."

After a few moments, Ross replied, "Well, Frank it happens all over. Hold on a bit, pay us when you can."

Within the year, business picked up. Frank didn't mail the check; he personally handed it to Ross along with a cigar.

My father, Bernard, and his half brother, Harry, took over the business as Frank's health began to fail. In addition to scrap, they had begun selling plumbing and supplies for the mills. The new lines of plumbing, then heating and finally, with pressure from mill personnel, industrial products were added. Crane Company, most prominent of the valve manufacturers, and National Tube opened the door. As welding supplies were added, a new employee who had been working on submarines for Manitowoc Ship Building Corp. moved in. Don Engel and his wife, Sally, had arrived, renting an apartment on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue near St. Lawrence church, to which they soon brought their first-born.

Frank Garber Co. Inc., was poised to move on. I was in my last year of college in Chicago, where, in order to pay tuition, I had begun a career playing trumpet in house bands during the great swing era. Dad pleaded with me to come home to help with the industrial products.

In the right place at the right time, we had been offered industry's finest Crane valves, Ladish weld fittings, Trent Stainless tube, Duriron stainless steel valves and filters, National Tube piping, U.S. Rubber and A.O. Smith plastics.

Crane Co. and Ladish, two of the most prominent suppliers, offered training to accommodate new outlets. Spending weeks in Chicago with Crane Sales and in Milwaukee with Ladish, I had the opportunity to acquire product knowledge, enabling me to service the mills. I sold valve fittings, filters and alloys being developed, plastics needed to move the paper making process from batch to continuous production and products needed to feed the wider, faster, automated paper machines. The need for efficiency was driving the industry. The paper, chemical and mining industries were in a race that would eventually flood the available market. At its peak, the Garber Co. grew to 35 employees with five outside sales personnel and branches in Appleton, Wis., and Ishpeming, Mich.

By 1981, too many distributors were competing for the same dollar. Garber Co. had been financed by local banks tied to the prime rate which had jumped out of reach, and the poor return on investment made it impractical to continue. Without a larger, deeper pocket to carry the company, we looked for and sold out to a larger company looking to expand. For local suppliers, it was over.

During one of my last flights as a product manager for DURCO (The Duriron Company, an alloy valve, pump and filter manufacturer), I sat next to a Norwegian paper company sales representative. We were both on our way to Portland, Oregon. I was marketing coating filters; he was calling on paper suppliers.

We talked about importing. By 1989, his Norwegian mills were shipping into the U.S. over 5,000 tons of paper annually but his concern and mine was over the Asian mills that were beginning to move in to take over the bulk orders.

As they read this, the buyers I called on, and the engineers and tradesmen we worked with, will smile... and wonder how the latest generation is dealing with the challenges of the modern paper industry.





Earle, Bernard and Harry Garber. In photo and insert: Bernard, Harry and Frank Garber.



Frank Garber Co. headquarters, 650 McKinley St., Wisconsin Rapids



### **Artifact - As Is**

What you see (or don't see) above is a reproduction of an unidentified photo looking about the same as it did when Uncle Dave received it from Auril Murgatroyd Harding. The condition of this object places the archivist in conflict with the scholar in conflict with the publisher. The archivist is asked to preserve the thing exactly as it was found. The scholar analyzes, interprets and explains. The publisher wants something that looks good.

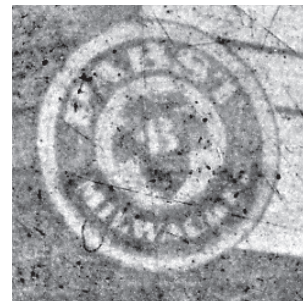
Fortunately, digital technology has enabled a win win win situation. Now you can have it all three ways: artifact, history and *Artifacts*.





## Artifact - Tweaked

The illustration below uses the same digital information as on the facing page, comparable in film days to using the same negative; but it has been enhanced, primarily by increasing the contrast. Which photo is more real? Is it proper for history publications to improve the viewability of images? Can you identify persons or place? Looks like a bar in a rural location, circa 1900.



Get your Pabst here.





## 50 Years Ago



**Howe School 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduating Class 1959**

<b>Row Four (Top)</b>	Dennis Demuth, Wayne Sparks, Gary Peters, John Farrish, Dick Zellmer, Harold LaChapelle, Vernon Ahles, Kent Zastava, Richard Cummings
<b>Row Three</b>	Craig Skibba, Barbara Panter, Ann Chariton, Norma Pierce, Jennifer Junkman, Nancy Householder, Charlene Fisher, Patty Emmes, Alan Grischke
<b>Row Two</b>	John Blanchard, Victor Friday, Tom Johnson, Janice Krommenaker, Betty Peik, Bill Metcalf, Mark Suckow, Dave Cesare
<b>Row One</b>	Jennifer Johnson, Susan Anunson, Lois Reynolds, Betsy Brauer, Mary Helmuth, Cathy Brown, Kathy Worlund

Later to become the LHS Class of 1963

See tribute by Chuck Hinnert (LHS-65) in Artifacts #19, November 2008



Contributed by Mark Suckow

**Howe School 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduating Class 1959****Picture Two:****Row Four**

Peter Garrison, Gary Kester, Jon Schmidt, Jay Somers, Ron Brazener, Nick Brazeau, Keith Fisher, Ed Kanieski, Bill Hartley

**Row Three**

Mike Ebsen, Don Solie, Cecelia Chariton, Mary Jane Graves, Nancy Baird, Marsha Koonz, Dawn Siewert, Robert Gringle, Ralph Diver

**Row Two**

Bill Schroeder, Leon Schmidt, Gloria Chell, ?, Nancy Droste, Judy Gilbert, Harold Marcoux

**Row One**

Last name Noel?, Mary Ann Schill, Susan Hanson, Karen Rude, Arla Robinson, Verjean Bierman

Observations? Most startling is how short the boys are. To classmates, even half a century later, many are recognizable, or “the same.” Others, not. Style? Relatively conservative and flattering period. The girls here wear skirts or dresses, thankfully not the chemise or “sack” Modesty? Evidence of petticoats above bobby socks. Innocence? Yes, if memory or lack of it is kind. Friends? Some of us have been more or less together for life. Others are happy to never see us again.

*Of the open land that joins Wisconsin Rapids, Plover and Plainfield, college types say, "Bway-na Veesta"; locals "Byoona-vista"; and a few righteously ignorant, "Bone-a-vista." Some call it too much of nothing.*

## The Old Bone

By Justin Isherwood

**O**ld Bone. How aboriginal dirtballs refer to the Buena Vista Marsh in their patent-pending lexicon. To call it Buena Vista seems, at least from a rural sense, a bit...shall we say effeminate, an over-done sophistication, too much glamour for a place that isn't—glamorous.

The tract of the Marsh bisects, in the tribal vernacular, the middle of the middle of Wood and Portage counties. As school children, we learned of this geographical eeriness, of a marsh in turn in the middle of Wisconsin, in the middle of North America in the middle of the western hemisphere in the middle of the northern hemisphere ... zounds, it was some worse than eerie, it was an omen on the order of special significance by the anonymous author, most likely God, of an unrevealed purpose of the Buena Vista Marsh.

We include in this litany of eeriness the Biblical demise of Buena Vista village with a Sodom and Gomorrah ending. Made toast and utterly toast by an 1863 tornado that smashed the village to smithereens. As children, we knew the metric equivalent of smithereens, ever so much smaller than nanometers. Funny what things kids know without being told.

The problem with the Buena Vista Marsh was it did not resemble the sort of notable feature the demographer of the universe might have put in the middle of the middle of the middle to mark the spot. At the very least, a mountain, or a volcano or a notable chasm would suffice. Instead, a stretch of land about as dumb plumb as it is possible and not have "boring" written in bold letters on every eerie particle. Any more boring and the Buena Vista would have achieved a perfect vacuum by

just sitting there. Beyond boring was a soil type that isn't very nice. A soil that if insulted could burn neatly enough, matching the Sodom and Gomorrah precedent. To this condemning list of flaws, the Buena Vista Marsh was empty, its soil lousy, its winters cold, and where killing frost could and do occur any month of the summer.

Any transit of the marsh by the modern traveler readily connotes a vast and empty place. The Grasslands preserve within the confines of the marsh is the largest such tract east of the Mississippi. Agricultural occupies approximately two-thirds of the area, growing everything from potatoes and sweet corn to cranberries, to which the naturally acid soil is allied. Those few who choose to live within the domain of the Old Bone are hardy folk. Roadways are problematic as blacktopping is not advanced by the unstable subsoil. When it comes to roads the choice is either dirt or gravel.

In one of the most retro-devolutions ever witnessed by civilized man, the Township of Buena Vista has actually disassembled a blacktop road, masticated it to its constituent bits and put it back as a gravel road. Some detractors go so far as to characterize these flaws as a mentality, implying the Buena Vista Marsh harbors a subconscious and it is not about to be civilized. In the summer of 2007, among the hottest and driest in Wisconsin history, the Buena Vista Marsh held 8,000 acres of contract sweet corn that froze just days short of process maturity. A personality that does not surprise old-timers—never mind personality streaks are usually attached to flesh and blood of a few mammals of the higher order and not a supine tract of land with none of the ambitions of decent real estate.



It is the known peculiarity of humanity to reverse established prejudices. Like as not a full one-eighty degrees if after a decent period of mourning so the convolution doesn't look so damn awkward as might suggest a political source to the ailment, meaning the one-eighty about-turn.

The Buena Vista, like thousands of other resources and landscapes, has been written off as useless, despicable, loathsome, good for nothing waste. It is odd that vacancy should tempt one, if quizzically so, to be curiously, oddly refreshing. A land that all but out loud says empty, do not tarry, go home, there are better places to be. As almost says what no nice place would, leave me alone. A landscape not inclined to be modern, is thus to our well-fed comfort, creepily attractive because there is yet a place, not ... nice. By the rich caprice of its habitual vacancy, the Buena Vista Marsh has become something of an emergent jewel for our home counties.

It is a land of vistas, even if we don't agree on them as *buena* vistas. Perhaps there exists here an elementary cause something beyond *buena* to describe. Any winter afternoon on the Marsh with

the sun low in the west, one can cast the eye across a peneplain that seems just too flat, eerily flat. In the distance, the gossamer hem of the moraine with a blue hue like the suggestive petticoat of an antebellum age. To the north, the landscape is

rumped, stone-full. Its waters dash and flirt with flashing rapids. East is a happy riot of hills and drumlins. To the south, a sylvan land lush with indolent swale and friable meadow. In the middle of the middle of the middle this strange oddly evocative marsh.

Since a child I have known this Marsh. Amongst ourselves in the privacy of the feed mill and potato shed we call it the Old Bone, a name as befits the baptism of lost crops and tractors. A well-gnawed bone it is and quite bare. In our sophistication we go to museums to see bones. Some are well stacked and labeled, some

articulated, attached to the skulls and jaws of former things; the marsh is such a thing. Like most fossils it doesn't smell bad any more. It tends quiet in a way now thought antique, I have on occasion been humbled by this quality alone, the Buena Vista's lack of noise, and us.



*Justin Isherwood, photo by Uncle Dave*

## 1924 Spring in Wood County

By LuVerne Heger Conway

About three months after Christmas, spring blew in—sometimes with sleet and snow and sometimes with pale green on the trees. But no matter what arrived, we got to shed our long winter underwear! First, baths in the galvanized wash tub in front of the kitchen range, the hot water having been dipped from the ‘reservoir’ at the side of the range. Marion, the youngest, got to go in first, then my turn. Our hair was rinsed from the big tea-kettle and then a good towel rub. I think we still faced flannel night gowns and Grandma’s heavy quilts. After all, pneumonia and flu could still be around in spite of the good tidings from Easter.

The new patent leather shoes were ready for Church and the long lisle stockings could be drawn on smoothly over our bare legs. No more ugly bumps from our wrapped around underwear! And maybe a new bonnet from Johnson and Hills. The Easter Bunny would have left a basket or tray for each of us, with dyed eggs and chocolate rabbits from the Sugar Bowl, and, of course, jelly beans and marshmallow baby chicks from Rowland’s Grocery.

A big Sugar Bowl Easter Egg was a thing of beauty. Jim (Wasn’t Jim the candy man of the three brothers? George was behind the counter and big Tom would be reading the paper and keeping an eye on things?) Jim’s #1 Prime Eggs were medium-sized footballs decorated with flowers and containing more chocolate inside.

One year, much later, a Lincoln High boyfriend ordered such an egg with my name artfully adorned on the top. But he got mad at me before Easter, so he sat in the Sugar Bowl in view of all the patrons and slowly ate my egg!

My memory bank at 90 does not have Wisconsin spring flowers on Easter. They came later for May Day baskets. The older girls would carefully paste ruffled crepe paper over small boxes and we would go to the swampy woods behind the cemetery to gather moss, violets, may flowers and Johnny Jump-Ups. Come dusk we would quietly leave a basket at the front door of a good friend, ring the bell and run off into the night.

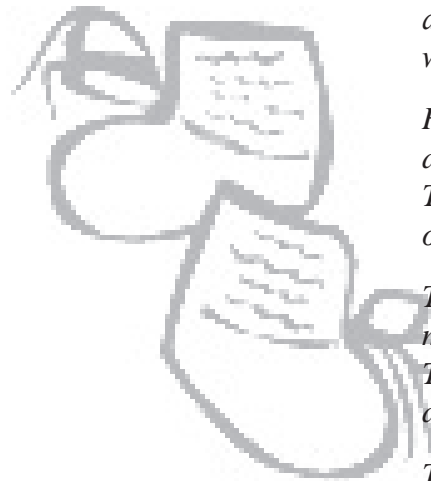
I have told of this lovely ritual to people in other parts of the country, and they admire my good luck in having grown up in Wood County, Wisconsin.

*March 17, 2009*



## Relics in the Attic

*By Ione Cumberland*  
1914-1990



Editor: Ione's writings were in my attic until they climbed out of the box.

*I heard them again last night  
Grampa clock had struck half-past three.  
They thought that I was sound asleep  
As I was supposed to be.*

*The wooden cradle began to rock  
as it did at night so long ago  
and "Aunt Jemima doll" sang lullabies  
in tones so soft and low.*

*The porcelain doll with a broken arm  
whispered to a wedding gown wrapped in blue.  
They giggled, blushed and carried on  
as maidens sometimes do.*

*A quilt top pieced in Depression Years  
from sacks that held grain or flour  
told tales of hardships and hunger  
during our nation's "poorest" hour.*

*Baby booties climbed out from a box  
three pairs in shades of blue  
and pattered across the wooden floor  
with steps not sure or true.*

*Hard soled shoes come when boys walk  
and tennies by the score  
Tracking mud, grass and sand everywhere  
on chairs, sofas and on floors.*

*Then came boots, the sturdy kind  
made for work, play and more.  
The bass drum beat a cadence  
as a pair marched off to war.*

*They stayed with him as he bled  
in the mud of Vietnam  
And came home to a nation's "unwelcome"  
for heroes unsung.*

*They thought I was sleeping  
those treasures from the past years  
that revived memories both sweet and sad:  
I indulged in confused tears.*

*Their whispering stopped as it always does  
and I was lulled back to sleep  
after reliving a family's history  
told by souvenirs I keep.*

South Wood County Historical Corp.  
540 Third Street South  
Wisconsin Rapids WI 54494

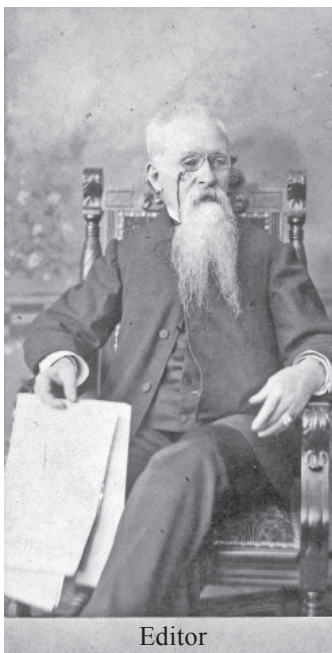
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*Artifacts*, local history magazine and newsletter of the South Wood County Historical Corp., welcomes contributions of writings and photographs relevant to the greater Wisconsin Rapids area. For a year's subscription and membership send \$20 to the address above. Questions? Contact Lori Brost, Museum Administrator and assistant editor, 715-423-1580. [Lori@swch-museum.com](mailto:Lori@swch-museum.com).



☺ Good news. For a society and Museum of relatively small size, SWCHC has enjoyed above average financial support from loyal families and institutions.

☹ Bad news. The usual for 2009. The value of and consequently the return on endowments have fallen enough to threaten the functioning of the History Center and the existence of this publication at its current level. The SWCHC board has agreed to support these programs at a loss until Labor Day when the budget will be re-examined. If money matters do not improve, the next issue of *Artifacts* will tell the tale.



Editor

☺ Thanks to recent contributors of published material: LuVerne Conway, Herb Dittman, Earle Garber, Paul Gross, Joan Haasl, Marge Hamm, Auril Murgatroyd Harding, Chuck Hinnners, Joe Jackan, Gene Johnson, Eileen Keating, Mark Suckow, Tim O'Day, Dan Teas and Priscilla Witter. Keep it coming.

✍ *River City Memoirs VII*, the book mentioned last issue? A proposed collection of Uncle Dave's *Daily Tribune* stories 1998-2008, published at his own expense for about \$1,000 and resulting in an unprecedented one (1) copy for personal and reference use. Since then, a couple good fellas offered to contribute sums to SWCHC that would enable a larger print run. Meanwhile, volunteer Holly Knoll, a recent graduate of UWSP, has taken charge of organizing the hundreds of Memoirs that have appeared over the decade. Counting her copy, the number of books to be published has gone from one to four.