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Volume II #2

South Wood County Historical Corp.

Artifacts



Cover photo (c. 1950) by Don Krohn. Nepco Lake?

Inside: Joan Haasl, two stories, pages 2- 3; history of Getsinger/Lester Cranberry Co., 4-7; Our 20th Century, an interview with Clara Freund, 8-15; more Don Krohn photos, 16-17; John Vicker, three stories, 18-19; report from Historic Point Basse by Mark Scarborough, 20-21; "History from McMillan" by Don Litzer, 22-23.

Joan Haasl

When Grocery Shopping Was Fun

Remember the little family owned grocery stores? Some were in houses, others in old buildings. Most families were in walking distance of one. The owners knew their customers by name, knew where the father worked and all about their families.

In the years I was growing up there were two chain grocery stores, the A & P and Piggly-Wiggly, both on the west side. In 1913, seven grocery stores were listed in the Grand Rapids City Directory. All were locally owned. In the 1948 telephone book, thirty-six are listed, all but two locally owned. In the 2003 phone book, Saratoga Grocery is the only grocery store listed that can compare to the little stores of our child hood.

My father did most of the grocery shopping for our family. He liked good food and he liked to cook. He thought it was good business to buy from several stores, so sometimes he went to Sutor's, other times to Reilands, Beardsley's, Kruger's or up 1st Street North to Siewert's where there was a nice lunch counter. Dad and I would have a sandwich there along with a lot of railroad men. At every stop business would be discussed, how good or how bad it was.

For meat, my father liked Werle's Market on 2nd Street North. This was an old- fashioned meat market with sawdust on the floor, a big walk-in cooler and a huge old chopping block worn wavy from years of cutting and chopping meat. Dad did not like buying meat from the showcase. Mr. Werle would bring out a half cow or pig. Then he would cut off a steak, roast or chop and hold it up for Dad's inspection. If it was good enough, Dad would nod his head and the meat would be wrapped in heavy pink butcher paper.

Other times we would go to the fish market across from Huntington's Machine Shop, also on 2nd Street North. They had big dill pickles and pig's feet in wooden barrels and cod fish in wooden buckets. Dad liked the cod. He would soak it overnight and we would have it for breakfast with melted butter.

I miss those days when shopping was a very personal, satisfying experience, when you charged your groceries and paid every two weeks. In appreciation the owner would give a treat, usually a pint of ice cream. Today I get my groceries like everyone else at a big store where I know some of the clerks but none of the owners.

JH

Joan Haasl

A Small Sacrifice

War brings many problems, some big and some small. One of the small problems was a shortage of toilet seats.

During World War II, I lived with William and Cora Rowland while attending Lincoln High School. Mrs. Rowland said I could have the little shack behind the house for my art work.

I fixed it up real nice. I had a little work bench for the wood carving I did with the tools my father had bought me. I made an easel for my painting. I had a little jigsaw I cut out pins with to sell. They were in the shape of footballs and basketballs. I was also good at fixing things. At Staub's Electric, where I worked Saturdays, I put plugs on toasters and irons, and wrapped cloth tape on the copper wiring used in motor rewinding.

One day Mrs. Rowland asked me to fix the toilet seat that was coming apart. I re-glued it, sanded it down, and gave it two coats of enamel. I put it on my work bench to dry. During the night, we had a terrible storm—high winds and the sky was bright with lightning. There was a huge tree on the north side of the house. It crashed to the ground, taking the chimney and a corner of the house and went right through the middle of my studio.

The toilet seat was smashed beyond repair. For the rest of the war we made do without a toilet seat. A small sacrifice, considering what the servicemen and women and their families had to endure.

JH

Getsinger

By Dave Engel

Because the book Phil Brown and I published in May 2004, *Cranmoor: The Cranberry Eldorado*, focused on the period prior to 1904, there was no opportunity to include much of the material we received from former cranberry grower Richard Getsinger.

Getsinger and his family had, for many years, owned the Lester Cranberry Co. How that came about is the topic of a 1968 history that was provided.

Lester Cranberry Co. was formed in 1903 by Charles E. Lester, G.M. Hill, Wm. Johnson and G.W. Paulus. Lester already owned the marsh but it was believed he needed additional investors.

Hill and Nels Johnson owned the Johnson & Hill department store in Wisconsin Rapids, then Grand Rapids. Their company provided products

to the cranberry marshes during harvest season. Paulus had been an educator and invested in real estate. I don't know who Wm. Johnson was.

By 1903, the cranberry industry was reborn following the fires and drought of the 1890s. On the Lester property, just about everything had been destroyed but the house still in existence.

Shares in the Lester property went through several owners. In 1905, Oscar Potter bought Lester's stock; in 1917, Andrew Searls purchased Potter's stock and Carl Getsinger, that of Paulus. Getsinger, in 1929, purchased Johnson's shares.

In 1947, Leonard Getsinger, Carl's son, bought Hill's shares and, after the death of Andrew Searls, a portion of the Searls stock.

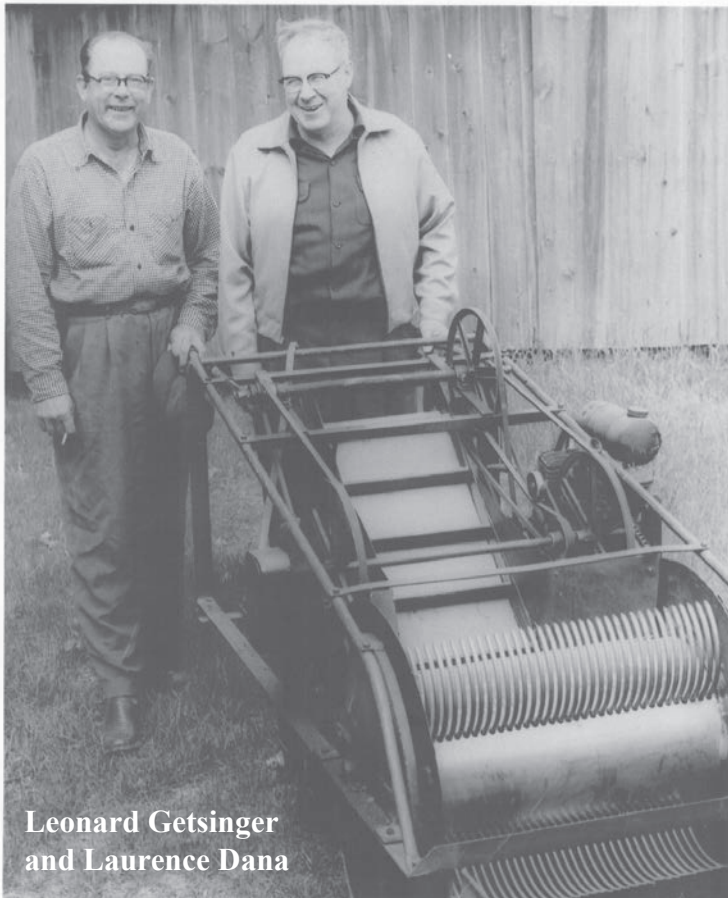
Upon the death of Carl Getsinger in 1962, Leonard inherited more shares, some of which he sold to his son, Richard.

The native berries that had begun the cranberry industry here were described as small in size. In 1905, Oscar Potter, a Lester shareholder and a member of a prominent cranberry family, began replacing most of the natives with Bennett Jumbos from the Bennett marsh near the Lester marsh. Twelve years later, Carl Getsinger and Andrew Searls replaced the Bennetts with Searls varieties of better color that also were better producers.

A Fordson tractor was used to plow and prepare the marshes for replanting. The vines were planted by stomping them into the prepared bed.

New acreage was added in 1964. It was planted in Ben Lear berries that ripened earlier but were bad keepers and hadn't been practical until the advent of refrigeration for storage and processing into juice.

The vines had to be purchased from a marsh near Hayward, although the original plants had actually come from the Lester property.



Leonard Getsinger
and Laurence Dana

In 1925, Leonard sat with his father Carl and watched frost destroy the crop because there was not enough water in the reservoir for flood protection.

The water supply for Lester came from rainfall and Hemlock Creek, stored in a large reservoir. But every couple of years the marsh would freeze because the reservoir was low.

A method of repumping the water was developed to keep the reservoir full but it proved slow and inefficient. Repumping was replaced in the 1930s by an irrigation canal from the Wisconsin river north of the Consolidated paper mill log piles, paid for by fourteen growers in Cranmoor. This provided almost unlimited flow, which then drained into the Yellow River on its way back to the Wisconsin.

In 1966, two sprinkling systems were installed for \$18,000. The pump was designed to go on when the temperature fell to 36 degrees F.

Cranberry production was estimated in 1968 at 100 barrels per acre. The crop had been worth about \$8 a barrel until 1960 when the price rose to \$15 per barrel due to a massive advertising



campaign of the Ocean Spray cooperative, which Lester had joined in 1944.

Previously the marsh had run a processing warehouse where women sorted the harvest for bad berries and debris. This was abandoned in 1967 to ship directly to a receiving plant at Babcock, owned by Ocean spray.

Historically, the company had employed about 200 pickers and rakers, many of whom were Indians.

The mechanization of the Lester company came in 1952 when Leonard Getsinger obtained the patent for a cranberry-picking machine that used oscillating teeth to scoop the cranberries from the flooded marshes.

In 1945, hail badly damaged the crop. When a similar potential disaster hit in 1968, the loss was covered by insurance.

Prior to insecticides, flooding on cold nights killed insects by drowning. DDT was used for two years but Leonard noted in 1968 that it did not break down and quit using DDT in favor of malathion and parathion. Spraying at that time was accomplished by use of WWII biplanes.



CARL GETSINGER 1920'S HARVESTING CREW

LESTER MARSH



Carl Getsinger, 21, fiddle

1902

Emil Marx, guitar



C CARL & LEONARD & LENA GETSINGER 1902



Above: From back of photo — “This home is still on Lester Cranberry Co. Built 1890s. Seven families lived in this home up to 1999. In the small building was a store at harvest.”

At left this page: Tickets given to represent berries picked, later to be exchanged at the store for goods.

Below, harvesting cranberries with hand-held rakes, early 1900s.



Our 20th Century

An Interview Series

Clara Casper Dassow Freund

As told to Dave Engel

June 15, 2004
1400 River Run
Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.
(James Mason in attendance)

Her words, slightly edited

*In the center of Wisconsin
Where the giant trees once
stood
Oh, they carved a splendid
county
And of course they named it
Wood*

My folks were so in love
with Wood County, I learned
a poem about it. I thought it
was great.

*Her people all are fearless
They laugh at hardships
now
For the forest dark and
cheerless
Is followed by a plow*

When I learned it, I was about in fifth
grade. Who wrote it, I don't know.

I was born right here in the town of
Sherry, Wood County, in 1907, so I am
96 years old. My mother and dad raised
a family of thirteen. I was fifth from the

bottom, seventh from the top.

My dad was Henry Casper. He was born
in Brown County up toward Oconto. He
was German.

My mother was Anna Noyan. She was
born in Green Bay. They're Holland. When
they came to this country, the name was
Noyanette. It was Belgium, wherever my
mother's folks were born.

My mother and her
parents had a farm
in Bay Settlement,
near Green Bay.
They skated to go to
dances, so somehow
or another she and
Henry met.

All I know is,
my dad was a
woodsman. He was
25 and my mother
was 22 when they
got married in 1895
in the cathedral on
Irwin street in Green
Bay.

Somehow they
found out there was
standing timber to
buy in Wood county.

They had a boy and a girl when they came.

My mother and dad never told us too
much. They talked to each other in Holland
or German and we didn't know what they
were saying.

My older sister, Julia, tells about it. She
married a Bankenbush.

The second oldest was Pete, the one that
got killed.





Clara, third from the right. "The rest of the kids and three more to be born. Dad sitting on porch, Mom in doorway but you can't see it."

That was in Racine. He was 20. He went downtown to buy a present for his older sister's birthday on the 13th of September, 1919. He was on a bicycle when an army truck hit him and killed him. I've got his picture in the casket.

The other children, in order, were Henry, Rose, Pauline, John, Agnes, Betty, me, Josephine, Genevieve, Frances and Alice. *Das is alles.*

Home Place

A few years after Henry and Anna got married, they came to Wood County and bought 80 acres of standing timber, the lake and the babbling brook for \$900.

The farm was located off "C" on what we called the County Line Road [Wood County Highway S] as it runs toward Milladore. The farm was six miles from Rudolph and three

miles south of Milladore.

The house had two bedrooms upstairs and a great big attic we could have made into bedrooms but never did. As kids grew up, they got married and left so we got along.

There were two bedrooms downstairs, a large kitchen, a dining room and a living room.

On the farm, the folks never had a lot of cows. I don't think ever over twenty.

We had work horses, Barney and Gene and Ben and a big gray one we called Jim. I know him because he stepped on my foot.

The babbling brook was there and it babbled into the lake. It was behind the barn. We kids used to run through it. There was a well for the cattle to drink from.

We took all our milk to that cheese factory on the Holland road. I think that was Bankenbush's.

We always got around with a pony and what they call a top buggy. There's another wagon, a light wagon, with a seat in the front and a seat in the back, horse-driven.

The folks never had light until I was about ten or eleven. Then they got electric.

Saturday nights, we had a great big washtub; each one gets in there to get a bath. Water was heated on a wood stove.

We shopped in Milladore; Rudolph was too far. Milladore looked like Vesper, looked like Rudolph, Arpin, all the little bitty places out there.

We had a blacksmith shop. They could buy iron and he had a forge that they put coal in. I remember a little of that. They would pump that thing up and down.

My dad was a very good blacksmith. When they made the merry-go-round, he made all those wires. The merry-go-round was bigger than this room. It had five seats. Us kids

enjoyed it until my dad had to tear it down.

They had a donkey in the center to pull it around. Sometimes the donkey would get real stubborn and wouldn't move so they had to get a pony. I guess the way Mom tells me, they always charged five cents a ride for each person.

They had sulky races. They would race two miles up and two miles back on the road. I have never seen it.

That road got plenty muddy. I used to think, couldn't they make something so it wouldn't be muddy? And they did. Now it's blacktop.

Across the street, they used to have ball games.

Saloon

He did good on the farm until asthma got the best of him. That's why he started Casper's Saloon and Dance Hall.

We had a living room but that turned into a saloon. It was big enough to handle enough so



the folks made a living. He built an ice house so they could keep the beer in ice on tap for the saloon. There was a lot of sawdust there so they could put ice up for the summer to cool the beer. That's what my folks told me. We kids used to play in the ice house, throw sawdust.

Then they built a cement one and it was nice and we used it as an ice box too. It was six-by-six with a big thick door.

Bill Henke came all the way from Rapids with a double team of horses and brought out the beer. That's what they said. I don't remember it.

At that time there were no ladies allowed in the saloon, just men, very strict.

Dance Hall

We run a dance hall on the farm.

My dad was a violinist. He had a real good violin that his parents had brought back from Germany. They just had a drum and an

accordion. Reidels was the orchestra. The round barn on the way to Milladore was Reidel's

For the dance hall, they had this great big thing like a frying pan. They call it carbon lights. You'd scratch something and it would light.

Who came? Most of the farmers, lots of farmers, all the way to Milladore: Jadacks, Harmicek, Hardina, Bierman.

We had very nice neighbors.

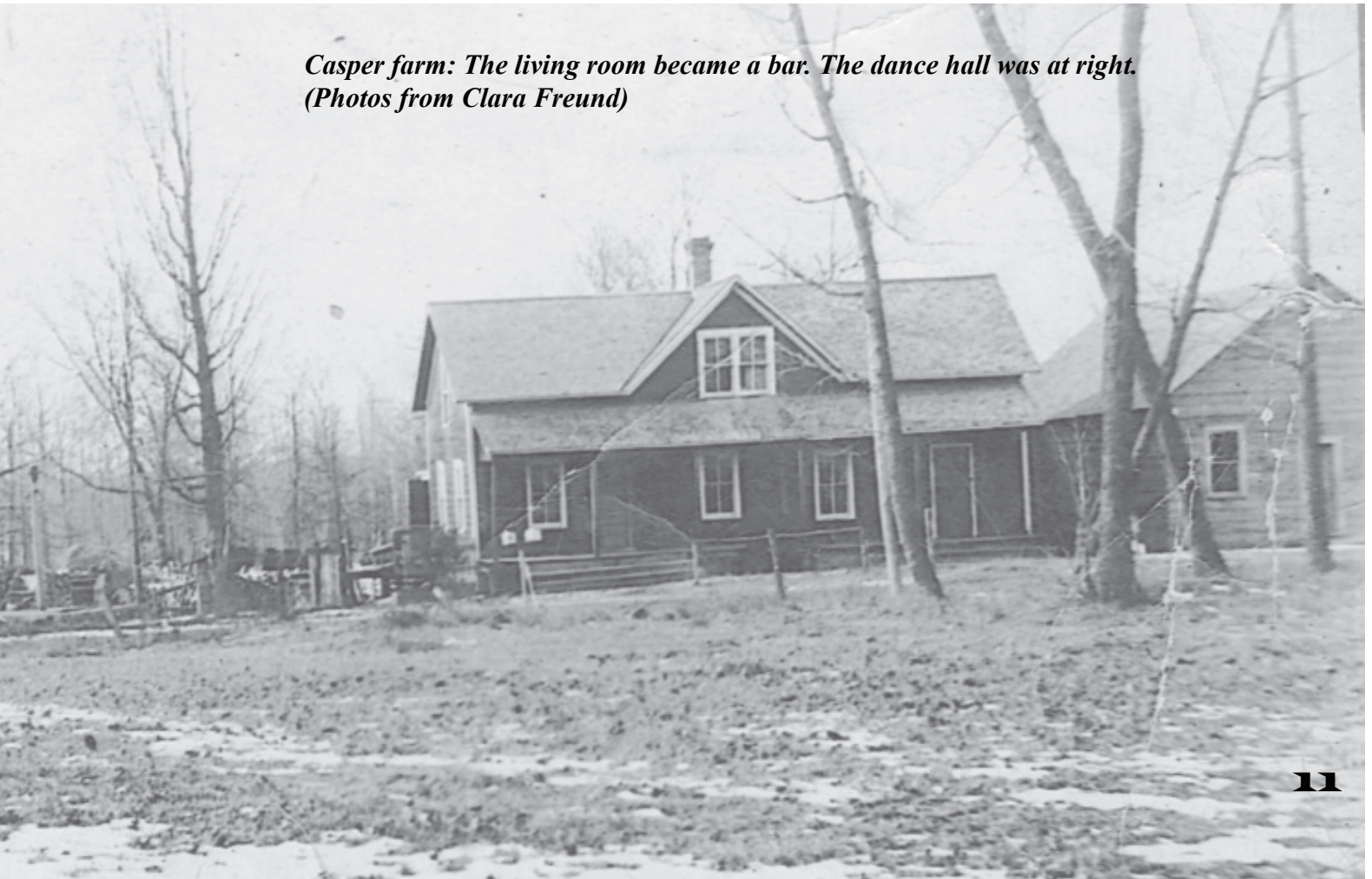
Quists.

My mom took very sick when I was born. She had to go to Green Bay. She wouldn't go to any doctor but the Minnehan brothers because she worked for them when she was a girl. She went to them for her gall bladder operation.

Quists came and took the baby and that was me.

In 1918, when Prohibition came in, we kept

*Casper farm: The living room became a bar. The dance hall was at right.
(Photos from Clara Freund)*



the dance hall open for a while.

Some some of the soldiers were coming home and celebrated at our dance hall.

My dad wasn't well then. He had a little stroke on his left side.

There was a nice bar, and a big back bar with mirrors all around. I remember it at the auction where they sold all that stuff.

Dance Halls

After the folks closed their place, we used to go to the Mancl dance hall in Milladore and Sherryland Ballroom in Sherry.

We girls were very popular because there was always a bunch of us and we knew how to dance. We thought that was great, when we were nine or ten years old, to dance with the older men. Waltzes were popular, hop waltzes. "Oh, You Beautiful Doll," [1911] was one song I remember.

Mancl's had a tavern and an upstairs dance hall. That burned too. Rudolph had a big dance hall. That's when the Bloniens owned it.

John Blonien was my husband's cousin. His ring finger was so large that a ring the size of a quarter was too small.

My second husband had big fingers too. We had a cousin who couldn't put his whole hand in his pocket.

Lone Maple

We went to Lone Maple school. It was three miles from our place. You go up to Kuentjes corner, Tony Kuentjes. Then a mile west [to Section 35].

It was far enough so the folks had to take us. Dad built a regular little cabin for us and we had a horse that hauled us to school. We put hot stones in for the winter to keep our feet warm.

We had fun with that horse. In the winter time, he'd get rheumatism or something and get stuck in the ditch. We'd have to help him out.

One of the teachers at Lone Maple went with my brother for a while. She was a good educated lady and my brother never had more than eighth grade so they broke up.

Rudolph

Dr. Jackson was our doctor. He was from Rudolph. Later, when I worked at the infirmary I took care of him. He was old and barely remembered the Casper farm.

My parents were Catholic. We went to church in Rudolph. When we got out of grade



Casper Saloon



"These are the threshers. That's my dad in the center and one of my brothers."

school, we had to go to Sister school to be confirmed.

Father Van Sever was the priest. I was just a little six-year-old then.

The old church was on the hill. I think that's 5th Avenue today. That's where I made my first communion. The church was in Rudolph. I made my solemn communion, then I was confirmed and all the way through.

In between grades, we would have to go to Rudolph for school. At the Sister school, we had a nun for a teacher. We would go for a whole week at a time.

Father Wagner was our priest. When we'd go to school there, we used to have to help him. He'd break up bottles. We'd have to put them in a kiln and make colors and burn

them until they'd pop. He'd make different things for the Grotto. I remember helping with a lot of that stuff.

Father Wagner came and got us. He was driving a pretty nice car. He'd go up and turn at the corner.

There's a little creek running through there. The thrashing machine broke down there once. Just above that is a road that goes east. He had to pick up the Sprangers and the Doughtys and all of them on that Holland Road.

He picked up as many as he could load in his car; but we walked six miles home every night.

Father Wagner was well-liked. He was a wonderful priest but we were scared we might say something wrong and get punished.

Hotel Witter

I was fourteen when I graduated from grade school. We didn't go to high school. We had to stay help the folks on the farm.

A girlfriend a little older wanted to go to work and I went with her. I was 16 years old. When we went to get the job my folks took us to Rudolph and we took the train. It was the first time I ever rode the train.

I couldn't work to amount to anything because I was too young. I got a job as a salad girl. She got a job at that restaurant near the depot, making salads and so on

At the hotel, I stayed in a room with a bunch of ladies and we had a head lady that they called a mom to watch all the girls, take care of them, see that they stayed in the rooms and behaved themselves.

The only name I remember of one I had to work on was Starks. They had a big convention-like and I had to wait on table.

I remember a black kid at the hotel, climbing between a part of a building this way and a part this way and he was jumping from one part to the other.

I told him I would tell Mr. Daniels.

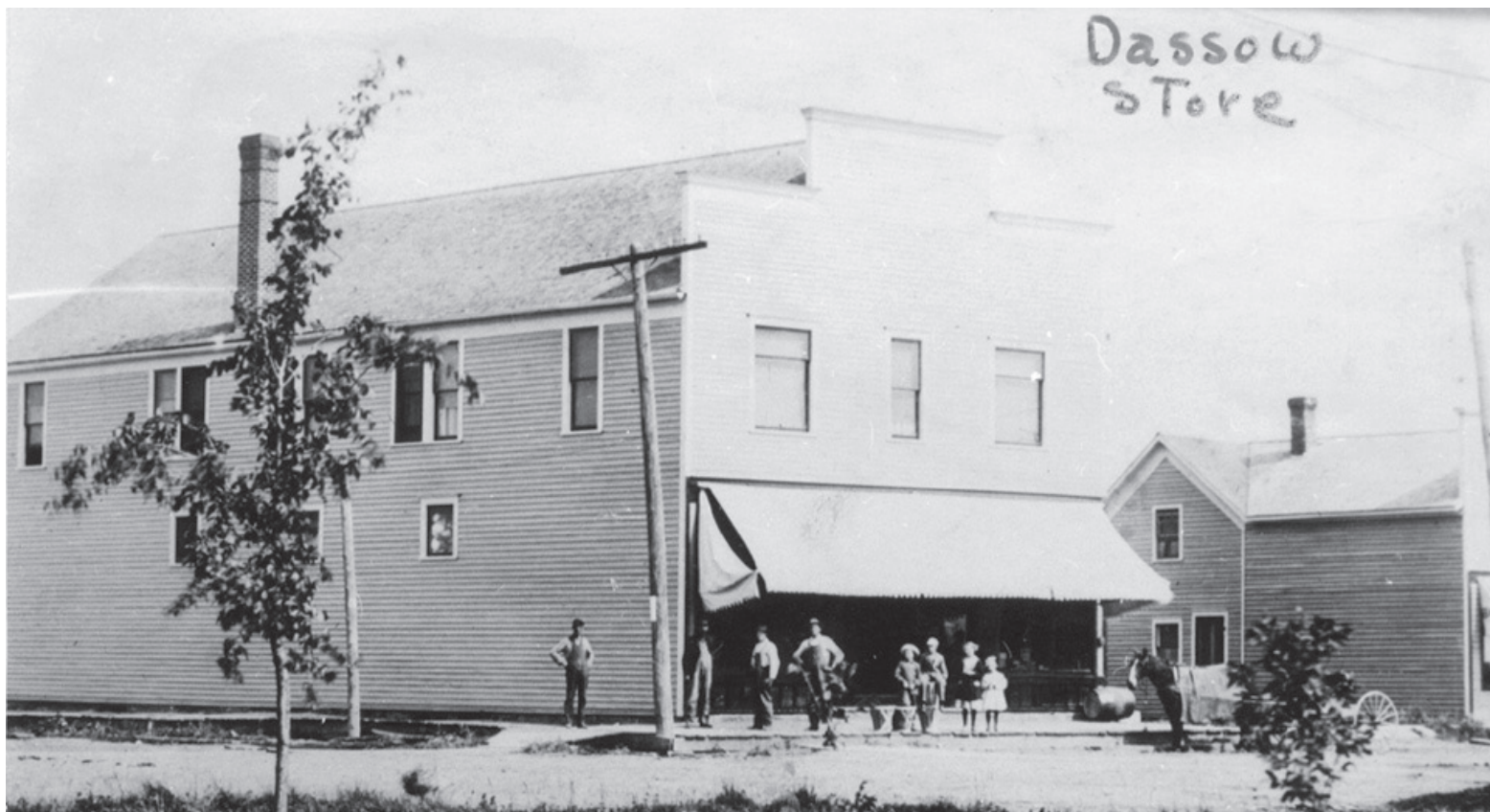
He said, "Go ahead."

In spring, my mom and dad came and got me and wanted me to stay home. I had younger sisters and had to take care of them.

Continuation School

Mr. Daniels was operating the hotel. He was a nice man. He's the one helped me go back to school. He had to encourage me or otherwise I couldn't stay there. He didn't pay for it; my folks took care of that.

Out on the farm in those days there was no education. So that's how I happened to get my education at the "continuation school." It was in Rapids. I think they called it the Normal.



Elmer

I was the farmer's daughter that met the merchant's son and got married. That was Elmer Dassow. He was with his dad in Dassow's grocery store and feed warehouse in Vesper.

I was only about 16. We were young kids at a dance in Sherry and we were throwing wax balls at one another and I hit him in the face somehow with that wax ball. He came and bawled me out for it and that started it.

He had been a sailor on a sub and somehow or other the sub went down and they were six weeks underwater before they could. Something went wrong with the motor but the subs usually have enough air so they can live for a while.

I got married in 1924 at the age of 16. He was a Lutheran, I was Catholic. We got married in Vesper Lutheran church. We raised the kids as Lutheran. Later on, I went back to the Catholic church.

We were married about 27 years.

Vesper

At the time we bought the store from Grandpa Dassow, it was called Clover Farm.

We lived above the store. We had groceries and sixty meat lockers. We sold dry goods, material, notions. Work there, sure I did. We had different ones that helped out between the children.

Where was it? In the middle of Vesper! We were right across from the park. The road was between us. Across was George Horn's hardware and Nick Zieher's tavern. Nick Zieher and Margaret, his wife, were very close friends

Elmer Klawitter's meat market was on the other side. There was Dunn's grocery store and Bean's grocery store. And Doc Whitehorn. Dr. Hartsough, the veterinarian.

And Pagel, he had the shoe store.

Then there was Woodruff. They had the lumber, skids, whatever they are called.

Lawrence Oliver was a photographer.

He was the baby and the only child that the Olivers had.

When I knew them, they were just living there in a big home. My one son had his picture taken by Oliver when he graduated from high school.

We ran the store until 1950, when we sold to Chicago people but it came back and another person bought it but they couldn't take care of it and it came back again so we tore it down.

We had three sons: Edgar, the oldest, an engineer.

Robert, with North Central airlines, Minneapolis, also an engineer.

Dale, who you know from Consolidated.

Freund

After Vesper, I came to Rapids. I was a practical nurse. I worked six-and-a-half years at Wood County infirmary. Then I worked at the hospital for five years. When I met Vince, he said, "No more work."

*So now would you come with me
To the county I love best
This county in Wisconsin
With milk and honey blessed*

My second husband Vincent Freund was from Rudolph. They had a big farm.

He was strict Catholic. We were married in 1969 at St. Vincent De Paul in Rapids.

*We'll help you to be happy
Just let us show you how
And you may make your home with us
And learn to guide that plow*

Hurrah for Wood County!

1952

Identification of photo in May *Artifacts* courtesy of Nancy Droste Schmidt, LHS Class of '63. Tribune clipping says 17th and Oak Street neighborhood, "Vacation fun."



Nancy Droste

Vickey Mortenson

Sharon Mortenson

John Droste, 5

Jim Parker or Jerry Parker

Ron (Speedy) Winters

Dolores (Tootie) Alft

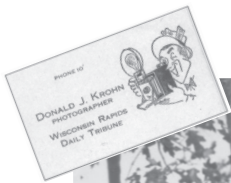
Francis (Mule) Alft

? Joe Frederickson, 4

Roger (Butch)

Babcock

Below: Daily Tribune employees picnic. Looks like Lake Wazeecha. *Don Krohn photo.*





Camp, indoor and outdoor, circa 1950. Above, note log walls and pool table. Below, early L.L. Bean-style roughing it. Who are these happy campers?



John Vicker

In 2001, John Vicker, Wisconsin Rapids, introduced his book, Poems and Stories with a description of himself. "Adopted, unknown, decent, friendly, Christian. lover of cookies, ice cream, cheese and hugs. Might have kin all around the world. Who knows? Father of 10 kids. Husband of two wives (not at the same time). Who feels good looking for rocks and making Kachina dolls. Likes to run around the house naked and drink Diet Coke. Who needs to be loved, money to spend and a Guardian Angel to watch him all day. Who gives advice when not needed and writes poetry for anyone. Who fears nothing except doctors and monthly bills.

The Dormitory

When seen through the eyes of a little ten year-old boy, the dormitory at St. Clare's was huge. There were four rows of beds with eight beds in each row. They were old iron beds painted white. They had high rail sides that were chipped and scratched from teeth marks of the little kids crying and looking for somebody to pick them up and hold them.

The smaller beds were down on one end by the Sister's 8 x 19 bedroom. It was her job to take care of the younger kids at night. When she heard them crying she would come out with a hanky to dry their tears and rock them back to sleep.

Around eight or nine PM all the kids said their prayers and got into their beds. By ten PM all was quiet. The older boys who had a flashlight (which was gotten by trading toys with the neighborhood farm kids) would hide under the covers and read old comic books. Once in a while you could hear a giggle or snort and Sister would peek through her door and say, "Be quiet out there."

A Sister once told us that we snored in different pitches. With 30 kids snoring away that was a lot of noise. She also told us if we all got in tune she could make a lot of money using us as background music in the Church choir. She would have the little squeaks from the little kids in the juvenile section and the low rumbles from the older boys.

Our dorm always had a bad smell to it, even though it had eight large windows in it. If you went to the bathroom at night you would never get lost. You just had to follow your nose. Years later we kind of figured it was from all the beans and potatoes that they fed us. The large gardens we had were full of everything, mostly beans.

I was there for a visit fifty years later and they still had the windows open and to this day nobody sleeps in that old dormitory. There's a sign above the doorway and it says, "Rest in Peace."

The Years to 1930

After leaving the foundling home with my new Mom and Dad in 1923 we moved to a new home at 113 Superior Avenue in Stevens Point, Wis. It was a wonderful life. For me it was play, play all day and night. I had a large sandbox, a wading pool, tent, and toys coming out of my ears. All the neighbor kids came over to play with me. My new Mom kissed and hugged me all day and my Dad took over at suppertime. But all good things in your life will some day come to an end and mine did too. My Dad died three years later from a mastoid infection and operation.

My mother took over the tavern business in Stevens Point and hired two bartenders to help out. She really worked hard taking care of me all day and tending bar from 5 PM to 1 AM every day. A young neighbor girl took care of me at night.

When I was 9, my Mom sold the bar in Stevens Point and rented a farmhouse by the Westside viaduct in Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. She had a small bar, fixed up shelves for a back bar and opened the place up in 1929. It was too far to walk to school, no car, nobody to take care of me, yep, back to the orphanage for six years. But maybe that was the best for me. I think otherwise I would have been listening to all the nasty stories and bad words and having at those good-looking girls chasing me all around the place.

In the next five years I got to come home for two or three days once in a while. In 1935, I passed 8th grade, got my walking papers, and came home for good. I ended up tending bar for my Mom. I was up at 8 AM to clean the mess up from the night before. I tended the bar from 10 AM to 3 PM and then my Mom took over. As we lived out of the City limits, I did not have to go to high school. That's what makes me so smart today. That's what I call an education!

Moccasin Creek

In the thirties, when my mother ran the Viaduct Tavern, there was a beautiful little creek called *The Moccasin*. It snaked down from up north across Highway 13-73 behind *The Edgetown*, *The Coach*, and our tavern. Then it went behind Strawberry George's and the Romanski Farm. It was a clear water creek with a sandy bottom.

Besides us, the kids from West Grand Avenue came out to swim. There were the Kehrberg's, Whitrock's, Zinda's and Shymanski's, just to name a few. We would swim in the afternoon after the water got warmer. We used to have sand races where you would fill your swimming suit up with wet sand from the creek, line up on George Road, and race down the road with fifty pounds of wet sand flopping around from your waist to your knees.

My mother used to say, "I don't know what happened to your swimming suit, it's all stretched out of shape."

Another game we played was horse and rider. A smaller boy would ride on a bigger boy's shoulders. We would climb on our horses and push each other off into the water.

There were no snakes in the Moccasin Creek, only angleworms and frogs. If there were snakes, we chased them out to the swamp.

When we heard the Green Bay and Western train coming, we would all run under the trestle and when that big old steam engine rolled over it, the water rippled like there was an earthquake. We would yell at the top of our lungs like crazy. I think the engineers knew that we kids were there, because they always blew steam when they went over the trestle and we couldn't see anything for at least ten minutes. If any of the kids were so scared that they wet their swimming suits, who would know the difference?

From Historic Point Basse

A few words from a ghost

WAKELY'S DAUGHTER WRITES FROM 'POINT BOSS'

By Mark Scarborough

Ghosts tell us almost everything we know about history. A woman who scribbled a few words nearly 140 years ago is still talking today about what life was like in the 1860s world of Point Basse, a sleepy Wisconsin River town that is best known these 21st Century days as the home stomping grounds of Wood County pioneers Robert and Mary Wakely.

Martha Jane Wakely (1837-1895), the third-born child of Robert and Mary, married a fellow named Henry Snyder.

Wed sometime before 1860, Martha Jane and Henry show up that year on a U.S. Census as parents of two-year-old daughter Alice and 10-month-old son Robert. Henry, then 27, was a day laborer claiming a personal estate of \$100. Martha was just 23.

Before the 1870 Census taker rolled into town, 37-year-old Henry and 32-year-old Martha Snyder found prosperity. There were then five children (with Henry, Chancy and John making their appearances). Henry Snyder Sr. moved up the economic ladder to "farmer," owning real estate valued at \$2,500 and personal estate valued at \$700. Martha Jane earned a respectable mention in the census for "keeping house."

Thanks to Steve Erickson, a New Mexico accountant who traces his ancestry to Martha

Jane and Henry, volunteers at the Historic Point Basse Inc. living history society now know a little more about the 1864 lives of these two early Wakely family members. (HBPI members are devoted to restoring Robert Wakely's 1840s home and recreating the village that tavern-keeper Wakely once served as postmaster). Erickson's family kept a cache of about 100 Civil War-era letters, mainly exchanged between Martha

Jane and Henry. At least one of the letters, however, came from the pen of old man Robert Wakely himself. (I'll write about that in the next installment of this history). At one time, the original letters were stuffed into a coffee can.

During his May 2004 visit to the Wakely house grounds, Erickson gave copies of some of these letters to Mike Hittner, a former president of the group. Erickson promised to send copies of other family letters in the near future.

Mary Jane's September 11, 1864, letter from "Point Boss," dispatched to "My Dear Precious Henry," is a charming example from this collection. For her distant husband, whose wartime absence might be explained by military service, the wife chronicled her troublesome domestic chores and her irksome health.

Mary Jane's phraseology leaves a bit to the imagination, so I have tossed in a few words



Mary and Robert Wakely

here and there, in brackets, where the modern-day reader is likely to fall between the lines.

"I will ... tell you how I have Buised myself to day so far," Mary Jane writes. "I got up this morning [and] my head ache and I don't feel very well myself and the first work was to drive the catle [cattle] out of my garden [and] the next the Hogs ... and that is the why [way?] I have buised myself all day

"Oh my head ache Badly and oh I hope heaven will ever bless you and protect you from the hands of the enemy is the sincere wish of your ever true wife Martha J. Snyder.

"I could go out rideing with you once and a while but now we have to Stay at home," Martha Jane complained to Henry. "Chancey [her brother, Chauncey Wakely?] is about Selling his place for five hundred dollars Pa [her father, Robert Wakely?] has had the use of it this season." Martha Jane writes that either Robert or Chauncey "has got his corn and oats over on this side" [of the Wisconsin River?], adding that the 1864 potato crop "will be very good if the hogs let them alone."

Chickens also threatened crop goods, so they were "shut up," Martha Jane wrote. "I have made almost a barel of Pickles," she told Henry. "They are very good if they only keep well ... I worked to[o] hard yesterday Pa and Ma and Ella [Martha Jane's sister?] and myself took care of my corn yesterday what little there was of it ... about 16 bushel of ears that will winter our chickens and make a little meal, won't it [?] ... Monday I have got to help them ...

"I dreamed last night that you come home and I thought I was going up stairs and I hurt my foot," she wrote. "I set down on the stairs and was cryin with the pain ... when you came to me and Said Martha did you get hurt.

"I told you I did not care for my sore foot if you had only come home again I thought you was sorry for me and I was so glad to think my dear, dear Henry had come home ... Oh Henry don't you wish you could see us to day I know you do ...

"I answered your last letter last Sunday it was dated the 25th of Aug. I expect Chancey down from the Rapids to day I hope he will bring a letter from you. I hope Atlanta is taken we heard it was last week but we do for Sertin [certain] we have not had any late papers ..."

Each "new" intimate glimpse like this one helps us connect with a place far away yet almost within our reach. With a little help from Mary Jane Wakely Snyder's ghost, historians at Robert Wakely's old house on Wakeley Road step a little closer to the "real world" of 1860s Point Basse.

A former president of Historic Point Basse Inc., Mark Scarborough left the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune in August 2003 to become a full time student at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He hopes to work again, if the creek don't rise and President Bush will let him, as a high school English teacher.



History at McMillan

by Don Litzer

Head of Adult Services

McMillan Memorial Library

At McMillan Memorial Library, as in many public libraries, historic newspapers comprise a core component of its local history collection. Newspapers, regardless of how well or poorly they manage their task, are the most complete, regular, and in many cases, the only chronicle of a community's collective memory.

Newspaper runs are significant whether complete or fragmentary. Even when only a few issues of a newspaper survive, they represent, almost iconically, the development and maturity of a community that may have since blossomed and/or faded into obscurity.

It's also easy for media-bombarded twenty-first century folk to forget that, until radio became a widespread medium in the 1920s or so, newspapers and other printed media owned a monopoly on readers' window to the world around them. Wisconsin Rapids residents — in their roles as shoppers, as citizens, and neighbors — relied on local newspapers for local information until WFHR began broadcasting in 1940.

Notable efforts in recent years to use historical newspapers include:

- A major project by the Heart O'Wisconsin Genealogical Society, with the Library's support, completed in the mid-1990s: an index to birth, marriage and death notices published in south Wood County newspapers from 1858 through 1906. This index provides an important

complement to civil records of births, marriages, and deaths, the recording of which was not mandated by law in Wisconsin until 1907.

- A great deal of the research synthesized by historian Dave Engel into the narratives known as *River City Memoirs* and the rest of his historical oeuvre has been based on published newspaper accounts.

- Former *Daily Tribune* reporter Mark Scarborough, in historical articles including his *Over the Rapids* column, used newspaper accounts as the basis or to support his work.

- In a current research project awaiting final organization and publication, volunteers involved in the Rudolph History Project have gleaned countless articles from local newspapers relating to Rudolph and its inhabitants since the town's establishment in 1857.

Even these efforts, however ambitious and innovative, only scratch the surface of the possibilities for mining historically significant data from newspapers.

It would be indeed wonderful were modern technology to come to the rescue and south Wood County newspapers be made available in digital format, obviating the need for bulky and crumbling paper or the imperfect medium of microfilm. Progress has been made in recent years for newspapers of national scope, and on a scattered basis for newspapers with less universal interest. However, the large physical dimensions of newspaper sheets, the sheer massive quantity of newspapers produced, and lingering questions about the backward and forward compatibility of computer software all limit the progress and potential of digitization to merely access newspapers more easily, not to mention permanently archiving this information.

All newspapers may someday be available digitally, permanently, and in full-image format, at least on a current basis, with persistent effort towards working into the massive backlog of pre-digitally published work. However, even when that occurs, the next step — that is, to trust that digital newspapers can actually replace print and microfilm archives — requires a leap of faith in technology and resources that may not be prudent to take for years.

In this light, as a steward of our area's collective memory, the Library has striven to 1) determine as best possible the extent of the historical record—in this case, what newspapers were published in the south

Wood County area, 2) identify which of those newspapers are extant, and 3) ensure that the availability of these newspapers is available to future researchers by having them microfilmed, still the best overall means of preserving newspapers as historical record.

Future installments of this column will describe the Library's recent efforts to preserve a significant part of south Wood County's historical newspaper record, a project successfully completed, thanks to many individuals and organizations, including the South Wood County Historical Corp.



c. 1950



From the Museum

Thank you to the following:

- The Master Gardeners, for the invitation to be a part of the Garden Walk and for the wind chime.
- Berg's Lawn Service for doing last minute work on the grounds for the Garden Walk.
- Breuner Timber Products for the discount on the mulch.
- Serenity Gardens, EMR, and Reeves Greenhouse for the discount on plants.
- The Wisconsin Rapids Police Department for doing extra patrol around the museum during the Fourth of July fireworks.
- Signe Jorgenson for updating the museum's website.

The staff has given 13 tours to date with more scheduled. They have also completed the kitchen, silver, and medical collections along with updating computer files.

Reminder: The museum's last day for this season will be Sunday, September 5. After this date, if you have any questions please call the museum office at 423-1580.

-Karen Pecher



**South Wood County Historical Corp.
540 Third Street South
Wisconsin Rapids WI 54484**

To:

All the History that Fits

The May 2004 issue of *Artifacts* (Volume II #1) introduced a format that would allow maximum coverage of south Wood County history. The current issue, "Volume II #2," doubles the size to 24 pages.

The editor hopes to complement *Artifacts* with the newly-revived *River City Memoirs* column in the *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*. The *Tribune* stories, which appear weekly, are not illustrated, whereas this quarterly forum is a natural for visuals. Embracing the spirit of synergy, contributions from McMillan Memorial Library and Historic Point Basse, Inc. speak for our neighbors in the historical community.

Representatives of other like-minded groups are invited to follow suit. Individuals may also consider submitting reminiscences, memoirs, photographs, research papers and documentation for possible publication in future issues.

To receive *Artifacts* four times per year while supporting local history, join the South Wood County Historical Corp. by sending \$15 to the Third Street address below.

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