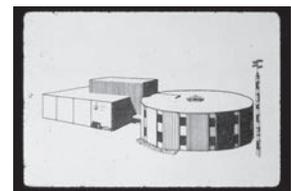


# ARTIFACTS



Above, Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune*, Version 1973, October 8: Width of paper - 9 columns. President's message by Phil Brown, 2; Office Report by Lori Brost, 3; Polish West Side, Interview with Peter Frede, 4-11; LHS by Ed Severson, 12-13; Uncle Dave's new book, 14; Grand Avenue photos, 15-17; *Daily Tribune* 1970s, 18-23; Car Dealerships by Bill Hartley, 24-27; Vesper Fireman's Picnic by Scott Brehm, 28-31.

1970s *Daily Tribune* logo



## Museum works hard to maintain legacy

By Phil Brown  
SWCHC President

Greetings from the South Wood County Historical Museum!

This past winter, we have undertaken several important projects to preserve our facility. Having previously rewired the third floor, we completed the electrical upgrade of the first and second floors and installed state-of-the-art, energy-efficient light bulbs.

Over the years, the interior walls of the foundations in older homes begin to crumble and flake away, so we hired a local masonry company to prepare the walls in the basement and layer a Portland cement product and sealer over the old foundation, followed by waterproof paint. With the rooms cleared out for this project, we also put a fresh coat of paint on the floors. To say the least, the old basement is looking pretty proud these days.

This spring, the Wood County Master Gardeners and the Evening Garden Club have been hard at work. The grounds of the Museum have become a showpiece for the community and we appreciate the hard work of these volunteers.

This summer we will be discussing a recurrent problem. Flat roofs in Wisconsin really take a beating over the years and it's been about 15 years since we addressed our own situation. While we are at it, we also plan to touch up some of the painted areas of the exterior. The Museum is irreplaceable and our Board of Directors is dedicated to preserve this historic landmark.

Thank you to everyone who supports our efforts not only to preserve and share the rich local history of the south Wood County area, but to maintain our beautiful facility and grounds.

These projects would not be possible without the support of our membership and of those who give so generously above and beyond the basic level.

*May 18, 2015, photo at left could have been taken any time in the century-plus since it was built. That's how well our Museum has been maintained.*

SWCHC photo by UD



## Swingers, Brownies, & Birdseyes

By Lori Brost  
Museum Administrator

Sunday, September 7, wrapped up our 2014 season and kicked off our fall and winter downtime around the Museum—though “down” is not exactly the word I would use to describe the past few months.

On May 24th, we will kick off our 2015 season and it guarantees to be even more active than winter.

The second floor is in for some changes.

We have recently received a collection of cameras spanning a wide range of years from Mitch Schlagenhaft which will be displayed in the Toy Room. Updates will be made to the Country Kitchen to help depict the differences in running a household in the past versus the conveniences of the modern day.

In the Alcove, we are adding a “Birds Eye View” pictorial display focusing on aerial photos dated between 1960 and 1972 and showcasing some of the more well-known buildings from those times. These images offer a view of a Rapids many remember fondly as children or young adults and a new view for those who missed seeing these wonderful structures.

To assist with these projects and some additional changes, I will be working with our intern, Alison Bruener, a Junior at Northland College, for the summer months. Alison will also be instrumental in helping me accomplish an update to the Depot exhibit in the basement and assembling a traveling educational exhibit utilizing some of our Native American projectiles and artifacts.

While this season may start a little behind the ball with a lot to accomplish, we continue to have the excitement and enthusiasm to make this a very successful season.



*Kodak Brownie Starmeter  
Uncle Dave learned on a  
similar Starmite.*



*Who didn't have an old “box”  
camera around the house?*

*Polaroid  
Swinger*



*Kodak  
Brownie  
with  
flash  
attachment*



*niech cię Bóg błogosławi*

## Peter Frede: the Polish West Side

*Interview with Dave Engel*

April 27, 1998 @ 1230 High Street

For the South Wood County Historical Corp.

*In Pete's words, edited:*

I was born January 13, 1902, on a farm in the town of Seneca.

My parents were Francis and Mary. The name was Freda, then. Somewheres along the line, it got changed to Frede. I don't know why.

I was pretty young when my dad died, so I didn't know too much. I don't know what he died of. It was around 1911, 1912, something like that.

I was only ten, eleven years old, see. My mother sold the farm and moved to town. They come here from Milwaukee where I think they had some uncles, aunts.

They worked in town here and then they bought a farm and started farming, like anybody else. I suppose they came in from the old country, Poland. I suppose they had friends here when they come.

Do I remember the farm? Oh heck, yes. I chased cows there. I was eleven, twelve years old when we moved off of the farm. You just go on the Seneca road, across the Moccasin Creek. There's a school house there. Pine Grove.

I went to school there. That's where our land started, right on the corner there.

They had dairy cattle. We planted a lot of rye. We sold it, to town. That was tax money.

We always put in eight, ten acres of potatoes. If one didn't produce, why, the other one did. Rye or potatoes.

There was four boys and four girls in the family. Of the girls, Hattie was the youngest, then Annie, and Helen and Mary. The boys were Joe, Frank, John and me. I was the youngest one in the family.

My brother, Joe, he left early.

First he worked in Port Edwards. He walked from the farm when he was 14 years old.

**St. Lawrence**

Years ago, SS. Peter and Paul was the only Catholic church here. St. Lawrence was built, 1908, 1906, around in there.

They had one church there first, then that burned. Then they built the schoolhouse and in one room upstairs was the church. I went to school there, in that building. That was on that corner there.

After they built the church across the road, then they used that for a schoolhouse. It ain't too many years ago where they tore that down. Then they built this other one.

My folks, all they could talk was Polish and German. They come from Poland and one part of the country was German and one part was Polish. Krakow. And Poznan was another town that they talked about.

Quite a few of the Polish people followed the old country way. My mother used to make Polish food. I know they used to make their own home sausage.

At St. Lawrence, you had to read Polish and learn Polish when you went to school. Otherwise, you couldn't make your communion. Catechism was in Polish. It was kind of tough going, to learn and read when you come off of a country school where it was all English.

There were so many priests coming and going, I don't remember them all. For teachers, they had sisters then. The oldest one was Sister Mary something. They stayed right in the schoolhouse.

I only had three or four blocks to go to school.

There were three rooms in there. There was two rooms downstairs, first grade and second grade in one room and third grade was in one room. Then there was fourth and fifth and sixth—and seventh and eighth upstairs, see.

We studied the same as we did in the other, country school. Reading. Spelling. We had a whole lot of spelling. And arithmetic, we had a lot of that.

That was all English. The only thing, you had some books in Polish you had to read, like the catechism.

You had to get along because the priest was the head of it. He had us in tack all the time.

Some of my Catholic school friends were Tony Benkowski and Joe, Stanley Schanock and the Andrews boys too, Jim and Ed.

There was 28, 30 kids in a room. You knew those kids well.

## Germans

When we moved on Tenth Avenue, there was a German church and the school there.

There was no problem getting along with the Germans. I had a lot of friends that was German. I had a friend that went to the Moravian church and one to the German church. They lived over there, right across from where I lived. Bill Kuehl was one and Cliff Mosher was another one.

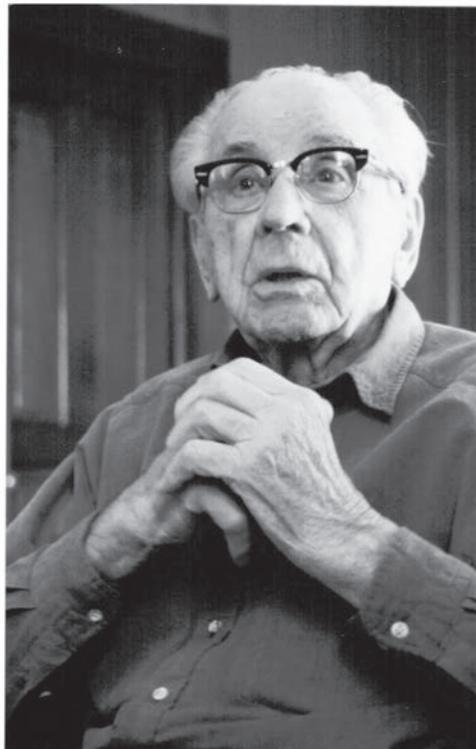
## Baseball

We played ball in the summertime on 10th Avenue where Ahdawagam has a parking lot now. That used to be a ball diamond in there.

That was a field. There was only one or two homes up in here, towards the tracks and on 17th Avenue.

High Street, right up here. It was just a dead end road; a trail walked in there. We had a makeshift diamond in there. Kind of rough. After a while, we got over by the Edison School, where the fire station is now. Right back in there, we played ball too.

There used to be a lot of guys here. The Vollerts, Ole Marx and Bill Kuehl and Clint. Art Plahmer lived on 12th Avenue. There was 20-some guys.



**Peter Frede**

*1998 photo by Uncle Dave*

## Oberbeck's

Years ago, there used to be a furniture factory here, where Ahdawagam, paperboard, is now on the east end. It was a two-story building. I quit school and worked there when I was 15 years old. The first World War had started and my two brothers went in the army, then I had to support my mother.

That was about 1916, 17, and my brothers went in the war and I quit.

I got 11 cents an hour working in Oberbeck's furniture factory.

They made chairs and dressers and everything. All wood furniture.

They started with lumber.

It was mahogany. A lot of that stuff was special wood. It was all solid wood. They didn't have no veneer then in them days.

I was taking off a machine where they sawed the boards. It was rough. They had planers. We had to do a lot of sanding. Hand work. All these chairs, on the side like that.

They treated it and painted it, whatever they did with it. That was another department. They had salesmen on the road selling, wherever they could ship it. Most of it, I suppose, went to bigger cities.

I started in the spring after school and worked all that summer, then I think in the fall, they closed up.

The war started and they was going to make a factory. The army was going to take that over and make war stuff in there.

### Hub & Spoke

Then I got a job in the MacKinnon wagon factory, where Gross Brothers [trucking] is now [660 W. Grand). The old man, name was MacKinnon. Hub and spokes factory.

I made the hub. My machine was where that nut goes on, on the outer hub. I put that in the machine and put the thing down and it ground that round thing out where that nut went on.

I worked ten hours, six days a week. We had Sunday off.

First, I got 75 cents, over there. I got \$1.10 a day over at Oberbeck's. At MacKinnon's, I got a dollar and a quarter a day, ten hours a day. We had to start ten minutes to seven. Then we got off Saturday night at five o'clock.

I didn't like that work, sanding over there in the furniture factory. That there [MacKinnon's], was all right. I had my own machine. The guy that made the hub, there were two guys at that machine. It worked from the outside.

They sawed these blocks out of a certain birch that come from up north and Colorado. They couldn't use this birch here because it wasn't the kind of birch they use. They all had to be big. If it was small, they made spokes out of it.

They had a machine that ground it right out. The spokes come right out.

They put the wagon and everything together here. Frank Pribbanow was the boss in the wagon factory. The spokes was put in, in the factory. Then they'd take the wheels in there and he'd paint 'em over there.

There must have been 50, 60, people there.

MacKinnon was there off and on. John Schnabel was superintendent. He come through there. Herman Bethke was the boss. You know Len Bethke? His dad was boss there.

I was 15 then.

When the war started, they started hiring women. My sister, Hattie, worked in the box factory for a while, she got a little money, she went to Milwaukee.

They had men running the machine and women had to take off and put it on these trays. There wasn't too much there for a woman to do. They was heavier work, see.

They sold the wagons all over. MacKinnon wagons. The farmers all bought some. They were these big lumber wagons, four-inch tires, steel frame. They'd get that hot then put it on there, then they'd shrink it. Then they stayed on.

I don't know who made these other ones; there was these small Democrats, they called them, inch-and-a-half tires only.

A wagon, I supposed, might have cost \$12, \$15, \$18. There was no tractors then. This was about 1913, 14, 15, 16, 17.

### Badger Box

When they closed up, I went to work for Badger Box factory. I forget who the owner really was. There was some local stock in there.

Probably around 40 to 50 people worked there. They made piano boxes and sash and door window frames and doors.

We'd take 'em down, get 'em all sawed up, the ends and everything and put 'em all together and tie 'em together one box at a time and ship 'em out like that, carloads of them.

I and Len Olson, used to be on the police department, he lived right here. He was born and raised on 10th Avenue. When he got married, he built this house here. He was on the police department twenty-some years. Bill Sanger. They worked together. Web Berard. Tom Foley. All on the police department.

Badger Box hired a lot of kids and women. It was lighter work.

Where all those homes are now, where that chemical plant is in there, that was open field. That was 40 acres in there, all the way to Mead School. That school wasn't there then.

The factory was on 12th Avenue. There was big pond in there. The logs was shipped down into this pond and they'd come up to the conveyor to the sawmill.

First I worked out in the sawmill, riding carriage on the lumber, back and forth.

After we got through with the logs, then they put me inside. I was loading these piano boxes in cars. I and Len Olson. We got a dollar and a quarter a day. Ten hours and ten minutes a day.

You bet it was a long day. But you worked. There was no breaks or nothing then. You just worked, that's what it was. Work, work.

I worked there until it burned down.

The fire, see, the boiler was a big steam boiler and it had these big chutes overhead. They had a big fan up there and it come into the factory where you worked.

The wrong door opened up, the flame got in there and that fan took hold and the whole thing, the flame came right out.

We had a hell of a time getting out. You had to wear pretty good clothes to keep warm. I had my winter jacket and I took that and ran out and got through the side door.

Course it was all wood, dry. There was no saving that. She went down just like that.

Nobody got hurt there. That was before the war, I think. I was 16 then.

When the war ended, they had a big parade downtown. Old Doc Pomainville, he was the head of it and he was a good one. Everything shut down and everybody went to the parade.

## Downtown

We used to walk a little over two miles from the farm up to the street car. Then we get on the street car and take it downtown. We had to carry the groceries on the way back.

My dad was busy and they was thrashing; in them days, they had thrashing machines. They'd go all over and thrash out the rye and the oats and stuff. All the farmers would always go and help one another.

So in order to get some groceries I had to go with my mother to town. Mostly what we had to get was meat and maybe sugar and stuff like that.

We bought the meat downtown at Siewert and Edwards. The butcher shop was separated from the store. Right on Grand Avenue right next to Sam Church's drug store. Johnson Hills had meat too.

There was quite a few butcher shops around

town. Right across from the old city hall [441 W. Grand] was a butcher shop [440 W. Grand].

Remember Skinner Johnson? They had a pool hall right across from the city hall. Right along the tracks. I guess that was closed up when Romanski got a hold of that. He made a meat market out of that. That was back around 1932.

Yeah, I walked into taverns. We might drink a little wine then. You had to be 21 to get in. So we went in when we were 16, 17.

We had one certain place we always went in. It was where the main office of Consolidated is, just this way. That was part of the Mead Witter block, there was another block in there [later, River Block]. Old buildings. It was in the back of there. Kroll's tavern or Kroll's saloon. They were saloons then.

There was the Quick Lunch restaurant [243 W. Grand]. That was a good spot.

And one up here, Akey [650 W. Grand]. Right where Gross [trucking] is in there now. Up on this end. The old depot, remember where it was [720 W. Grand]? Akey's was downtown about a block.

We'd go to the show, get out at nine o'clock or ten o'clock and we'd always stop there for ice cream. Then he had dinners there too. Akey, Jim Brockman. The mother was the head in there too. Her name was Akey or was it Brockman? They both run it together. All the railroad men ate there.

We hanged around in the pool hall, yeah. At one time, it was up in there by the Quick Lunch. Then, years ago, there was one in the Mead Witter Block, across from Johnson Hill's. There used to be a pool hall in there. Fritz Hribernik and Pete when they came here to play ball, they started one downtown where Mrs. Fischer's got that [at 2nd Avenue], right in there. That was an old building then.

That was where the First National Bank used to be years ago. On that [east] end. When we come off of the farm that was the bank there yet. Until they built the one up on the end.

The bank was on the corner and Johnson Hills was there. We used to buy groceries there, right in there.

Then they had a kind of a little feed mill on the other side. There was a lot of little stores. A barber shop and a hardware shop.

Mike Nilles had a harness shop there. The old man had that. The young guy sold guns and shells and stuff like that. Sport Shop.

Then there was a drug store in there. Anderson and somebody else. Florence Mendyke [?] had a dress shop. On the end was the pool hall.

### Socializing

A lot of them started near beer. They had this wildcat beer they'd bring in from Tigerton. They had a brewery there. It wasn't like good beer but it was pretty good. Very little alcohol. They couldn't put too much alcohol in it.

When the beers came back in 1933, 1934, I was in business then. I started a business in thirty-two.

We didn't have too much money, in the first place. We worked for eleven cents an hour and you gave your money to your mother to support her and she'd give you 25 or 50 cents to spend for a Saturday night and Sunday; you didn't have too much to spend.

A girlfriend? Heck no. Couldn't support one. We kidded around. We'd meet them around town, probably go down to the park and sit around there. That's about all.

### Dredging

After the box factory burned, there was nothing around and I had to help my mother so I went dredging for Rood Construction. They had their main office downtown here. I was 17 then. I worked for them for three years.

My brother was dredging then already. We went all together on a train. They paid the fare way out there to Arlington, Minn., southwest of Minneapolis about sixty miles, towards Le Seuer. Frank Newman was the boss.

First I worked on the ground floor, then a guy quit. I was swinging the boom back and forth.

Sometimes there was an old bull ditch. Years ago, they had one of these plows, when they pulled a team of horses, way back before, they stopped the fires in these marshes and grass. They surveyed all through the wetland and we'd hit these ditches and cleaned and dug them all out.

I always sent my money home to my mother so she could live.

I helped my brother clean that ditch there then we worked at Fremont [Wis.]. We worked all one summer there, on the Wolf River. All the way to Dale. There were six or seven miles of dredging. From the Wolf River up around through the low lands. Zigzag through there up to Dale. My brother ran the machine. George Hill, Shaw Hill's dad, worked there. And a fella by the name of...what the heck is his name? Shaw Hill used to come out once in a while and help us.

### Consolidated

In the wintertime, we'd come home and get a job at Consolidated on the log pile. My brother and I went and put our names in and they come and called us to work.

That was 10 hours a day, carrying logs on your shoulder. In them days, they didn't have no jammers. You had to carry them out of a box car. Eight foot, two guys would take it. Four foot, you carried alone. Twenty-two cents an hour, we got. That's what I did, two winters out there.

We got less work when they didn't have any orders. The guys that were off the machines would come out and get a job outside.

Some guys couldn't take it. It was cold, you know. They'd quit.

After the dredging, I got a job one winter to Biron out in the yard. When they built that dam on that power house across the river, I and another fella, four of us, Dave Atwood and I, Seth Eberhardt and another fella, we boated a lot of the sand and gravel and brick, above Biron. We had to take the big scow, it had a motor on it, load it up and take it across and unload it.

That's the time we pretty near went through the dam.

The water was high. It was in the fall and they had a lot of rain.

We was on this scow and the motor stopped. We couldn't control it. We had quite a load on too. It was hard to stop it. Once you got that thing going, the damn water, the waves.

We had some big picks, spike on the end. Dave Atwood just happened to catch one of those deadheads out there, just hooked it so we could hold it back until we got another one, a rope around it, and pull us there.

That's the only thing that saved us. That was a bad scare.

We fished deadheads. A lot of that wood had soaked down and we'd go and jig around and pull these deadheads up and a guy with a pickaroon would pick it up and pull it up on the scow.

We did that one whole fall. That was 1919, 1920, 1921, along in there. That's when I come off of the dredge.

Then one year, we come back and I went to Consolidated and we got a job and they wanted me to skin roll and I says, "No." I knew what skinning roll was. That's a job. My brother skinned roll at South Side. There, they only had one machine. Here, you had to take care of two of them. If you made one mistake and you didn't fold it up right! That was in 1922 or 23. I was there two years.

### **Frede's Battery & Electric**

I got kicked around. You got here and there and you get laid off here and you haven't got a job.

I had to save enough money to go to school. I saved a little of mine and my mother saved a little of hers. My brother was home then. Frank, so he paid more.

I had some literature on it. The cars was first coming in, back in 1922 or 23. I went to school two years, came back, got a job here for Auto Electric. Edward Steiner had that, Exide Battery, behind Brauer's clothing store.

I worked there until there was an opening on this side of the river where I started "Frede's Battery and Electric Shop" in 1932.

I did a lot of battery work: generators and starters. I did all the work for the county. Every fall and every spring, they'd take all the starters off and all the generators, overhaul 'em and put 'em back on. The snowplows, see.

Then they used these trucks for roadwork. They didn't have any mechanic.

My shop [616 W. Grand] was downtown across from the city hall, this side of Guarantee Hardware, further west, between the Soo Line and the Northwestern tracks. There was a big warehouse in there. I had the front end of it.

Bill Teske, he had that garage out here on 17th Avenue. He had that Terraplane, Hudson car. He was on the other end of the building, a repair shop. He just took cars and overhauled them. Ground the valves, doing brake work. There was a lot of that at that time.

From there, I moved across, next to the Bandelin Hotel [620 W. Grand]. There was a building in there. Frank Swarick owned that. Then Bocaner bought it. He wanted to put his used stuff in there. Bocaner's junkyard.

In '38, I went behind the Hiawatha tavern, back in there. That's where it ended up. I stayed in there [131 7th Ave. S.] until I retired in '67.

I had been [616 W. Grand] right next to Bocaner. He wanted everything for nothing. At one time batteries wasn't worth hardly anything. Maybe 20, 25 cents. So I stacked mine up outside for a long time. I had around four, five tons.

Then the war started and everybody wanted lead. Garber was loading a carload. A big Jew come from Chicago. They was picking up all the stuff because the government was buying it and paying big prices.

Bocaner wanted them too. He said, "Well, you got to sell them to me. You're renting from me."

I says, "Well, then bid on it. How much you gonna give me for them?"

"No," he says, "I ain't gonna bid on them. I'll give you so much."

I says, "Heck no."

Garber overbid him by over \$60 when a dollar was a dollar. Bocaner got mad and he told me to get out of his building so I moved behind Hiawatha tavern. That was back in 1938.

### **West End**

Down on 7th Avenue, it was building up then. There was Bender Oil company. Emil Schara had a tavern in there. A dry cleaners was up in there. Ed Bodette had a machine shop.

Seventh Avenue was a pretty good street. I had my business built up and everyone knew where I was. They followed me right over there.

I had a home on 4th Avenue, where the Penney's store is now, across from the drive-in bank. There was a house in there. Close downtown.

Then I had my shop downtown. I could just run right to the shop. Course I had to have my car to run service runs, changing batteries. People would run their batteries down, had to go and change them. Put a battery in and start their car up.

### **Bars & Ballplayers**

There were six taverns right on that corner [of 7th and Grand Avenue]. Emil Schara was one: 7th Avenue Bar. Annie Romanski, Joe Romanski.

Brown Derby, the Tomscyk boys had that. Van Kubisiak and Leo had the corner one. The old Hiawatha. Clint Falkosky was on this side.

Red Bouton ["boo-ton"] was next to Lutz's in there [on Grand], by the Soo Line tracks. I guess there was seven taverns on that corner.

Red was a good guy. He come here as a ball player. He was a good ball player. He come here from Illinois. When they come down here, they married girls here, so they stayed here.

Where they stayed there, they were near a prison, out in Illinois. When they come here, the air was clean, everything was nice, so they stayed. Joe Hribernick stayed here. He was a pitcher.

### **Switzer Wife**

My wife was originally from Altdorf ["eldorf"] country. A Wipfli girl. Irene. I met her at a dance. Maybe Seneca ["senekee"] corners or some place, Vesper. They all had dances. Pittsville. There used to be a dance hall right by Seneca Corners, right on the corner where you go to Vesper. When the highway came through there, they bought them out and tore it town.

She was a Switzer. All the Wipflis, they come from Switzerland.

We got married in '26, '27 or '28. I was working for a fella when we got married in Altdorf at the Catholic church.

I got a boy and a girl. Ellen, the girl, she's '59 or '60. She was born couple years after I got married in '27.

### **Charging Batteries**

I got along. If you made two or three dollars a day, that was pretty good.

When I was charging batteries for 50 cents, you wasn't going to get rich. For a dollar, take a battery out of a car, put another in, so they could use the service battery. Dollar or dollar and a quarter.

Some days, I'd change 20 batteries. Them days, they didn't have the high powered generators, alternators. They just had a generator that charged only eight, ten, twelve amps. If you used your lights at night, you would be losing power. It was cold and they didn't have that thing .

They run their batteries down in the morning, so I'd have to go there and change batteries, take theirs out, put another one in, start it up for them so they could use it; and then the second or third day, they'd come back after their battery and I'd have to change the battery again.

Nobody had too many dollars to spend. There was very few people working. Consolidated was down. A lot of them were laid off. A lot of them were shut down. There was nothing moving.

### **Grand Mall**

I started going to the city council meetings when Penza got in.

Years ago, I bought a piece of property on 7th Avenue. I was getting shafted by the people I was renting from. Every time I made a dollar, they wanted two. I bought a piece of land there.

Then Swarick owned that building I was in. Every time he'd see that I was making money, up goes my rent.

First, he begged me to come in there because that thing was empty and nobody wanted it and it was off the street. It wasn't too bad—cold. I had a big furnace in there that could keep pretty good, nothing hot.

Then I bought this land and I could use it for parking too. I paid \$3,067 for it. Then [Mayor Donald] Penza, they appraised it for \$1,225.

They were buying all that up to build that big mall. I wouldn't sign off. Harkins was the head of it. He and Penza were working together. They were going to get rid of me.

I says, "I own that, stay off of it. Or else."

They got pretty huffy about it. It went on for about a year.

They thought they were going to get somebody in here with a million or two million who was going to build right away.

People didn't want it. They wanted the city to build it. And the council wouldn't go for it. They says, "No, we got enough money stuck into it now." They had lost a lot of tax dollars already.

So, that's where I started going to the city hall and started fighting.

Finally, they couldn't agree on it. I had that piece of property for twenty years and I paid my taxes and everything on it, put sewer and water in there on that road, 7th Avenue, and a cement sidewalk and curb and gutter. And black-topped it.

That cost me a little money but they wouldn't pay me for what I paid for that property. They couldn't do anything until it got up to the council. The council voted it in that they'd pay me.

Then, I didn't have nothing to do nights and I was still around here and I'd go to the council meetings because I knew a lot of the guys on the

council, the people. That's why I happened to get started. You learn a lot, too. Then you know what in the hell they're doing and how they operate.

A lot of the other owners had to go the adjustment policy committee. Bender had to go. I don't know if Ed Bodette went or not.

This Quality Dry Cleaner, Schrimpf [?]. She had to go too. I think Emil Schara had to go too because they didn't give him enough, too. They settled before the court with him.

They paid me. It didn't go to court.

This was back in 1966 or '67 around there. When they was buying that up. They didn't do it until way in the seventies. So I stayed there and did a little business. And I rented the property from the city. I stayed there and I paid them rent. I retired about in 1972 or '73, '71, along in there.

In 1948, I bought this house.

Felker bought me out because they put a gas station in there, on the corner there, on 4th Avenue. There was a tire shop they put in there. Leon Matthews, he run that, and he bought them out and he built that there right away, see.

As soon as redevelopment was buying that out. I sold to Felker's. Then I bought that piece of property there and sold that out to the city.



SWCHC Postcard

## My Life at Lincoln High School

By Ed Severson ('64)

My life at Lincoln High School began after Labor Day 1960. I had graduated from Saints Peter and Paul Catholic grade school, Wisconsin Rapids, in June. It had about 600 students versus about 1800 at Lincoln High—a magnificent three-story building of brick with large windows, wide corridors and stairwells, and a lot of wood trim and wood doors.

Lincoln had the largest high school field house in the state at the time with balconies on each side of a cinder track and basketball court. The north end had a large, deep, stage used for school meeting presentations, musical events, athletic award ceremonies, graduation exercises and pep rallies complete with cheerleaders. Dances and proms were held there.

So all 5'2" and 110 pounds of me was in awe of the sheer size of the school and the number of students. Also, the movement from classroom to classroom was disruptive, making it difficult to make friends.

The Saints Peter and Paul nuns had done a tremendous job in preparing me for high school. But, since the Catholic grade school was a rather "closed society" and strict, I had a hard time relating to girls. I didn't participate in any clubs or sports. As the first of nine children, I still had a paper route and other odd jobs such as lawn mowing and snow shoveling.

Life at school was rather simple then, as we read real books and wrote on real paper. No police on premises, no metal detectors, no ID badges, no drugs, no guns.

Our principal, Mr. Aaron Ritchay, died during the early part of the school year. Believe it or not, he was very respected. We had an all-school assembly at which his death was announced. Mr. Swartz, the assistant principal, took over while continuing part-time as a geography teacher.

Sophomore Year, academics became more meaningful. I had Geometry with Mr. Hurlbut, Latin with Miss Larson, English with a female teacher who sat on the edge of her desk and showed

a lot of 'leg' to us males, and physical education with "Torre," [Torresani] also the track coach.

Mr. Hurlbut was the wrestling coach. This was the "premier" sport at Lincoln. Our team or members of the team always went to "State" and usually won. So, in Monday morning Geometry, after a weekend meet, Mr. Hurlbut gave a take down after take down description. We always 'aced' Mondays.

In Latin class, I was seated next to the pretty girl. We talked more than we should have and were admonished at times by Miss Larson. Soon, the girl asked for some tutoring. We agreed to meet once a week in the library from 7–8 a.m. It was fun and she learned too. We were admonished by the librarian, Miss Lautenbach, for being too loud, but she did not kick us out.

I actually took a girl from Geometry class out on a date to a movie. My dad let me use the 1953 Chev. That car was made cleaner than when it was new.

I became less introverted as I moved into my junior year. I was 17 now, so I bought my first car, a 1957 Rambler, for \$300. I was one of the lucky few as the student parking lot only had room for about 40 cars.

I participated in cross country and track during my sophomore and junior years.

Cross country was my favorite. There was a small cadre of eight team members that went to meets. The same guys were together for both years. One of our team, Bill Geiger, went to "State" and won first place. I lettered both years. Mr. Jacobsen, an older teacher, was our coach. In his prime, he was a great runner.

The school had an athletic achievement recognition ceremony in the spring at an all-school assembly. When I was named, I stepped down from the bleachers and walked across the basketball court. I could feel everyone looking at me. I felt so proud as I mounted the stage to receive my letter from Mr. Jacobsen, a "W" for Wisconsin Rapids. I received a letter my junior year too.

Junior year entailed more challenging classes such as Algebra with Mr. Junkman, History with Mr. Miller (a “lecturer”), Chemistry with Mr. Hornigold (wore ‘Coke’ glasses) and English with Mrs. Hayward. I was up to the challenge and enjoyed it.

Latin class continued but we had a new teacher (male) and my tutoring was over. Also, I was named to the National Honor Society which really meant I was in the upper crust academically. So honored!

My friends and I did indulge in some beer drinking and may have driven when we shouldn’t but usually we walked home.

Senior year was a transition from high school to wherever/whatever. Classes included Physics with Mr. Carlson (often stood on a table while teaching), American Problems with Mr. Goetzke, Trigonometry, and English with Miss Sisley.

In American Problems, Mr. Goetzke required each student to select a topic (I chose the Death Penalty), research it and present the results verbally for about 45 minutes to the entire class. This was a real challenge to us and I did not perform up to his or my expectations.

Study Hall was monitored by Mr. Bird who was almost deaf, but could hear loud noises. Two or three times I threw a penny toward the front of the hall where it bounced around and echoed. Mr.

Bird looked around but couldn’t determine what it was. A couple of times, I brought leaves, which I would blow into, resulting in a shrill noise with the same reaction by Mr. Bird.

Unfortunately, during my senior year, I abandoned cross country and track to take on part-time jobs after school, including stints at Dahl’s Floral Gardens, Moon Pizza, and the Wood County Courthouse. There went my social life. I regret that decision to this day as high school is not only an opportunity to learn but an opportunity to mature socially.

I continued to do well academically and graduated 17th out of 327 students with almost a 4.0 average.

Throughout high school, we friends (male) attended many football, basketball and even wrestling events. These were great fun. The bonfires at football homecoming and the street dance in the downtown streets were a ball.

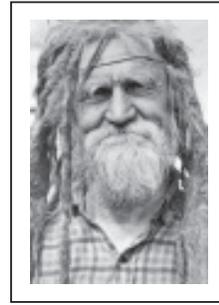
Despite my introversion, I would “interface” with certain girls, but they all ended up being “acquaintances.” I had my eyes on one girl for three years but never got very far other than occasional talks and two walk homes. She always had a boyfriend. Believe it or not, I am still in occasional contact with her to this day, fifty-plus years later.



ROW 4: E. Severson, T. Anderson, R. Plank, G. Jacobs, J. Perry, C. Marsh, J. Jackan, C. Fletcher.  
 ROW 3: D. Hamm, C. Arndt, S. Brandl, K. Bushmaker, S. Spranger, A. Roginski, C. Raasch, L. Foley, N. Sentek.  
 ROW 2: M. Glenn, M. Morzinski, L. Edwards, S. Heath, M. Fitze, B. Krause, J. McGraw, S. Krueger, L. Kubisiak.  
 ROW 1: B. Hoffman, P. Kuehl, J. Schaaf, M. Slinkman, D. Buteyn, L. Wotruba, B. Thalacker, P. Joling, L. Nieman.

# The Avuncular Uncle Dave

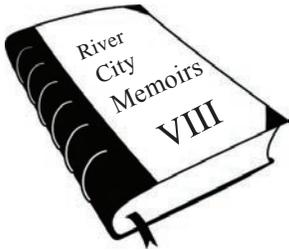
At a memorial for Madge Wilson Smith, her son, James “Skip” Wilson, legendary figure of Rapids sports (teammate of Sammy Sampson), brother of Darla Johnston and Mary Wilson and son of Castillians musician and vocalist Jim Wilson, confessed he had received a copy of a mysterious history publication that referred repeatedly to “Uncle Dave,” and asked the eternal question, “Who the heck is Uncle Dave?”



“Uncle Dave” is a name for the editor of *Artifacts*. Everything that is printed here goes through him: conception, layout, editing, photos, columns, proofreading (assisted by his wife, Aunt Kathy)—every punctuation mark and squiggle. *Editor’s note: All these words about Uncle Dave are written by Uncle Dave.*

## Book in the Works

Under the name Dave Engel, “Uncle Dave” has been writing history of the Wisconsin Rapids area 37 years and has, since 1980, published regularly in the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune*. Beginning in 1983, his *Tribune* stories have been collected into nine books under the title of his column, “River City Memoirs.” It has been more than six years since the latest collection, *Ghost of Myself: River City Memoirs VII*, was published (by subscription) in 2009.



Like Volume VII, the next book, the yet untitled “Volume VIII,” will be published and sold at cost, likely in the \$20 range for a basic copy or \$100 for individually-bound hard cover. In the latter instance, embossing with letters of your choice such as name or initials can be requested.

With luck, VIII will be ready in time for Christmas 2015. To reserve one of these books (especially if personalized) send a note to:

dave@swch-museum.com or kdengel@wctc.net  
 Dave Engel, 5597 Third Avenue, Rudolph WI 54475

### History Stories Previously Unpublished in Book Form: River City Memoirs VIII

2009

History of SWCHC. Chicago civil rights march. Civil war soldier. 1958 Election (Philleo Nash, Mel Laird). Recession of 1958-59 (Consolidated, Nekoosa-Edwards, Preway). Wisconsin Rapids History from N. Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. Daily Tribune history. Paper mill property legacy (Nepco Lake). Summer of 1959. RCM VII. Worst Generation. 50 years ago. Manager Charlie Manuel. Arnie Strobe, WFHR.

2010

Back to the Earth movement. Dr. Robinson (Park). The word, Ahdawagam. Badminton tournament at Fieldhouse. Consolidated benefits. Witter Manual Training School. Joan Haasl. George Mead’s mother, Abigail Spare. Artist Bernard Gilardi. Columbus Day fiasco. Uncle Dave is bonkers. Christmas 1960.

2011

Grand Rapids as state capital. Desperate housewives, 1961. George Mead and unions 1919. Jerry Wix and “Jerry wood.” Pot lucks and more, 1961. Masons and Civil War sesquicentennial. Last train to Rudolph, 1961. 4th Grade at Two Mile School. Dean Phelps Witter. Civil War in Grand Rapids, 1861. Grandpa’s farm journal. Mobilizing 32nd Division, 1961.

2012

Grand Rapids and Centralia, 1861-62. Legacy of paper mills. Fred and Sarah Case, Civil War. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show train wreck at Rudolph. May 1962. History of history in Wisconsin Rapids. John and Henry Rablin. Barns. Neal Smith and Marilyn Monroe. John Edwards, Jr. and Frank Catra, Jr. in Civil War. Fritz Peerenboom, the Night Owl. Don Krohn.

2013

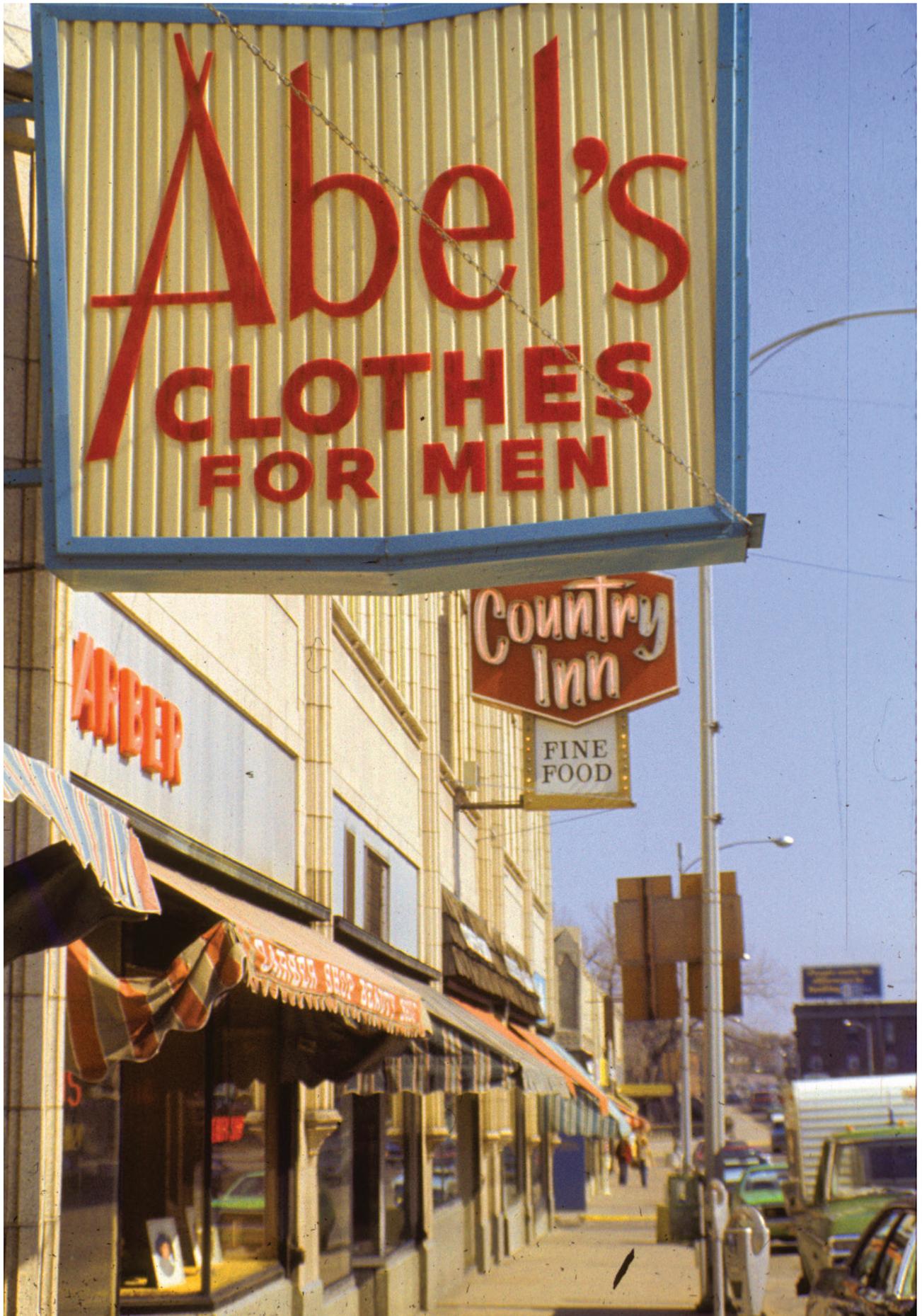
Roberson Players. Dan Rezin wrestles U.S. Grant. Sally Engel ledger. Month of March. Civil War in River City 1863. W.C. Handy, Grim Natwick and Popeye. Happy Felsch, baseball Black Sox. Mark Scarborough, journalist. Bill Thiele, classmate. Grim Natwick. Johanna Lyons Kellogg and beautification. UWSP 1963. Ellen Sabetta.

2014

Terry Stake, WFHR. Beatles and 1964. Dorothy Pluke Karberg autobiography. Callie Nason manager of Centralia mill. Last Uncle (Wilmer). Native American WWI volunteers. Rapids Indian Agency. Russell Monegar and peyote disaster. “Born here.” 1964 Election, Vietnam and Joe College. Bill Granger, author.

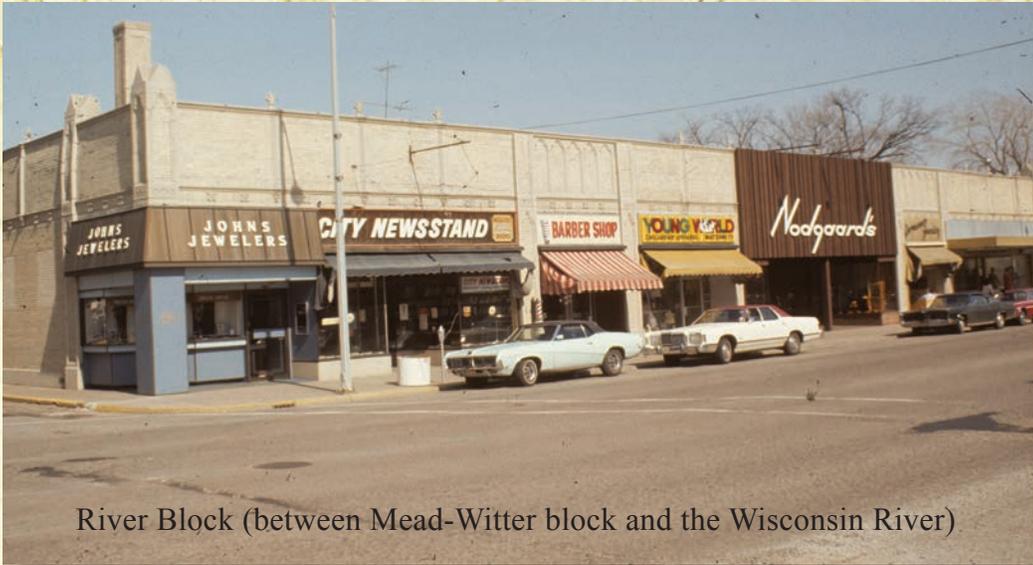
2015

(more to come)



*Mead-Witter Block, West Grand Avenue, looking toward river. Daily Tribune slide, 1970s*





River Block (between Mead-Witter block and the Wisconsin River)



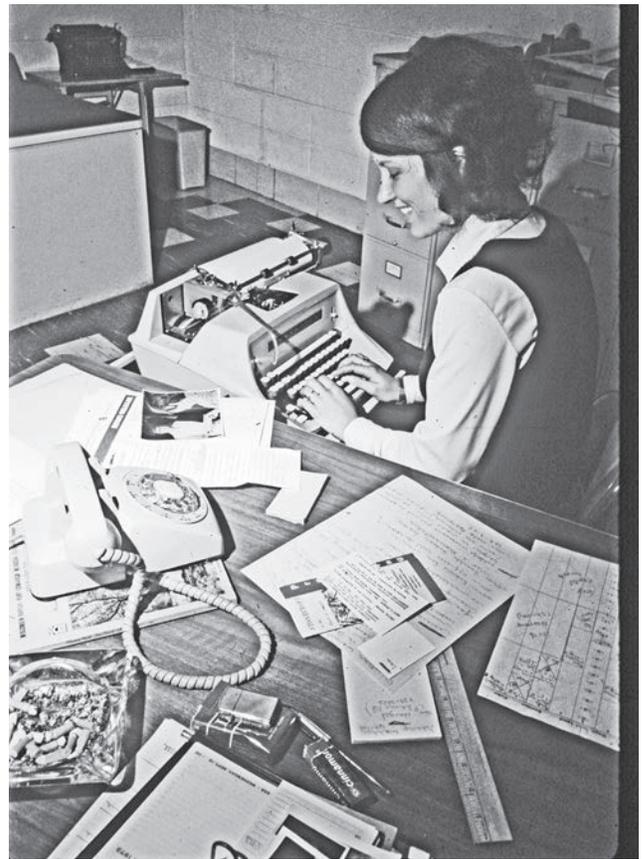
Mead Witter Block from *Daily Tribune* slide, AMC Gremlin, last made in 1978

*Tribune* reporter David Kaufman on city hall beat.



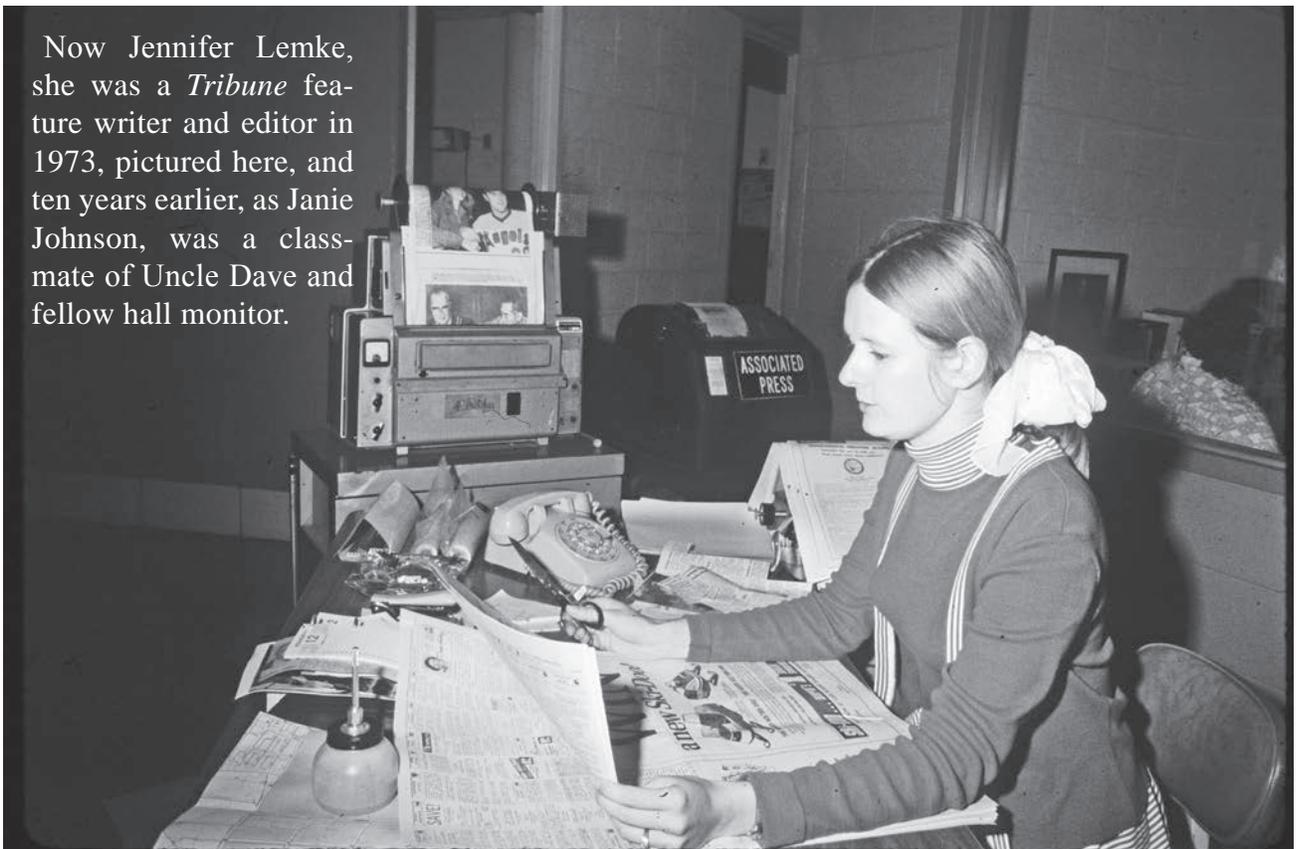


Receptionist/secretary Pearl De Reuter, 1979

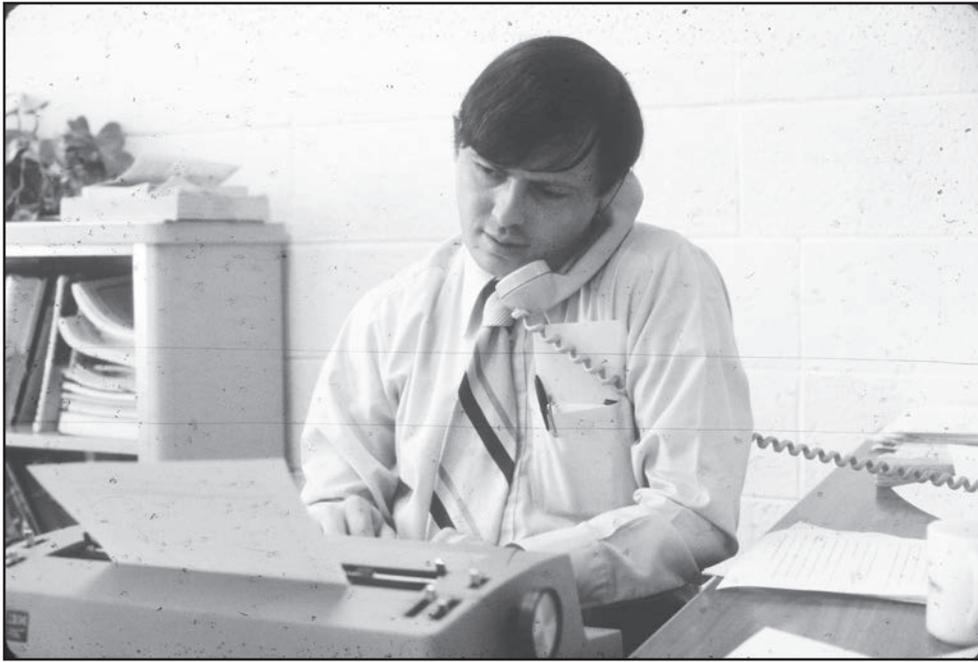


Above, 1973. Note the dial telephone, manual typewriter and cigarette butts.

Now Jennifer Lemke, she was a *Tribune* feature writer and editor in 1973, pictured here, and ten years earlier, as Janie Johnson, was a classmate of Uncle Dave and fellow hall monitor.



From color slides donated to SWCHC by the *Daily Tribune* and scanned by C. Henry Bruse



Vernon Borth, 1979, reporter, later Wisconsin Rapids city clerk, since retired. Some 35 years later, files such as those in the background and photos used for this story were donated to the Museum by the *Tribune*.

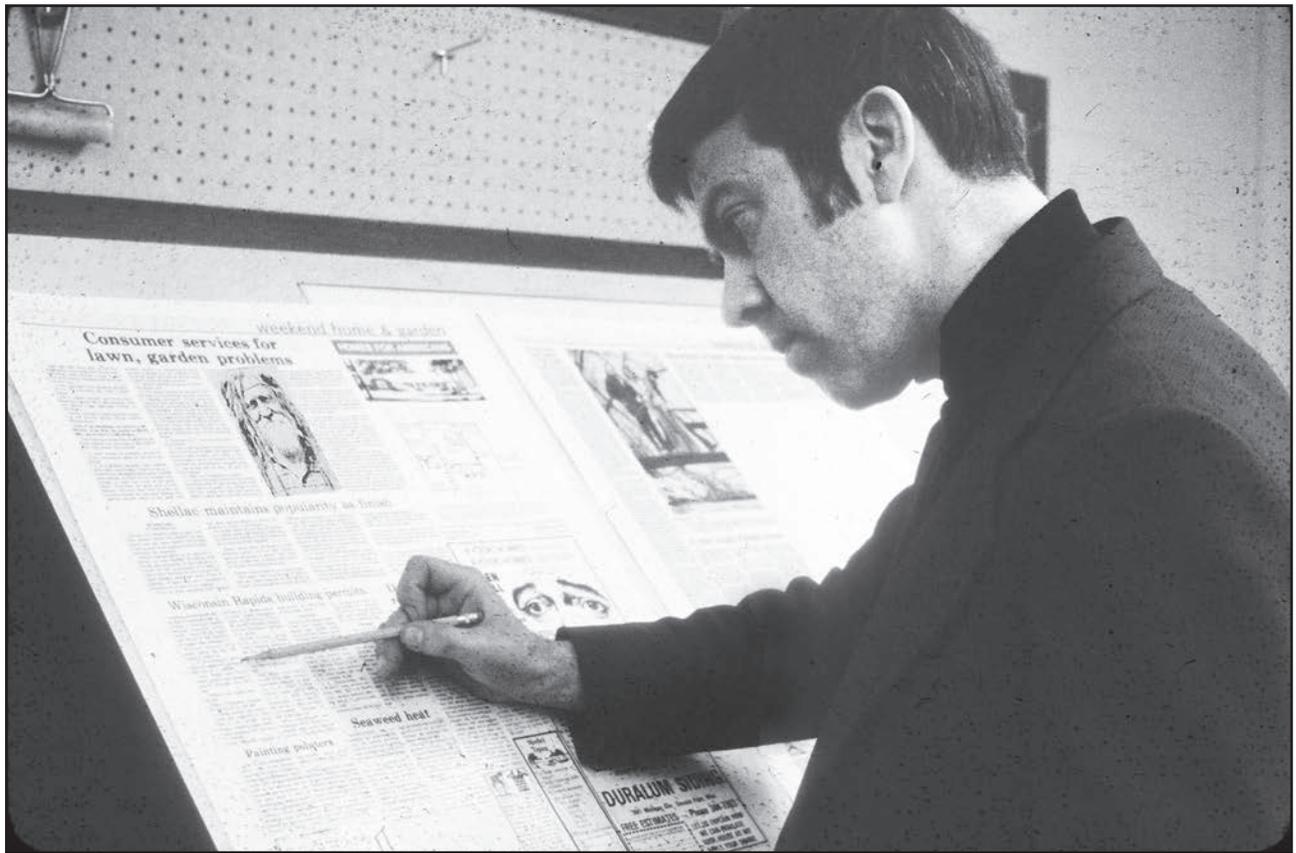
Sports Editor David Van Wormer and Robert Wells, Lincoln high school athletic director, at the Lincoln field house, now East Jr. High, 1979.

Uncle Dave was often confused with fellow local Van Wormer, who had worked for the Milwaukee *Journal-Sentinel* and was known statewide as an outdoor writer, columnist and raconteur. Babcock habitué Van Wormer died at age 78 in 2012 of a chronic illness.



Then, 1979, she was Nancy Langowski, now Nancy Quick, currently writing the Vintage Venues series for the *Daily Tribune* (Damaged photo, partially corrected).

In the 1980s, Ms. Quick was Community Life editor and sent along numerous photo assignments to Uncle Dave.



Pictured above is the best friend a guy could have.

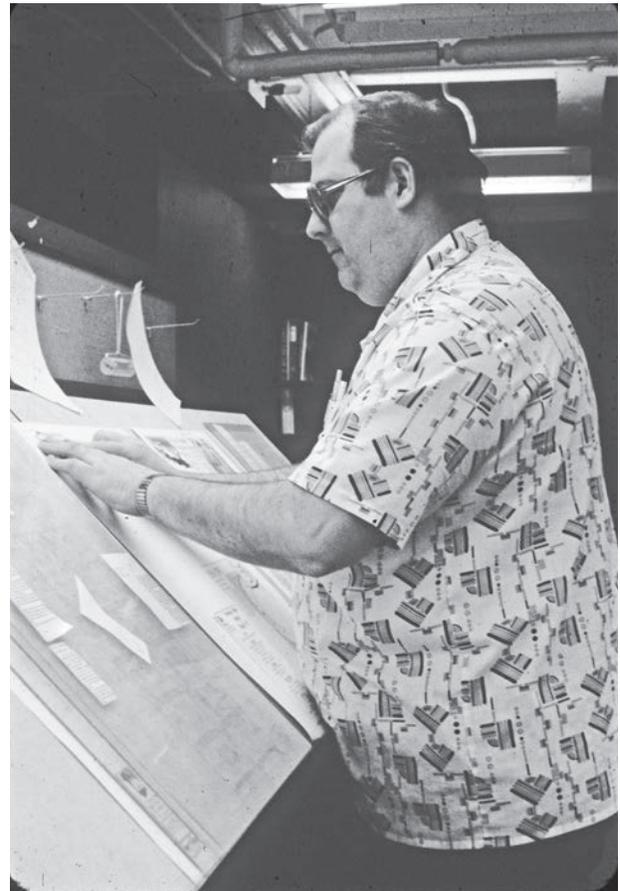
Robert Des Jarlais, “Bob,” the Big Kahuna, sports reporter, sports editor, city editor, columnist, managing editor, copy editor, counselor, self-confessed “fan” of this editor.

Traveled with Uncle Dave to Michigan and Minnesota and to Douglas, Ariz., to visit his mother, Sophia, when she dubbed the two mid-lifers, “adventurous boys.”

The Big Kahuna has been missed greatly by many in the community since he died of a sudden infection in 2003.

At left, Bob assists Debra Brehmer, reporter, feature writer and editor of the *Scope* weekly tabloid. Also a special friend of Dave, she moved on to Milwaukee in 1983, where she has become a significant figure in the art world.

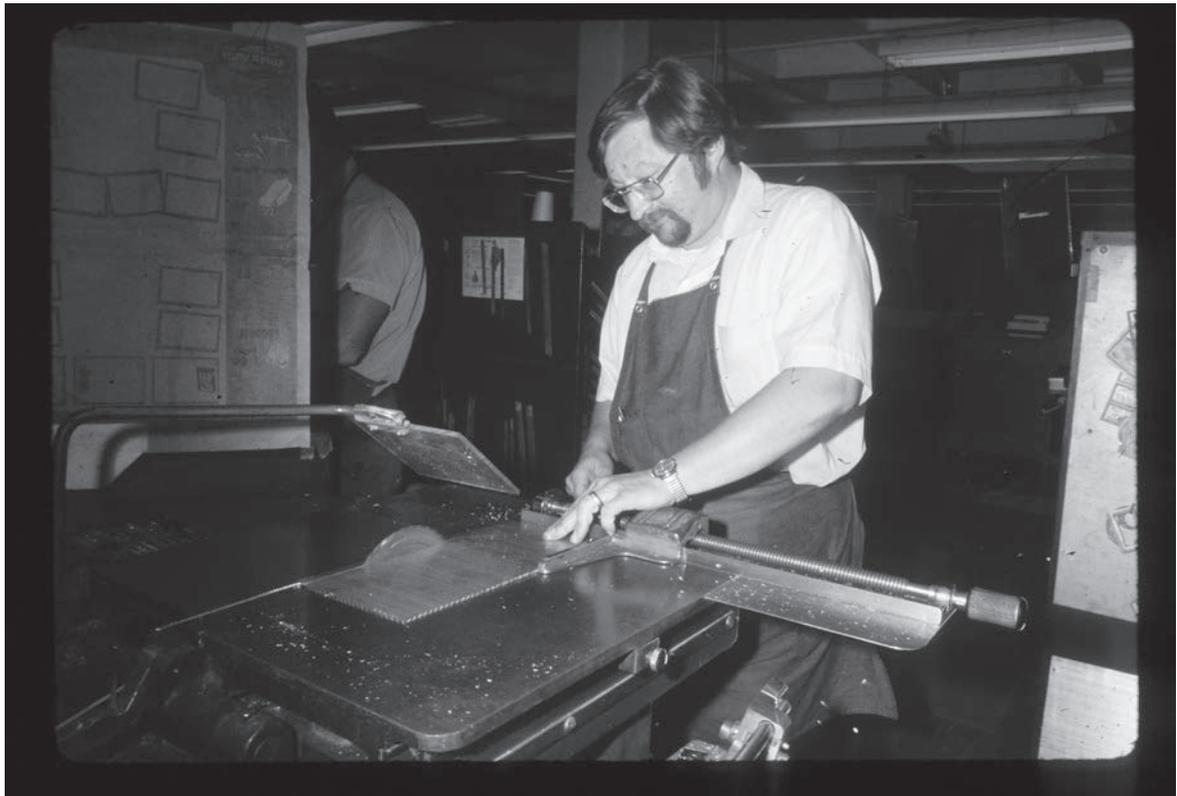
Working with Ms. Brehmer on *Scope* as a writer and photographer helped UD learn the basics of laying out a publication.

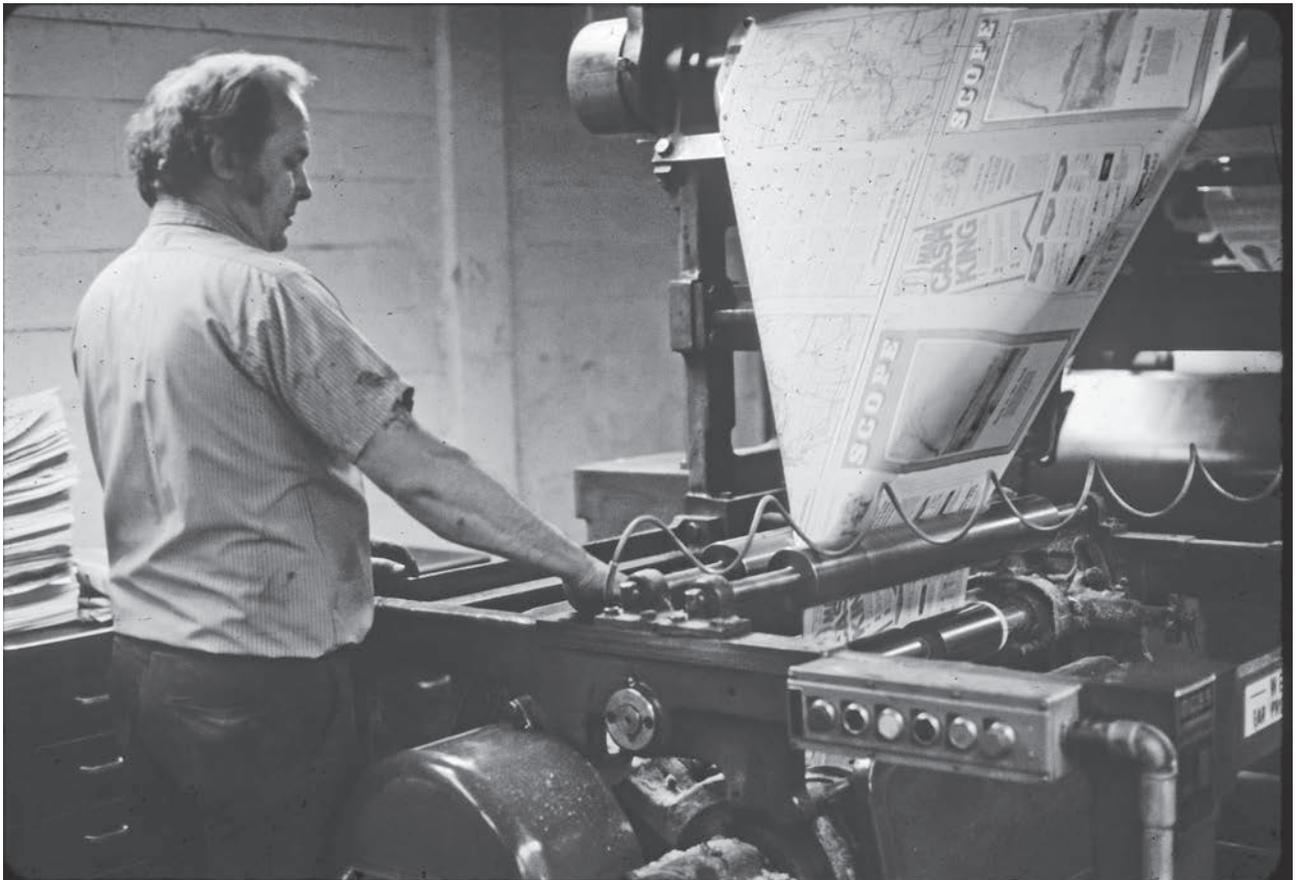


Above: John Thompson, 1979, pasting up pages

Left: Henry Silka, circulation manager.

→  
LaVern Keller, backshop. Besides assembling photos and copy, he and Thompson were good at fact checking local stories for Uncle Dave.





At printing press, 1973, Bruce Leberg was a popular Santa Claus and Rudolph neighbor of UD.



Unidentified, ad or circulation department

# Car Dealerships in Wisconsin Rapids

By Bill Hartley  
*Class of '63*

Interested in cars my whole life, I have made a good career out of automotive service. That's probably why I remember a few things about some of the dealerships in Rapids. I worked at a couple of them as I was starting my career.

## Car Shows

There used to be very well-defined new model announcement-days back in the '50s and '60s. They were always surrounded by a cloak of secrecy. The new models would come into town at night and were often wrapped or covered and stored until that big day.

There was always a new car show at Lincoln Field House to coincide with the introduction of the next year's models, and I couldn't wait for it each year. The local dealers would have their newest, flashiest cars on display. In late 1956, I was looking at the '57 cars, and I ran around behind a '57 Chevrolet. I remember catching my favorite corduroy shirt on the top of the tail fin and tearing it across nearly to the pocket. So much for my favorite shirt.

They always gave away door prizes at these shows and one year I won a wooden bushel basket full of goods from Mumford's Grocery. I had to get my dad to take me over to the West Side to get it, and my mom had to go through it first to make sure she got all the bad stuff out, like bleach, so I wouldn't hurt myself. I miss those new car shows a lot.

## Bethke Chevrolet

My dad knew little to nothing about cars, but he knew he liked GM cars because he felt they were reliable. He walked with crutches most of his adult life due to arthritis, so reliability was very important to him. My earliest memories of his cars

are of my mom telling me that Dad was coming home with a new car and me standing on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Prospect in front of the house waiting for him. He came home that day with a shiny new light-gray 1949 Chevrolet sedan. WOW! I was impressed and I was only about 4 years old. Today I can hardly remember what I ate for breakfast, but somehow I remember that.

My earliest memories of dealerships were of going with Dad to Bethke Chevrolet Oldsmobile on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue to look at the new cars. They had their new car showroom on one side of the street and their used car building was across the street. We made it a ritual every fall when the new models debuted. I remember going to Bethkes with him when he made the deal on a shiny new gray and white 1957 Oldsmobile. I guess I was about 12 then. I also remember us going to the airport and him letting me drive around a small circle track that someone had made in the dirt. That had me hooked on cars forever.

Me and my dad's new 1949 Chevrolet



## NimtZ Buick

After I left Northern Auto Supply, I started working at dealerships. George Nimtz was the Buick dealer in the mid-60s, and the dealership was located in the old Edsel building on 8<sup>th</sup> Street South (where Brostrom Kickert was when they closed). Jack Knott worked there as a salesman. I knew him as a friend of my dad's, and as we worked together, we wound up being good friends also.

I worked in the parts department with Clarence Plahmer, who had been there for years. I learned a lot from Clarence about how a parts department should be run, how to stay cool under stress, and I learned a bit about a service department while working there, too.

One of the technicians, I think they called him Curly, drove a black 1958 Cadillac Fleetwood.

He needed some special chrome moldings for the side of it, and he talked me into driving to Madison one Friday night after work to pick them up from the Cadillac dealer. After a visit to State Street, I barely made it back in time to be at work Saturday morning, but I had the moldings.

### Clark Chevrolet

Art Clark, Jr. was the Chevrolet dealer in the mid '60s. He and his dad, Art Sr., of CW Transport, built a new dealership on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North. I believe they tore down an old school to build there.

I worked as an assistant to parts manager Gene Skibba. He was a great guy and a lot of fun to be around. He made the days go fast. I went to work there about the same time my friend Willie (John Williamson) took a similar job working at Hemmersbach Ford for Jim Back. Two good guys.

We had a parts counter that was open to the center of the shop. The mechanic whose stall was near that opening (John Bakovka) was the heavy-duty truck guy. One time, he had one of Wolosek's pig trucks in his stall for a few days. We practically had to close down, the smell was so bad. I think that smell stayed in the parts department for months.

I went into active duty in the Army in early 1967 and when I came home, Gene said I was going to be the parts manager. I asked where he was going, and he said, "Nowhere."

He took me into the back and showed me my "department," four empty parts bins and a bunch of wooden crates with Japanese writing on them. Clark had taken on Toyota while I was gone. We were now selling little square Corollas. They were inferior cars back then that required lots of maintenance and rusted out very quickly. I remember looking at pictures in the parts book to try to identify parts as I took them out of the crates and put them on the shelf so I could have some kind of organization. I didn't read Japanese, and I

don't recall them offering a class in it at Lincoln.

I was driving a 1966 Buick Skylark Gran Sport at the time I worked there and Art Clark put forth a good deal of effort to get me to trade it in for a 1966 red Corvette fastback with a 327 4-speed that he had on the showroom floor. I was all set to get on a great deal until I checked with my insurance company. That ended that dream! I wound up buying a 1967 Riviera GS from Jack Knott at Nimtzt Buick.

Clark Chevrolet ultimately closed and CW Transport moved into that building. I think it's now an office building for whomever owns the paper mill this month.

### C&R

C & R Oldsmobile International on West Grand Avenue was owned and managed by Bob Freundl and Chuck Nemeckay, both former International Harvester truck factory reps. Bob was in sales and handled truck and fleet sales. Chuck came from service so he managed the service and parts functions. They always said they took on the Oldsmobile franchise

so they'd have demos to drive. Jack Knott had moved over there as a salesman, specializing in Oldsmobiles.

I was hired as parts manager and wound up doing Oldsmobile warranty claims also. As I was learning the IH parts system, I once ordered 12 of a small part for stock and got something wrong in the part number and received 12 huge radiators for big, over-the-road trucks! What a surprise when the truck backed up to our warehouse and started to unload. Chuck wasn't too happy about that.

We had big accounts in the area, like CW Transport. I worked directly with their parts manager (Bergie). I'd go over every morning and pick up his daily order and come back and call it in along with mine to the warehouse in Minneapolis. They would ship his parts directly to him.



My favorite shirt before the damage and my favorite toy

Wisconsin Valley Concrete was another big account. They bought a bunch of big cement mixers from us when IH came out with a new model called the M623CBE (how do I remember that??). Seems they had a problem with the power take off on some of the early trucks and they would stop turning the concrete drums. When that happened, they had to get the concrete out fast so it wouldn't harden and ruin the drum. A lot of it got dumped in the field behind the dealership. By the time they got that issue corrected and all of their mixers modified, that lot was practically paved.

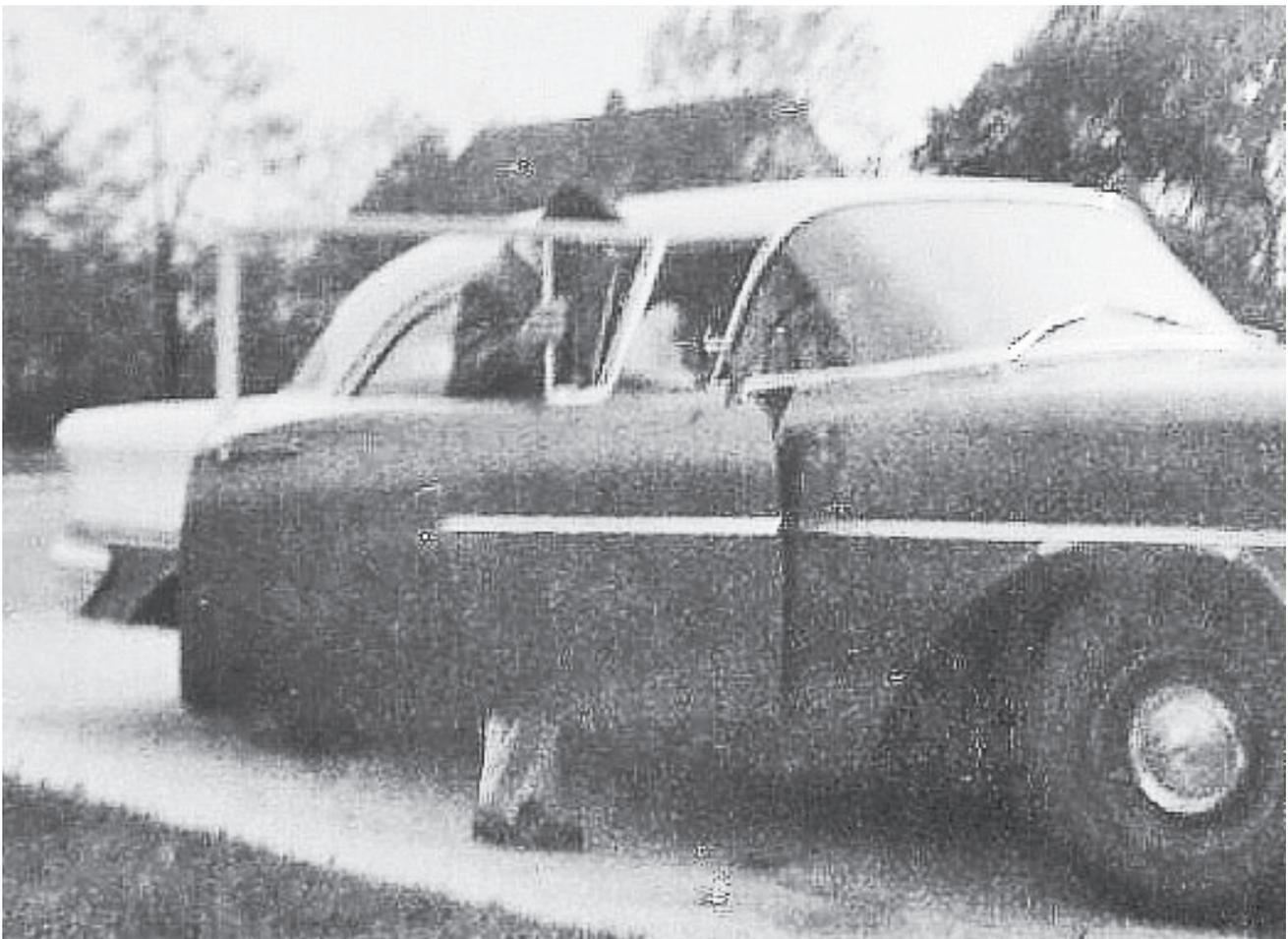
We had the honor of supplying Marilyn Brahmstead with her white Oldsmobile convertibles while she served as Miss Wisconsin. I had the job of applying her name and the large decals on the door of each new car, and she got one every 90 days.

### **Kay Oldsmobile Cadillac**

Although Kay Olds Cadillac was in Wausau, it had Rapids connections, such as the flamboyant Sam Bartus, who was running Griffith Park Speedway at the time and always drove new red Cadillac convertibles. I always wondered where he got the money for them and now I knew: they were demonstrators. Jack Knott was another connection. Jack had left C&R and gone to Kay some months before me and was probably instrumental in talking me into moving up there. Jack knew of our interest in fast cars. One evening, he called Kit Marceil and me to come up and see a 1969 Olds Cutlass "Hurst Olds" they had gotten recently. I talked to Leo that night, and the rest was history.

I worked at Kay Olds Cadillac until Cadillac offered me a job with the factory as a Parts & Accessories Rep in Minneapolis.

*Me and my dad's 1957 Oldsmobile*



My time in the dealerships in Central Wisconsin was relatively short, probably less than three years all together, but the experiences provided a lifetime of good memories and a lot of business sense that has helped me throughout my career in the auto industry.

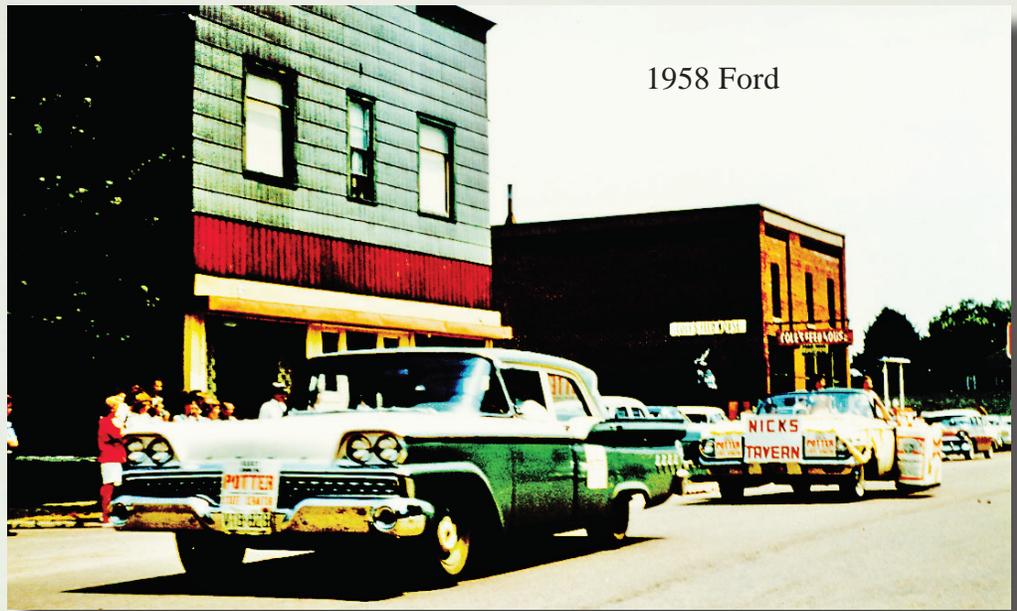
*Bill Hartley*



Jack Knott, Kit Marceil, and a 1969 Olds Cutlass "Hurst Olds"

Marilyn Brahmstead, Miss Wisconsin, and her 1968 Oldsmobile in front of C&R Olds International





1958 Ford



## Big Day In Vesper

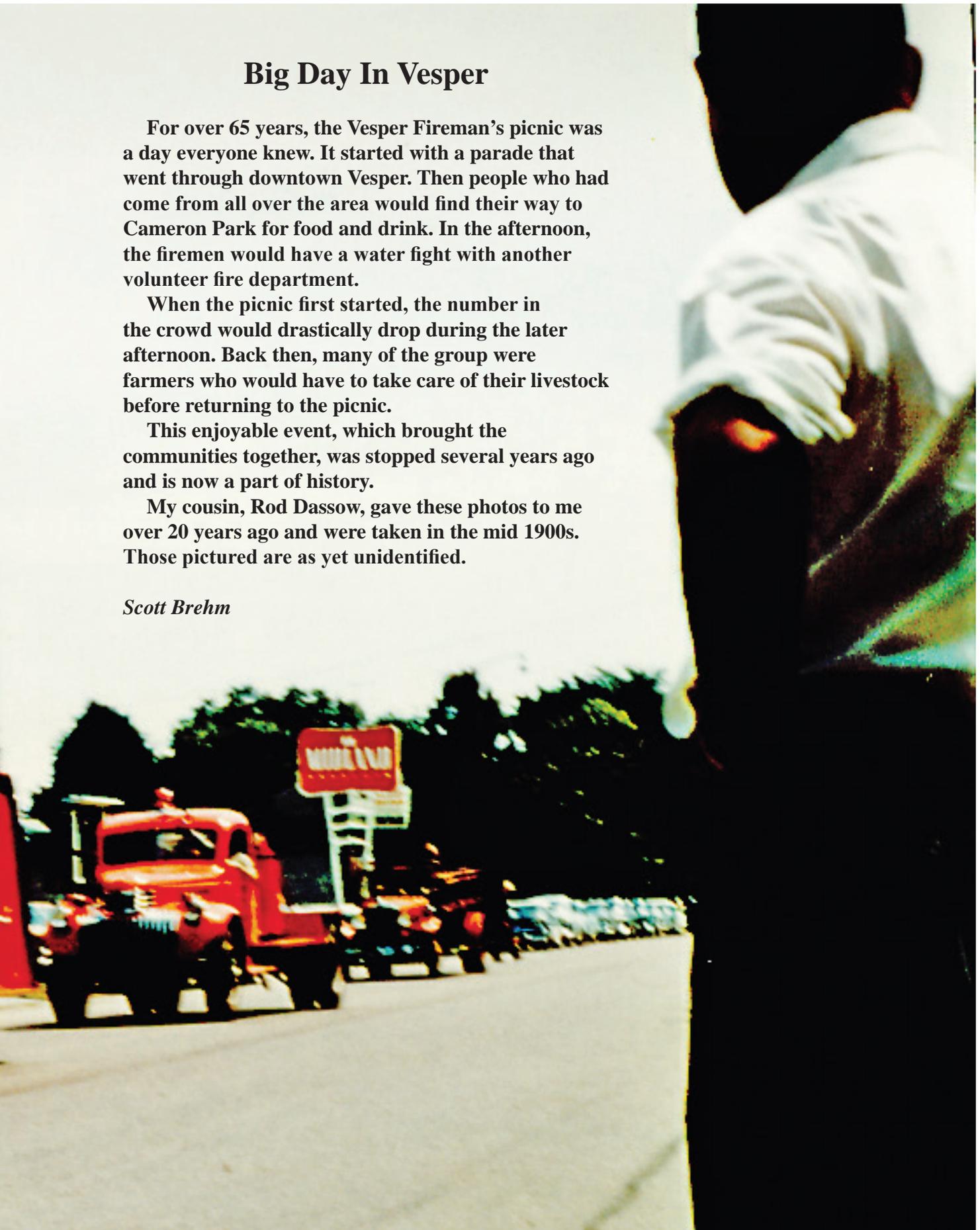
For over 65 years, the Vesper Fireman's picnic was a day everyone knew. It started with a parade that went through downtown Vesper. Then people who had come from all over the area would find their way to Cameron Park for food and drink. In the afternoon, the firemen would have a water fight with another volunteer fire department.

When the picnic first started, the number in the crowd would drastically drop during the later afternoon. Back then, many of the group were farmers who would have to take care of their livestock before returning to the picnic.

This enjoyable event, which brought the communities together, was stopped several years ago and is now a part of history.

My cousin, Rod Dassow, gave these photos to me over 20 years ago and were taken in the mid 1900s. Those pictured are as yet unidentified.

*Scott Brehm*





Downtown Vesper in the heart of America's Dairyland





Vesper

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

NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 31



*Artifacts*, a local history magazine and newsletter for 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 \$25 to the address above. Contact: Lori Brost, Museum Administrator and assistant editor, 715-423-1580. [lori@swch-museum.com](mailto:lori@swch-museum.com)



32 The baby boom looks harmless in this c. 1950 photo, probably taken for advertising purposes.