Part Three: THE WRAPPING PAPER ERA

Chapter Fourteen: A to Z in Wrappings

Just about every letter in the alphabet is represented by a grade manufactured by Nepco during the wrapping paper era, and at the end of this chapter there is presented a listing of some of these grades. One hundred and fifty-two products are listed, and the list it not complete! When you consider that many of these grades were made in several colors and various weights, there is no contention as to the statement that we made well over three hundred grades of paper during the 1920's and 1930's. Furthermore, when Nepco's advertising department presented a book illustrating our collection of paper grades and entitled it "A To Z In Wrappings," they were almost correct; although this author has not run across a grade starting with the letter Z.

You will recall from previous chapters, that the goal of Nepco's management was to convert from newsprint to higher quality papers for which a higher markup in price could be achieved, since they could not survive in the newsprint business.

The first step into this field was met by the introduction of manila printing papers, a small step above newsprint, and still made from groundwood pulp. From this simple beginning we gradually added more grades with the ever-increasing list of products constantly becoming more refined in respect to quality and appearance.

A close companion line to wrapping papers was the specialty papers we produced during this same era. Waterproof, oil and wax treated, creped, twisting stock, saturating, and flameproof were only a few of the many types that were made in our mills.

Whereas the newsprint production was sold primarily by a sales agent (i.e., General Paper Co.), it was now necessary to have a sales department as well as an advertising budget. Nepco's advertising budget in 1930 was $23,094.00, which was paid to an advertising agency who handled all the promotional work. Nepco's own publicity effort was concentrated on operating a Ford Tri-motor airplane; a subject to be considered in detail in a subsequent chapter. For this effort, $13,255.00 was spent in 1930. But John Alexander, in his General Manager's report of 1931, asked for $50,000.00 for agency expenses. His justification for asking for the healthy increase was that the airplane advertising program would pay for itself via charter fees.

As for a sales department, only two men directed the sales of Nepco's product line. Laurence Nash served as General Sales Manager, assisted by his brother, William. But by 1927 production records were being broken. In March of that year a record tonnage of 5,900 tons was turned out. Seventy-two thousand tons would be produced that year. This called for an addition to the sales department in order that this record production could be moved. Accordingly, regional sales offices were established in New York, St. Louis, and Chicago. Additional sales people were added to the home office sales team in Port Edwards.

At this point I would like to relate some interesting antecedents concerning our sales during this "boom and bust" era. First of all, we claimed to be the largest manufacturer of butcher's paper; and if you examine the list at the end of the chapter, you will see no less than thirteen (there may even be more), grades of wrapping paper designed for meat packaging. This does not include the locker and freezer grades.

Some of the papers are identified by their end use; such as Drinking Cup, Shade Paper, Baking Cup, Diaper Paper, and Soda Straw. Others, however, were sold under a trade name which left you guessing as to the end use. As an example, it took a salesman to explain to a customer just what Aerofoam, Palmleaf, Lykglass, and Radio Stripe were to be used for.

When it came to purchasing kraft wrapping paper, such as a hardware store would use, the customer might become somewhat confused. Should he pur-

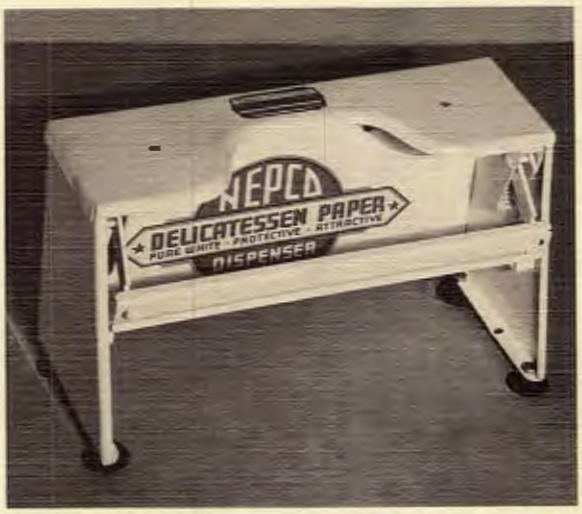
Employees pack interfolded Nepco Delicatessen paper into counter top boxes on an assembly line in the basement of the Nekoosa mill. This grade of paper was first introduced as Nepco Delicatessen but was later changed to Nekoosa Delicatessen.

chase Nekoosa Kraft, Nepco Kraft, Comet Kraft, Number 1 Kraft, or Number 2 Kraft? Regardless which one he preferred, Nepco made them all!

Then there were the grades which seemed to oppose each other in their end use. Saturating paper was made to absorb water, while King William was a waterproof sheet. Transparent was almost just that, while Film Wrap was a black, opaque sheet made to prevent light from getting through to the film or photographic paper packaged in it. There were oil-impregnated sheets (Modelwrap), and oil-resistant sheets (Pork Loin).

Some names were misleading. Car Wrap was not used to wrap up a car, but to suspend under the car to collect oil and grease drippings while the car was on display. Flower Paper was not used for making artificial flowers, but for wrapping cut floral bouquets. Batting had nothing to do with baseball, and instead was used for packaging cotton batting.

Lastly, some grades were identified with one sole



A dispenser that was seen in many butcher shops up to the period of World War Two, is illustrated here. The dispenser took a small roll (usually nine inches wide) that was referred to as a pony roll.

customer. B and B was a wrapper for Bauer and Black Co., P and G was a soap wrapper, while Karolton Klasp was a heavy kraft paper made for the Karolton Klasp Envelope Company.

Some of the customers who purchased these wrapping papers from Nepco are still valued customers of Nekoosa today, and to mention them here would be inappropriate for fear of omitting some. In many instances these merchants and customers have changed their line of sales, just as we did.

And did it show favorable results? Definitely yes! In 1932 Aerofoam Wrapping commanded a selling price of $103.70 a ton, netting a profit of $17.19 per ton. It was made in a variety of colors and was really a dual color sheet; that is, a solid base color sheet with splotches of white, referred to as clouds, on the top surface of the sheet.

Modelwrap, a petrolatum-treated butcher's sheet, sold for $115.23 a ton in 1932. This, as well as similar prices, were a definite improvement over the 1904 price of newsprint which sold for a third of those prices.

Our pulp prices in 1932 varied from $27.16 to $39.21 per ton, depending upon the degree of bleaching. But you could buy screenings, which were pieces of bark, chips, knots, dirt, and even some sand, for $15.00 per ton. Believe it or not, screenings were used for some grades.

Paper sold in rolls was shipped on iron cores with the customer paying a deposit of five cents per lineal inch of core. A return of the core to the mill, rather than use it for a piece of sewer pipe, resulted in an equal credit to the customer.

An envelope stuffer of the early 1940's. The famous NEPCO seal trademake is prominent on the inside cover.

Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company was a wrapping paper mill in 1926 when this photo was taken of the Nekoosa mill shipping room. Rolls of paper, including King William meat wrapping paper, are waiting to be loaded into cars. King William was available in large size sheets as well as rolls and some of those bundles are in the background.

Only two of these products are intended for use other than wrapping food products. They are Palm Leaf and Drug Bond. Of the remaining eight, seven found their way into meat markets. Nepco claimed to be the largest producer of meat wrapping paper.

At one point in time, Nepco had the distinction of being the largest buyer of dyestuff in the paper field. The grade which made the greatest demand on the purchasing of dyes was Twisting Stock. This paper was used for making seat covers and floor rugs. If you can picture the multitude of colors in your carpets of today, you can relate to the multitude of shades and colors of paper we made to satisfy the homemaker of yesteryear.

As the seasons changed, so did the pattern and color change in these paper rugs. Nepco was right in

An open house display at Nekoosa shows how Nekoosa papers were transformed into rugs for the home. The paper was cut into narrow strips, which in turn were twisted into a string. These multi-color strings were then woven into a rug. Nekoosa was the major supplier to two prominent rug manufacturers.

there ready to supply the latest spring shade of paper.

Two human interest stories associated with this period should be mentioned in passing. In the early 1930's L. M. Alexander approached his friend, Luther Burbank, famed botanist responsible for developing many of our hybrid fruit trees of today. Alexander suggested that a special paper be developed as a mulch to be placed over seed beds, thereby retaining moisture on the germinating seed, and eventually fertilizing the young seedling by rotting and decomposing. However, this project did not materialize, nor did another project investigated by Nepco. In 1930 L. M. Alexander, President of Nepco, wrote in a letter to his son, John Alexander, General Manager of Nepco:

"I'm shipping you some fruit from Florida. Take special note of the quality of the cellophane that is used for wrapping, and compare it to your efforts to produce a similar paper which turned out to be gelatin."

And now some myths to be set straight before closing this chapter. Nepco did make a watermarked paper in this era! However, it was not a watermarked printing paper such as is associated with watermarks today. But we did have several watermarked wrapping papers around 1930, which was the year we purchased an engraving machine to make pattern rolls for embossing a watermark into the sheet. Examples were Wrapsure, King William and Palmleaf.

Another myth concerns our entry into the Fine Paper field. We usually associate that with 1937, but in reality we were making Nepco Bond, Mimeo, Ledger, and Offset in the mid-1920's. They were not the watermarked business papers which really iden-

There is a Nepco paper for EVERY wrapping purpose. So states this display at a trade show. The sample books on the display are entitled "FROM A TO Z IN WRAPPINGS." When this picture was taken (about 1940) Nepco was known as a wrapping paper mill.

tified Nekoosa Papers Inc., as a writing paper mill.

The entry of Nepco into the wrapping and specialty grades was only a temporary remedy to the ever-increasing struggle to survive in the competitive paper world. Once more the advice of "Switch to higher grades," would echo around the planning table; and Nekoosa would make a radical change in product line, completely abandoning the grades that follow.

Applewrap
Antitarnish
Anchor
Adwrap
Aerofoam
Arcade Envelope
Artone Envelope
Blancraft
Badger Butcher
Baker's Fleece
Batting
Battery Paper
Beaver
B & B
Blue Macaroni
Bluetone
Blueprint
Bread Wax MG
Bread Wax Coated
Butcher's Special
Billboard
Bakewrap
Bird's Eye
Baking Cup
Box Cover
Cordex
Christmas Wrap
Commercial Butcher
Cabeca
Canary Stripe
Calendar
Can Liner
Candy Bag
Caramel Wrap
Carvel Parchment
C.B.S. Butcher's
Chemical Wood Manila
Check
Car Wrap
Comet Kraft
Camlet Butcher
Cover
Creamo
Corona
Creped Cap Stock
Cumac
Creped Saturating
Car Liner
Densite
Document Manila
Drug Bond
Dubonet Kraft
Delicatessen
Drinking Cup
Delta
Diwipe
Diaper Stock
Darwin Cover

Dry Wax
Drapery Stock
Echo Kraft
Extra #1
Excelsior
Envelope Manila
Flower Paper
Flour Sack
File Folder
Foil Mounting
Fleece White
Flameproof
Full Bleach Sign
Garment Bag
Gasket Paper
Glossite
Greytone
Greentone
Hoskins
Hidense
Identification
Interleaver
Ivory
Kraft
King Kraft
King Cold
King William
King Snow
Karolton
Kralow Butcher
Laundry Bag
Lettuce Wrap
Locker
Lilac Stripe
Lace Paper
Lykglass
M. G.
Marbletone
Manifold
Match Manila
Modelwrap
Minard Waxing
Maderite Butcher
Modern Parchment
Nekoosa Kraft
Nepco Kraft
Nekoosa Freezer
Neverslip
Napkin Tissue
Neptone
No. 1 Kraft
No. 2 Kraft
Oil Protector
Opaque
Para
Palmleaf
Pan Liner
Pork Loin
Polar Stripe
Peerless

Pity the poor stock room clerk in a large department store of the 1930's. He had to keep a stock of wrapping paper for every department, and each department had its own customized paper.

Nepco's advertising department maintained a constant barrage of brochures to familiarize him with the proper paper to stock.

Pattern Stock
Paramont
Pinktone
Protecto
Pressboard
P & G
Radiostripe
Roofing
Railroad Manila
Red/Green
Christmas Wrap
Sealing
Screenings
Seal of Quality
Soap Wrap
Soda Straw
Shirt Band
Service Envelope
Stylemark
Sign Paper
Scaling Wrapper
Special Kraft
Sponge Paper
Star
Sterling
Steel Wrap
Superior Cover
Strong Check
Tag Stock
Table Cover
Tray Cover
T Sealing
Textile Wrap
Toweling
Twisting
Tire Wrap
Tapco
Tiswrap
TNT
Toilet Tissue Wrap
Transparent
Tissue
Tuftex Sandpaper
Waterfinish
Waybill
Window Shade
Wrapsure
Wet Strength
White Cross
Waxing
Yellow "S"

Shown in these two photos are the Nekoosa and Port Edwards mills of Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company in the late 1920's. The 1920 decade saw many expansion projects completed in both mills, making them more suitable for the manufacturing of wrapping and specialty papers.

Chapter Fifteen: Beware of Imitations

King William meat wrap is promoted in this parade float. The roll of paper is really a mock roll of paper, prepared just for the occasion. In a modern day parade, the truck shown here would attract more attention than the roll of King William.

As was indicated in the previous chapter, butcher's paper was our claim to fame in the late 1920's; Nepco having produced over a dozen different grades, qualities, or colors of the paper. Some of these papers, Number 2 Butcher's, sold for as little as thirty-eight dollars a ton in 1923. This was only slightly better than newsprint in profitability and perhaps only slightly better in quality. There were better grades of meat wrappings available from Nepco; but none of them were of the quality and prestige of King William, advertised as the perfect meat wrap.

I suppose a word of explanation is in order here for readers under the age of thirty. As late as the 1950's most meat products were bought from bulk displays in a refrigerated display case. Fresh meats were often cut while you waited and then wrapped in paper. The paper had to protect the purchaser from blood or meat juices which might penetrate through the wrapper and stain clothes. It had to be clean and sanitary, a very important quality; and it had to be tough so sharp pieces of bone would not puncture it. King William met all of these qualifications.

The "King" came to Nepco from Rhinelander Paper Company in 1922. Nepco paid Rhinelander the sum of two thousand dollars for the label copyright, the trademark, and a license to be the sole manufacturer of King William Waterproof Fiber. Nepco immediately changed the name to King William Meat Wrap and then launched a vigorous advertising campaign to promote the grade to butcher's country-wide.

King William was heralded as being "sanitary, of consistent strength; always made on the same machine by the same satisfied workers; wound on our own paper spools; wound by the same winder-

men; always cut on the same cutter by the same man; wrapped by the same efficient girls; run honestly to forty pound weight; weighed and loaded by people expert in handling paper; and guaranteed by Nepco!" What more could you ask for? It almost made Nepco sound like a family operation.

King William advertised that you always received fair weight. That meant that the basis weight of the paper was uniform and that you received the actual weight of paper that you were invoiced for. Nepco claimed that the paper was weighed by the same devoted crew. This photo captures the look of pride that those scalers had in their responsibility.

Sold in rolls and sheets, the King found its way into paper merchants' warehouses across the country. The paper was a kraft sheet that carried a watermark to identify it as the leading meat packaging paper available to meat markets. "Beware of imitations and accept no substitutes," warned the advertisements.

A wet strength additive made the sheet "blood-proof," thereby eliminating the wax or petrolatum treatment used to accomplish this in other grades. Petroleum treatments could acquire an odor as the oil-derived treatments aged and oxidized. However, Nepco still manufactured the petrolatum treated butcher paper (Modelwrap) for the traditionalist butcher.

King William was pink in color except for a period during World War Two. At that time the color changed, due to a lack of dyestuff, to a faded pink or off white; whichever you preferred to call it.

Sales of butcher paper, including this grade, began to decline in the 1950's, being replaced by film packaging. Furthermore, the ever-increasing sales of fine papers by Nepco was preempting paper machine production time. Wrapping papers were not compatible with fine writing papers. G. E. Veneman, Vice President of Sales, wrote to the trade in 1966, "...changes in our pulp mills and an emphasis on the acquisition of pulpwood required for the manufacture of business communication papers, has dictated that we take this action." And what action was Mr. Veneman referring to?

In July of 1959 number three paper machine made the last run of King William in our mills. The grade was made in our Nekoosa plant and for a couple of years in our Potsdam mill. But as of July 19, 1959, all future runs of the popular butcher paper would be manufactured in the mill of Mosinee Paper Company, but still marketed by Nekoosa Papers Inc. However, in December of 1966 the entire business, production, trademark, and sales rights were sold

One of the promotional items used to help sell King William were scratch pads made up of King William paper. The other pad, shown in this picture, advertises Nepco Delicatessen paper but at the bottom of the pad it also makes a pitch for that famous King William meat wrap.

to Mosinee Paper Company. Thus, Nekoosa divorced themselves from the wrapping paper business by the sale of this once popular paper. In 1944 King William, along with other meat packaging grades, accounted for nearly twenty-five percent of our total production, according to President John Alexander

in his annual report to shareholders.

This writer recalls an interesting and somewhat humorous incident that took place in the early 1950's concerning this grade and himself. It seems that a run of the paper was being made in Nekoosa during a night shift. The mill, being located on the bank of the Wisconsin River, was the victim of a prolific mayfly hatch that night. The flies were attracted toward the interior mill lights and migrated in that direction. Of course, many of them died as they attempted to cremate themselves on the hot light bulbs, their bodies falling onto the paper machine. There they either became a part of the paper, if on the wet end, or an embossed "trademark," if on the dry end! The entire night's production was culled! The next night this young lab technician went through the mill with an insect fogging exterminator but alas, the hatch was over and the flies did not return.

King William was one of those grades that bridged the transition years between wrapping grades and fine papers for this company. And as for the "King" today? The "world's greatest meat wrap" has fallen by the wayside, having been completely replaced by the plastic films which we associate with our meat purchases today.

King William paper demanded a clean, and strong pulp to realize its stringent specifications. Here a skid load of bleached kraft pulp is being transferred from the pulp mill to the paper machine where it will come off as King William.

Chapter Sixteen: Find a Cheaper Raw Material

Although wood is the primary source of cellulose fiber for papermaking, a variety of other plants could be, and in fact are, used as the basic raw material for pulp production. Some of these alternate sources of fiber are straw, cotton, sugar cane, and hemp. Nepco, during a short period of our career, experimented with three alternatives to wood; corn stalks, straw, and marsh hay.

It was during those pre-depression years (1928-1930) when we seriously considered using straw as a source of our papermaking fiber. This was not revolutionary, as straw paper mills were quite common, even in Wisconsin. At one time the Badger state was a leader in wheat production, and the straw was a readily available by-product of this flourishing industry. Straw, like wood, contains cellulose fiber; and several small paper mills were scattered about the state making paper from this refuse which was so abundant. However, an abundance of wood in the northern part of Wisconsin, plus the development of better techniques for processing it and the demise of the wheat growing industry in the state, all resulted in wood displacing straw for papermaking.

It is quite surprising then to see as late as 1928 reports and letters advocating Nekoosa's entering into straw pulping. Excerpts from a report to Nekoosa management stated:

> *"The competition in the kraft field from the southern mills has forced down the selling price of unbleached kraft wrapping grades and liner board. There are two ways of meeting the competition. One is to make semi-kraft pulp. The other is to find a cheaper raw material suitable for use in the grades under consideration. This second alternative is possible and depends upon the use of straw grown exclusively in the adjacent counties to the East of Wood and Juneau counties.*
>
> *Straw has always been prized as a pulp making material and had formed a very important pulp source before the advent of wood pulp. Recent improvements in processing have extended its use, and the time seems ripe for the consideration of its use in the operations of Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company."*

A 72-ton pulp mill was proposed at an investment of $212,000. Cost of the pulp was estimated at $16.75 per ton; and this straw pulp was then to be blended with our regular wood fibers to make certain grades of wrapping paper, just as we blend sulphite and kraft fibers today.

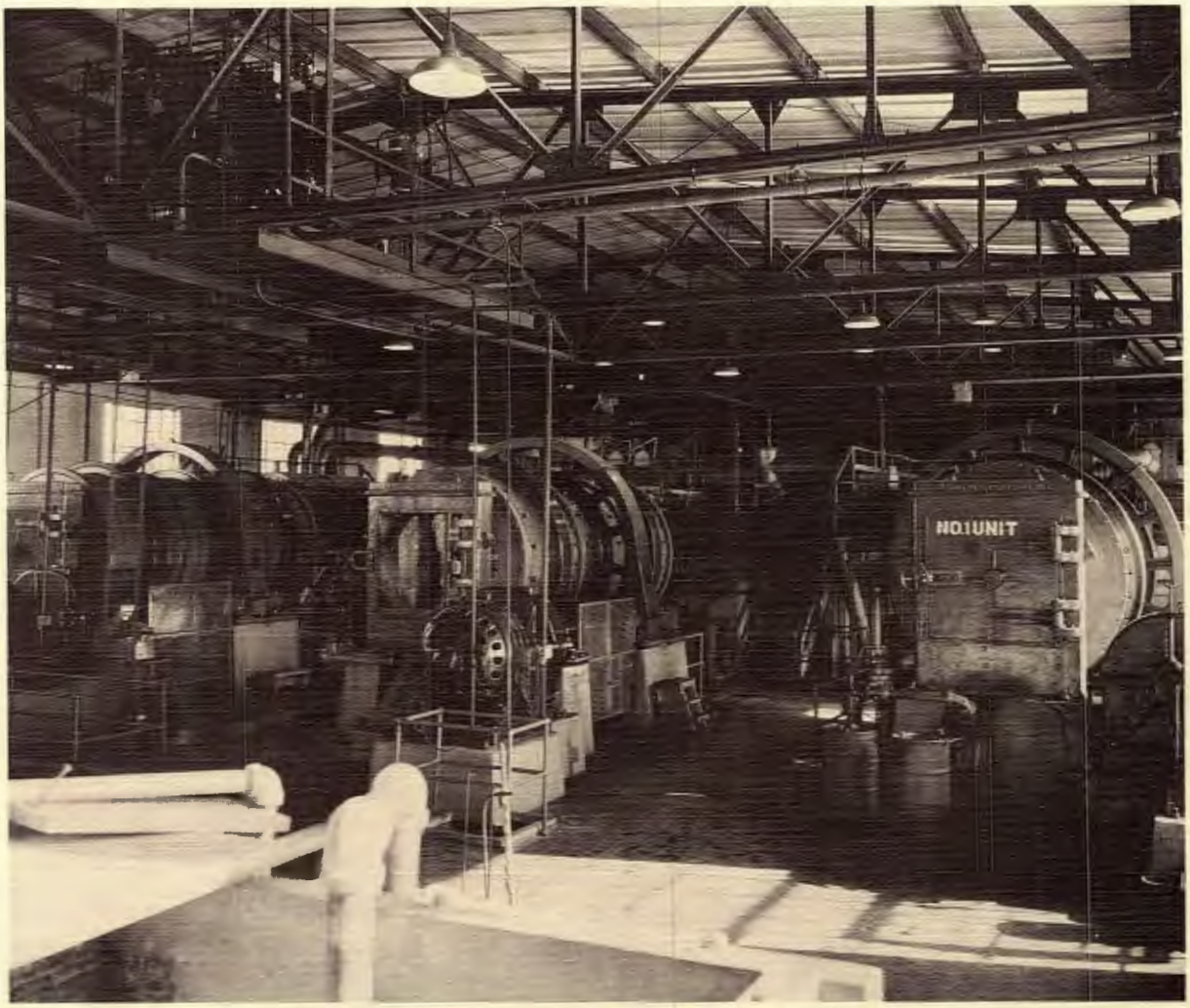
What was management's answer to the proposal? L. M. Alexander, then president of Nekoosa-Edwards in 1929, answered with these words:

> *"I have an idea! Hail to another birth! It occurs to me that we ought to get in under the rope on the cornstalk pulp very soon and make a study of that situation."*

So now emphasis had switched to another agriculture by-product, cornstalks. Cornstalks were held in high esteem, at least by agricultural research centers, which claimed that the humble cornstalk would one day provide our paper, lacquer, gun cotton, string, artificial silk and a host of other products.

Other archival letters indicate that one of the problems with the cornstalk project was the lack of cooperation on the part of the farmers. Ernest Eichstead, supervisor of outside crew, wrote in a letter to L. M. Alexander, "Can't get husks yet. Farmers have to get potatoes in seller (sic). Then they will husk corn."

A slightly different approach occurred in 1930 when marsh hay was proposed as pulping material. Located in Portage County just a few miles east of the mills, was the Buena Vista Marsh. Several acres of a variety of marsh hay were cultivated that sum-



The round drum in this photo is a rod mill. As the drum revolves, steel rods inside the drum tumble against one another. Any material inside the drum will be pounded to pieces by these tumbling rods. Originally designed for pulverizing ore, Nekoosa used them here for macerating pulp, including pulp made from straw and corn stalks.

mer and were harvested and cooked at the Nekoosa mill in a trial procedure.

Rod mills, commonly used for ore processing, were available in the Nekoosa mill and would have been used to macerate the straw or hay pulp. However, the equipment had a tendency to leave iron particles in the pulp, the chips of metal coming from the tumbling rods that beat the pulp. Thus, they were eliminated when we migrated to finer grades of paper.

None of these raw materials progressed beyond the investigational or experimental stage as far as Nepco was concerned, and there was good reason for lack of interest. Most important was the fact Nepco was on the brink of a decision which would be the most important one in its history, the conversion to fine papers. Straw pulp and cornstalk pulp had no place in these lines of paper. They were wrapping paper pulps, and we were playing our last act in wrapping paper production.

One investigator summed it up by saying that there never was going to be a shortage of pulpwood in North America. Why then should we turn to an inferior product? Thus, the project was dropped and only lives in the files of the Nekoosa archives.

Chapter Seventeen: Nepco Buys Monster Airship

The operation of aircraft for business purposes is old hat to Nekoosa Papers. Our entrance into this business support field dates back to mid-1928 when Nepco hired Major L. G. Mulzur as Aeronautical Engineer. Mulzur had previous experience with the army, having flown planes of all types from a small messenger plane to the largest bombers of that time. He had a flying log of over 2,500 hours of flying time and safely carried over 4,000 passengers.

As Nepco Aeronautical Engineer, Mulzur was responsible for the operation of the Nepco Trimotor plane. The plane was an all metal, three-engine plane build by the Ford Motor Company. It was purchased new by Nepco in 1928; and its first trip was from Chicago to Tri-City Airport, the trip requiring about two hours. It had a wing span of 74 feet and was 49 feet long. There were accommodations for 12 passengers, plus the pilot, and a "mechanician" who serviced the plant. Ample baggage space was provided in the rear.

The cost of the plane was $48,000; and a local tabloid announced the purchase with the headline, "Nepco Buys Monster Airship."

So now we had an airplane but no place to land it. Accordingly, Nepco's General Manager, John E. Alexander, organized Tri-City Airways, Incorporated. Three hundred and eighty-eight shares of $100 par value stock were purchased by 16 shareholders, of which Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company was the

The proud and mighty Ford Tri-motor airplane poses on a dirt taxi-way (runways were sod), shortly after being delivered to Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company. The planes were often called the "tin goose" because of the corrugated metal side panels.

To assure confidence in the safety of what was a first time flight for most passengers, this booklet was handed to passengers upon entering the plane. On the first page it points out that there are three engines. Only two will get the plane to its destination. One engine will give the plane an angle of descent equal to half the state of Delaware.

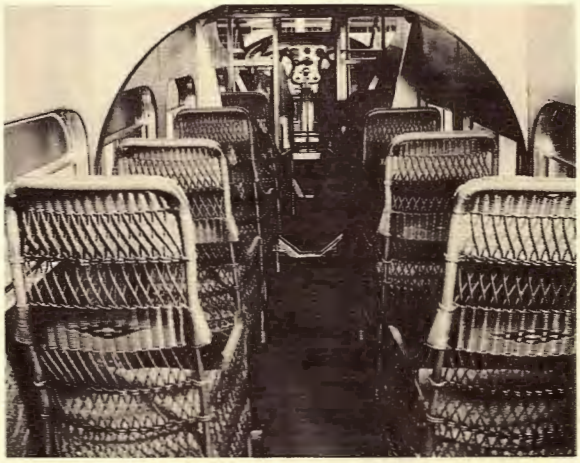
largest investor. The funds thus raised were used to purchase 330 acres of land east of Port Edwards. Sod runways with excellent drainage were laid out, a hangar was built, a 24-inch rotating beacon and wind sock were installed, obstruction lights and field markers were placed, a manager was hired and by dedication on October 21, 1929, the airport boasted being the largest all weather, all way airport in the state.

The port was managed by Major L. G. Mulzur from 1928 to 1932. Major Mulzur operated a flying school, complete with dormitory facilities. The airport, under his direction, offered storage and service facilities and even night landing light service.

An ambitious attempt to associate the Tri-City Flying School with Lawrence College of Appleton, Wisconsin, thereby granting a degree in aeronautics, fell short of Lawrence's goals of higher education.

Nepco used the Ford Trimotor plane for advertising its products and promoting the local airport. Its primary purpose was to fly customers from various cities to the airport. There, the Nepco bus would

A typical group of customers arrives at Tri-City Airport on the NEPCO Ford Tri-motor plane. Each group posed for their photo immediately upon arrival. The plane carried twelve passengers and a crew of two. Maximum speed was about 125 miles per hour.



Interior view of the Ford Tri-motor plane. Wicker seats provided little comfort during turbulent flights. Note the lack of seatbelts.

meet them and take them to the mills. After tours, lunch and a sales conference, the customers were flown back to their homes. Often several trips were made in a single day. On these trips the plane traveled at a maximum speed of 145 miles an hour, carried 5,400 pounds, and consumed one gallon of gasoline for each mile of travel.

In the spring of 1929 Major Mulzur took the "Nepco" on a barnstorming flight throughout the country. It is reported that this was the first close view of an airplane that many people ever had. The plane carrying the Nepco trademark, could, and did, land in most any level field since it required only a 900 foot runway. In the summer of 1929 all of the Nepco employees and their families were treated to a free ride in the "Nepco." This airlift operation required several Sundays since there were 3,000 rides to be given.

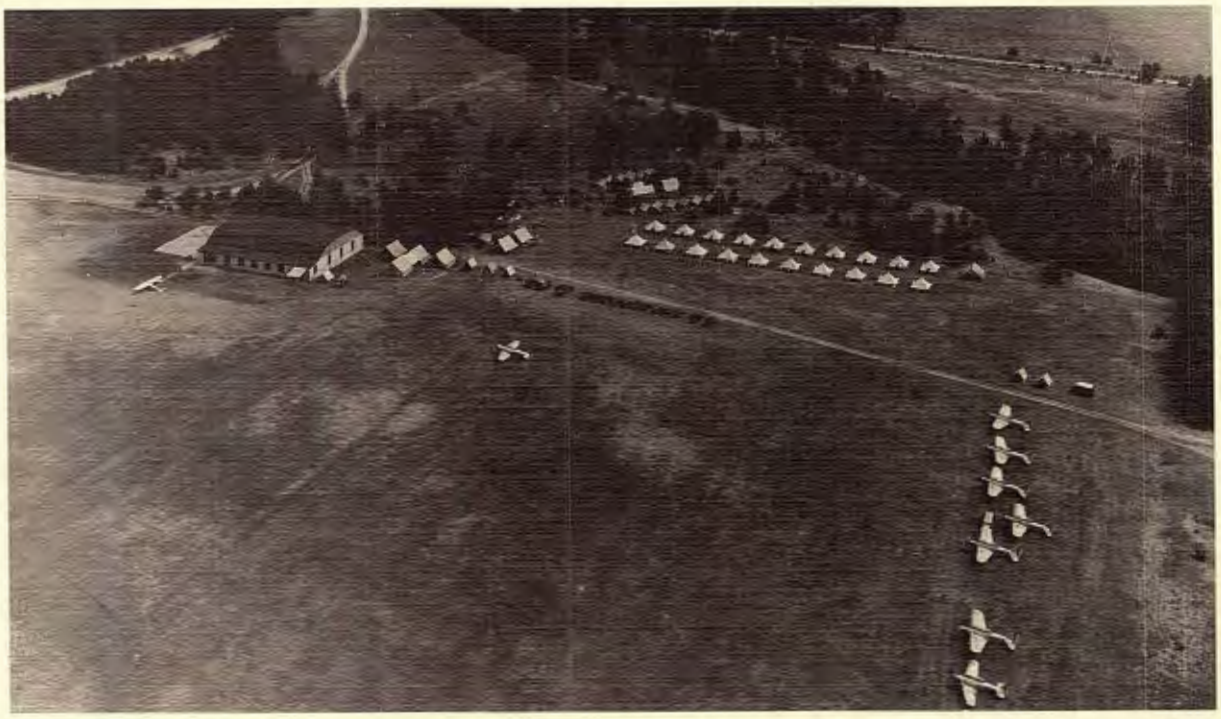
In Jacksonville, Florida, the Jacksonville Paper Company staged a "King William Day," sponsoring free rides for all butchers of the Jacksonville area.

Some human interest stories concerning our early aviation career are preserved in the Nekoosa Archives. For instance, the Tri-City Flying School purchased a Travelair plane in 1928 from a Madison, Wisconsin, dealer. Madison is 100 miles due south of Wisconsin Rapids. The pilot charged with delivery of the new plane took off from Madison with navigational instructions to follow the railroad tracks to the Wisconsin River, then follow the river

In 1929, Wisconsin became famous in court proceedings when it found a defendant guilty based on circumstantial evidence. NEPCO furnished the use of the Ford to the jury so that they might fly over the scene of the crime, thereby better acquainting them with the case.

Passengers arriving at Tri-City Airport on the Ford plane were met by this Buick bus which conveyed them to the mills or the Port Edwards Hotel were accommodations were provided for the overnight visit. The bus spent its last years as an intercity bus between Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards and Nekoosa, Wisconsin.

Classroom of the NEPCO Tri-City Flying School. When commercial airline service came to Wisconsin Rapids, this classroom was converted into a waiting room while the office to the rear was a ticket counter. When a new airport terminal building was built, these facilities became the office and lounge of the fixed base operator at Alexander Field.



Tri-City Airport became an airforce training camp in 1940. This operation was a summer only training mission. During the balance of the year the airport was dormant, and the hangar was a warehouse. Some permanent buildings were added during World War II when the airfield became a radar training facility.

to Wisconsin Rapids. But alas, out of Madison he chose the wrong railroad tracks. He ended up in Watertown, Wisconsin, where he was forced to land in a farm field, having run out of gasoline. A supply of fuel was obtained from a farm tractor, it first being strained through a silk handerchief as it was administered to the plane. Once refueled, the plane again took to the air and returned to Madison where the pilot spent the night and then attempted the trip the following day.

The Nepco Flying Service had other planes besides the Ford Trimotor. Here is a Curtis Robin. Others were a Stinson and a Fairchild. Planes of this style were used for charter and training.

Another report on file, this one a letter from Major Mulzur to John Alexander, reporting on activities at the flying school:

> *"We sold two of our four training planes to the insurance company this summer. Fortunately, no one was killed."*

Another report by Mulzur, written upon the crash of another Ford Trimotor and pointing out the safety of that model of aircraft:

> *"There must have been something else wrong besides one engine conking out. I went up today and cut my right motor off and flew around for twenty minutes with ten passengers on board."*

And how about this report to management in March of 1929:

> *"I had a deal all worked out with Pathe News Film to fly the Daytona race films to New York City. But as you probably read in the papers,*

one car crashed and killed the film man taking the pictures I was supposed to fly. I was going to get $3,000.00 for the trip with the Ford. It would have been non-stop (Daytona to New York), as I would have filled all tanks and put five, fifty-gallon drums of gas in the cabin."

The devastating depression of the early 1930's brought an end to our flight operations in 1932, but only temporarily. The Ford was sold to Mulzur and leased to Nepco for $15.00 an hour as needed. The wing advertising remained on the plane up until the

Nekoosa Paper's re-entry into the aviation field was in 1958 when this twin engine Beechcraft Bonanza was purchased. The plane was too small and was replaced very soon thereafter with a larger Beech plane. Nekoosa Papers president, John Alexander and Mrs. Alexander are about to embark on a trip. Alexander was a naval pilot in World War I and a promotor of aviation.

time that it was demolished in a tornado while on a trip to Iowa some years later.

The airport, named Tri-City Airport, continued to service small, private planes. Then in 1939 the army began using the flying field as summer training base. From 1939 to 1945 National Guard units, Airforce units and a radar training school all used the airport as a base. Then in 1945 it was converted into a prisoner of war camp housing captive German soldiers who worked on the nearby cranberry marshes and nurseries.

From 1946 to 1948, a period of dormancy fell over the Tri-City Airport. Paper Cities Flying Service leased the port and serviced a few private planes. From 1948 to 1959 the airport became nothing more than a weed patch, the hangar being leased to a local manufacturer for storage purposes.

Enter phase two of Nekoosa's flight activities. In 1958 Nekoosa purchased a Beechcraft Twin Bonanza plane. Although we had an airport in our own backyard, the plane was kept at the Stevens Point, Wisconsin airport until 1959 when improvements were made at Tri-City Airport so that our new plane could be accommodated. Starting in the summer of 1959 a unique, but not totally successful, innovation was carried out. The airport property had been completely acquired by John Alexander, who purchased all of the outstanding stock of the now defunct Tri-City Airways Company. Now an attempt was made to convert the grass runways to a 5,000 and 3,800 foot, hard surface runway by the utilization of spent sulfite liquor roadbinder, a by-product of sulfite pulping. This material was frequently used to stabilize the surface of secondary roads in the vicinity of a sulfite pulp mill. After grading the sandy soil to rigid specifications, darker top soil was spread on top. The roadbinder liquor was mixed to an eight-inch depth, and after compacting, asphalt road oil was used as a seal coat, followed by sand blotting and drag brooming. When completed, the airport claimed to be the fourth largest facility in Wisconsin. That was in 1959 when the 240-acre airport and its 98 x 102 foot hangar-administration building were given to five South Wood County municipalities as a gift by John E. Alexander, president of Tri-City Airways, Inc., and owner of the property. Construction of the runways used an additional 60 acres of Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company land. This added property enabled the airport to extend its clear zone at the end of the runways.

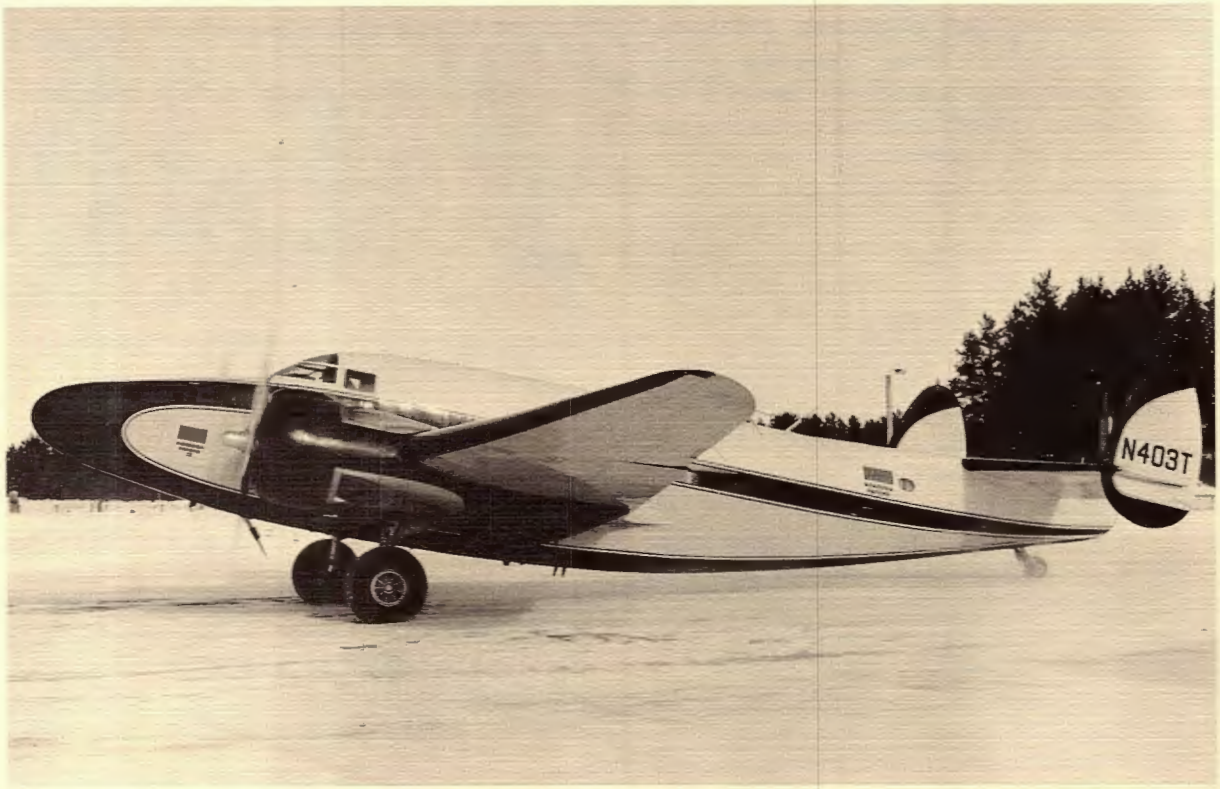
The airport was renamed Alexander Field in commemoration of Alexander's gift and today operates as a municipal airport. For many years, commercial service was available at Alexander Field.

In late 1959 Nekoosa replaced its Beechcraft Bonanza with a larger Beechcraft Super 18. This was followed in early 1963 by the acquisition of a Lockheed Learstar, which in turn was replaced by the present Dehaviland H125 Jet in 1969.

The need for a second smaller plane was realized in 1960 when a Beechcraft Baron was put into service. After 16 years of service and over two million miles of travel, the Baron was traded in on our cur-

rent Rockwell Turbo Commander in 1976.

The DH125 and the Commander, plus a staff of four pilots and a mechanic have replaced the Ford Trimotor, the aeronautical engineer and his mechanician. Now a flight to Chicago on our jet requires about thirty minutes as compared to two hours in 1929. Both planes are still used extensively for transporting customers to the mill for a first-hand look at Nekoosa's way of making paper.

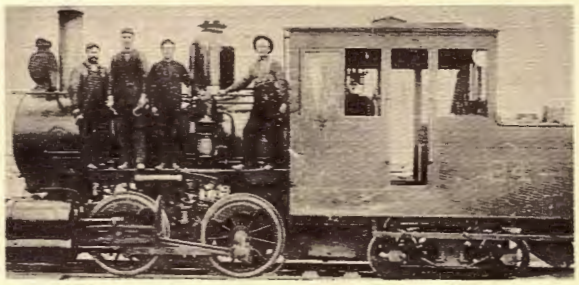


Nekoosa Papers Inc. labeled this Learstar "No. IV", since it was the fourth plane to enter service in the Nekoosa fleet. The Learstar was a nine passenger plane that was converted to corporate use from a Lockheed Lodestar.

Chapter Eighteen: One Engine Will Replace Ten Teams

Having reviewed the aeronautical history of Nekoosa Papers Inc., it is only fitting to give compensatory time to the railroad advocates. This can easily be done since Nekoosa has had a finger, in fact a whole hand, in several railroading ventures. Although John Edwards, Jr. served as a director of at least three common carrier railroads, these were not directly associated with Nekoosa. However, from some records on file, it appears that Edwards did operate a logging line prior to 1900 in Central Wisconsin.

However, in 1900 the Nekoosa Paper Company became directly involved in railroading when they acquired a steam locomotive for the purpose of shunting cars around the mill property. Prior to this purchase of mechanical power, two double teams of horses and four men were involved in moving cars. In 1900 the H. K. Porter Locomotive Company advised Tom Nash, President of Nekoosa Paper Company, that one steam locomotive would replace ten teams and at half the cost. Dobbin was doomed! Nash was sold on the idea but not on a new Porter locomotive. Instead he purchased a used



Nekoosa Paper Company became involved with railroading with the purchase of this steam locomotive acquired from the Chicago Elevated Railroad.

locomotive from the South Side Elevated Railroad of Chicago, which was converting their operations to electricity at that time.

A few years later the John Edwards Manufacturing Company saw the advantages of steam traction and purchased a new Brooks built locomotive.

Number Five locomotive was the first locomotive purchased new from the builder. Locomotives were numbered as they were acquired.

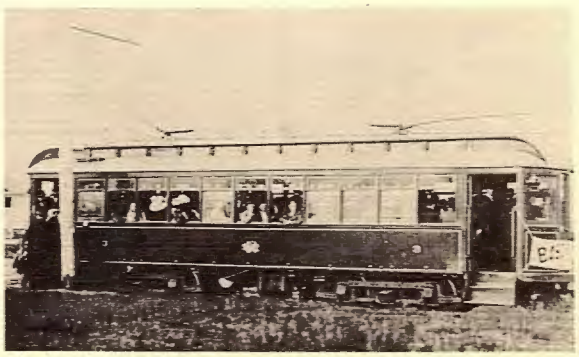
Thus by 1908, when the mills merged, Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company was well established in operating their own railroad equipment. Why, we even had a caboose at one point!

About this time we acquired a used locomotive for the Nash Lumber Company in Northern Wisconsin; and it became the nucleus for the formation of a common carrier railroad, The Glidden and Southwestern Railroad, all of four miles of mainline.

All railroad equipment operated by Nekoosa Edwards was not associated with moving cars. Several steam and in later years diesel powered railroad cranes were vital for loading and unloading logs, coal, limestone, etc. This steam crane is unloading coal at the Port Edwards mill.

The next venture came in 1909 when the Grand

Rapids Street Railway was organized; and although not a Nekoosa-Edwards property when incorporated, this eight-mile electric line did become our property just prior to abandonment in 1931. The line operated between Wisconsin Rapids and Nekoosa and received its electric power from Nekoosa-Edwards' Centralia hydroelectric plant. Part of the line is still in service as Nekoosa's intermill railroad connecting our two Wisconsin mills.

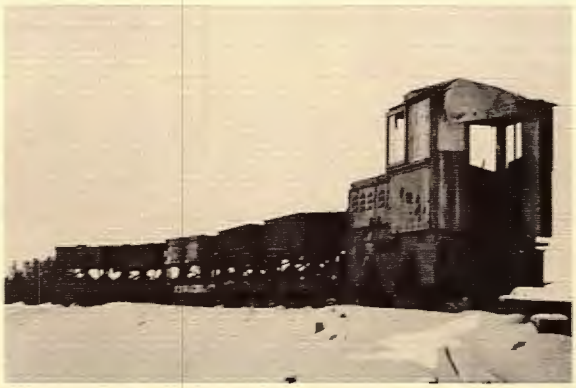


The Wisconsin Rapids Street Railway Company became the property of Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company prior to being abandoned. They operated two motor cars, one of which is illustrated, and two trailer coaches for heavy traffic periods. It appears that a trailer should have been attached for this particular trip as the car is quite crowded.

In 1946 we moved to Canada with our rail activities. There, with a retired steam locomotive from the Port Edwards mill, the Sturgeon Lake Transportation Company Ltd. was incorporated as a subsidiary of Alexander Clarke Timber Company, which in turn was a subsidiary of Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company. S.L.T. Co. was a common carrier, which with its one piece of equipment and seven miles of track, was responsible for getting cars of pulpwood out of the Canadian forests to a connection on the Canadian National Railroad for continuing movement to the mills in Wisconsin.

Originally built for the Soo Line Railroad, NEPCO purchased two locomotives like the one illustrated. They operated in the Port Edwards and Nekoosa yards until replaced by diesel locomotives. One of them was scrapped while the other went to Canada where it worked its last days on the Sturgeon Lake Transportation Company line.

Still another railroading adventure, which was unique from the others, was the portable, narrow gauge line known simply as the "Milwaukee." The name had no connotation as to cities served; but rather, it was named after its locomotive, a Milwaukee gasoline engine.



The "Milwaukee" gasoline engine at Nepco Lake with five of its minature ore cars. This line had no permanent roadbed since the tracks were somewhat like toy train tracks; the sections being laid on the ground and bolted together.

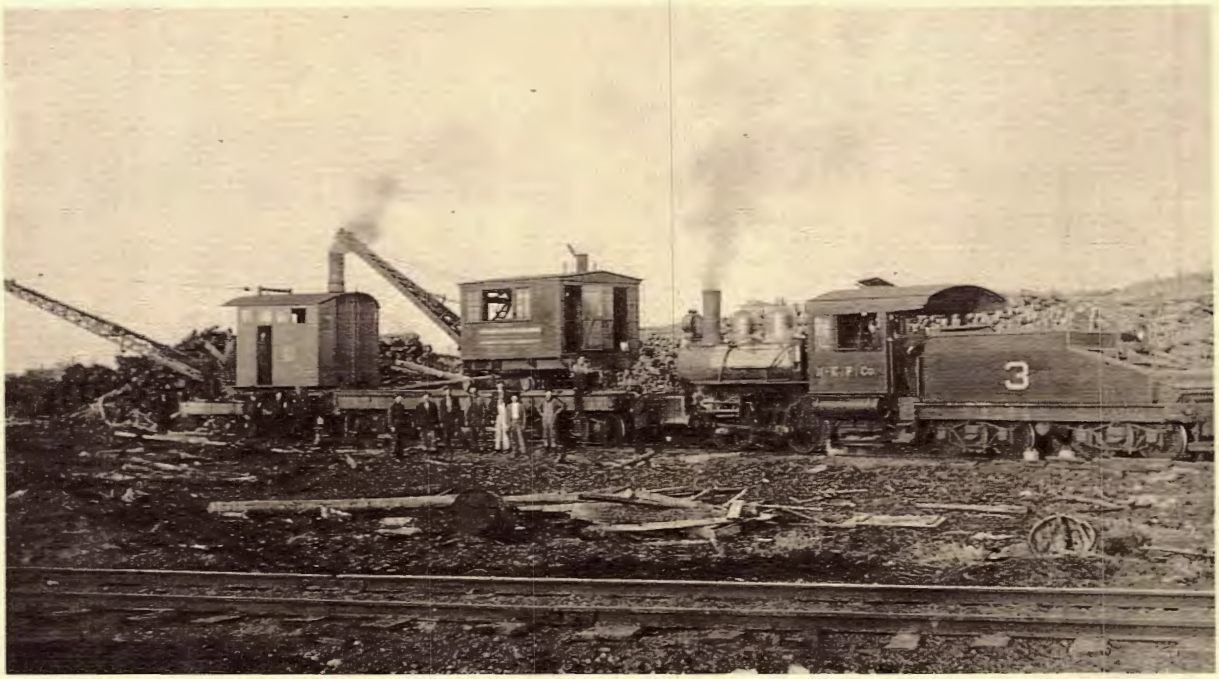
Purchased in 1928 from Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company, the motive power, cars, and tracks were moved to Nepco Lake to be used for hauling dirt for the dikes and chemicals for water treatment. In 1931 it was loaded onto a truck and hauled to Nekoosa, where it saw service on the mill dam to

All of the Glidden & Southwestern's equipment was not of massive size and heavy steel construction. This motorized unit, believed to be a model T Ford, carried passengers between Glidden and Shanagolden.

The first of the diesels arrives in 1941. The iron horse was doomed. Veteran engineer George Elliot poses with his new unit. George operated steam locomotives at Glidden prior to doing the same work at Port Edwards.

facilitate the laying of the 40-inch pipeline from Nepco Lake to the Nekoosa mill. Other service was incurred in the 1940's when the entire railroad was again loaded on a truck, having been loaned to Wood County for assisting in building a man-made lake. Finally, the unit became a piece of beach playground equipment at the employee's recreation area at Nepco Lake, where it has become a popular children's attraction.

Today our rail activities are limited to the operation of 6 diesel locomotives, 145 cars, 1 snowplow and about 20 miles of track. These facilities serve our Wisconsin and Ashdown properties.



Two cranes (jammers) are at work in the Port Edwards wood yard about 1910. The first crane is a mobile unit while the second one is mounted on a railroad flat car which has to be moved by a locomotive. Steam is the power source for all three pieces of equipment.

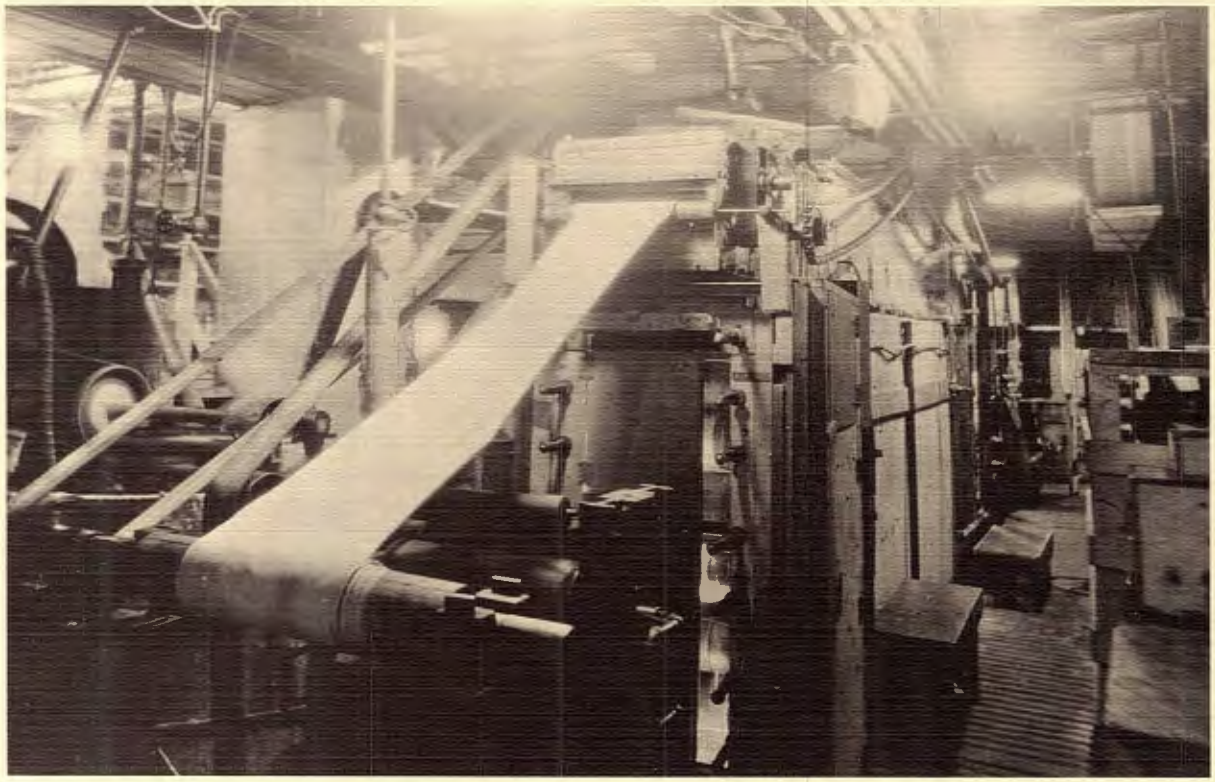
Chapter Nineteen: The Paper in the Machine Burned Up

A paper machine's life span can extend over a period of nearly a hundred years, such as our Columbian machine. It may also be short-lived as our "First Number Nine," referred to by the nickname of "John's Electric Machine."

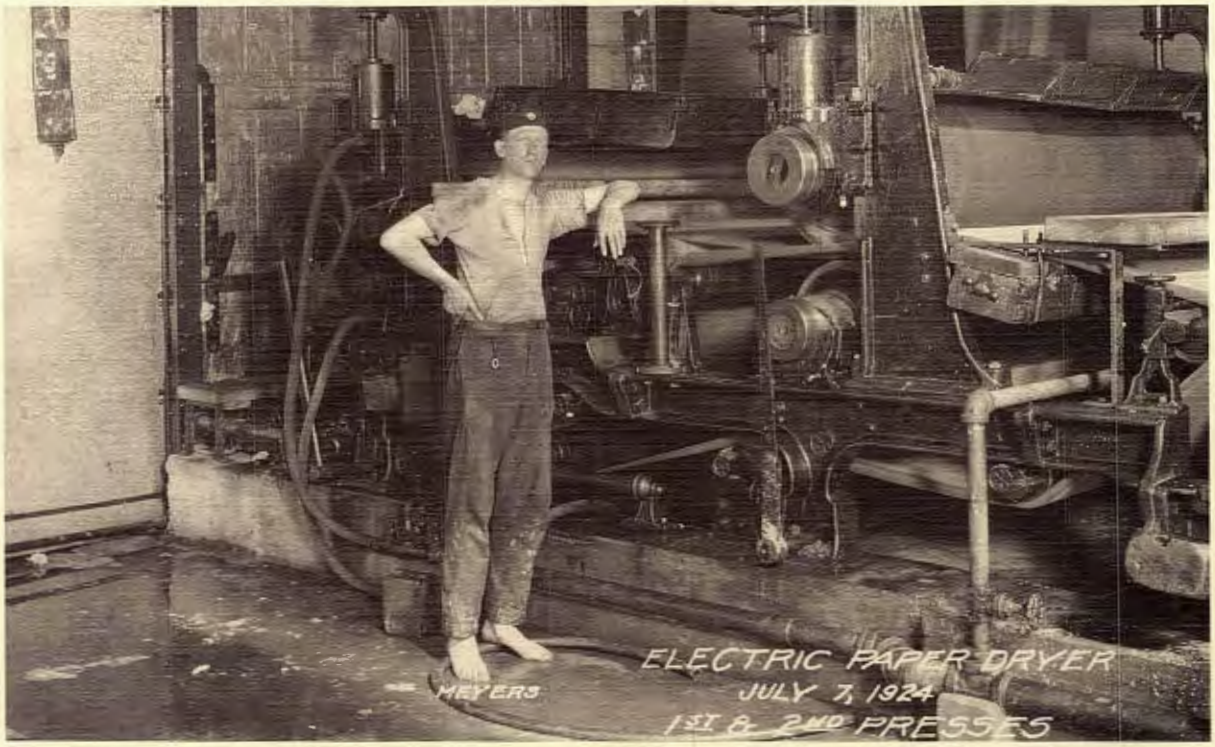
Conceived from an idea and plan developed by John Alexander, while a student at Armour Institute in Chicago in 1916, this revolutionary paper machine was supposed to utilize the abundant and low cost electricity available to most paper mills by virtue of their being located on water courses. The idea was revolutionary in two ways. First of all, the paper would be dried by means of electrically heated dryers rather than steam heated ones; and secondly, the machine would be driven by electric motors instead of a steam engine.

Upon graduation from Armour, Alexander's first position with Nepco was in the capacity of Chief Chemist. In this position he was able to further pursue his study of an electric paper machine; and accordingly built a pilot plant model in 1922. This experimental model was twenty inches wide; and instead of a conventional Fourdrinier wet end for forming paper, it incorporated a cylinder mold. The dryer was a single drum dryer; the drum being heated by electric heating elements placed inside the drum.

Alas, it didn't work! The drum did not heat uniformly over its entire surface, with the result being a sheet of paper wet in some areas and overdried in other spots. But John did not give up. He had another idea.



The pilot model of an all electric paper machine is shown here. Here the web of paper is exiting the oven and being wound on the reel. The grade of paper being run is called "paper."



Veteran Nekoosa papermaker, Lewis Meyers, was machine tender for the experimental all-electric paper machine. Louie will have dry shoes to walk home in since he is going barefoot at work.

Paper machine rooms were notorious for wet floors. This picture shows the press section and the entrance to the drying oven.

Alexander's solution to the problem was an entirely new principal for paper drying—pass the wet paper through a giant oven to dry it out. So the pilot model was stripped of its drum dryer, and in its place a sixteen foot long, electrically heated oven was built. On this small machine, newsprint, kraft wrapping, and even some writing paper was manufactured over a period of two years.

Results looked promising; so Alexander, who had been promoted to Assistant General Manager by this time, decided to build a commercial, all electric machine. First Number Nine was built in the Port Edwards mill. This was a joint effort of the Port Edwards machine shop; the Nekoosa Foundry Company; Bagley and Sewall Company, who supplied the Fourdrinier; and Westinghouse Electric Company, who supplied the heating equipment for the dryer. These collaborators had completed their joint efforts in only six months; and on July 7, 1924, the machine was started.

This commercial size trial machine was ninety-four inches wide and designed to operate at a speed of three to five hundred feet per minute. Production was in the neighborhood of one thousand pounds of paper per hour.

The wet paper, formed on a conventional Fourdrinier wire, was placed between two bronze wire screens. Sandwiched between these wire screens, the paper made five trips through the hot oven.

The oven, which was thirty-six feet long, seventeen feet wide, and twelve feet high, had brick walls that were fourteen inches thick. They consisted of two courses of four-inch brick with six inches of mineral wool insulation between them. The oven required 2500 kilowatts of electric power to heat its electric heating elements.

One of the problems encountered was traceable to the well insulated walls of the oven. A copy of the machine's log book relates to this:

"Belt broke. Turned off machine, but chamber

so hot that the paper inside burned up. This is the fourth time in ten days that this has happened."

Another comment from the same log of operation:

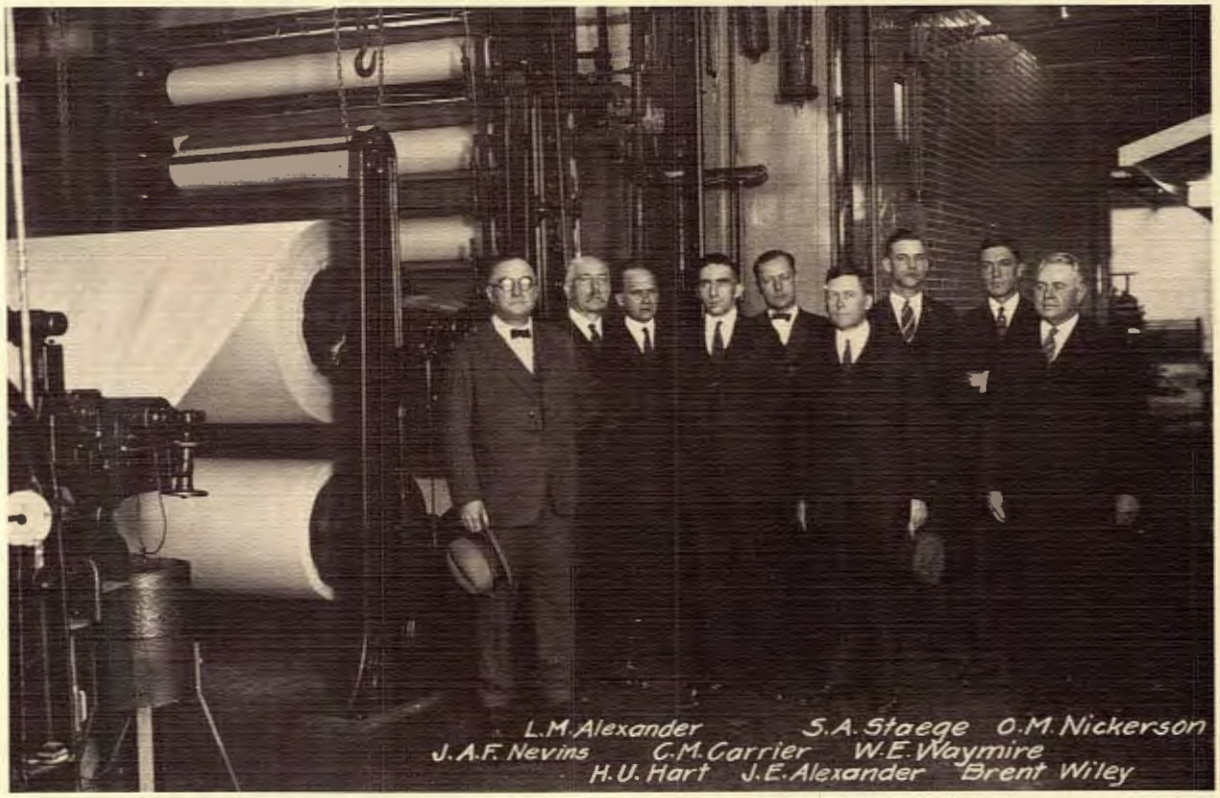
"Eleven heating elements badly burned at terminals, and all the connectors completely melted away. Melted metal fell on wire causing dents in wire."

But the final blow to the machine crew and builders was dealt with this entry:

"The finishing room crew does not seem very enthusiastic with the paper."

John's electric machine operated on and off until mid-1926. The high temperature in the drying oven affected the wire screen, causing it to expand and wrinkle. The paper was easily ignited if there was a break in the web. Still another problem was lubrication of bearings inside the oven.

Accordingly, in 1927, after plans for converting to conventional steam dryers proved to be too costly, the machine was dismantled. Meanwhile, the original twenty inch pilot model was converted to an experimental paper machine with a conventional steam dryer. Still later, it was converted into a coating applicator. Surprisingly, after all this time, nothing has replaced steam for drying paper on today's modern paper machines.



An early association between Nekoosa Papers and Great Northern Paper Company is indicated by this photo which portrays visitors from Great Northern, representatives from Westinghouse Electric Company and NEPCO management. In the rear of the gentlemen is the novel electric drying oven.

Chapter Twenty: A Hundred & Twenty-Five Beds and a Barbershop

"What does providing room and board have to do with paper making?" I will respond by letting it be known that Nekoosa has been involved in providing bed and board on at least fourteen instances. In addition, on two occasions, they have been involved in real estate transactions pertaining to home rentals.

Ever since John Edwards sent men into the woods to spend the winter cutting timber, Nekoosa, or a predecessor company of Nekoosa, has been involved in providing a home away from home for its employees.

Home? Yes, a home even though it may have consisted of a logging camp bunkhouse at the Edwards' farm on Mill Creek in Central Wisconsin. Edwards himself, according to his personal diary, made periodic trips to this hostelry, where he would spend the night. It is questionable, however, whether he slept in the "bunkhouse."

In a similar manner, Nash Lumber Company, another parent company, operated a logging camp and a boarding house in Northern Wisconsin. The reader is referred to an excellent description of life in one of these facilities in a thesis entitled, "A Boyhood in the Bush" by T. LeBlanc. Accordingly, we can pass on to more recent Nekoosa Papers Inc., ventures into the business of providing accommodations to transients as well as employees. These abodes were the more conventional hotel setup such as we associate with hotels today.

Exactly when Nekoosa-Edwards got into the hotel business is not precisely known. Perhaps the first hostelry was the old Delmonico Hotel at Centralia.

Hotel Port Edwards Prior to 1895. The building on the right survived until about 1960. The building in the center was a boarding house that was later moved closer to the hotel and became the "Hotel Annex." The John Edwards sawmill appears in the distant left of the photo.

Originally a stage coach stop, the Delmonico Hotel was later acquired by the Centralia Water Power & Paper Co. as a boarding house for employees. In its later years, it served as a family residence.

Better known perhaps are the accommodations offered for Port Edwards employees. The operation began prior to 1900 with the erection of the Blackstone Hotel which was located where the Port Edwards mill parking lot is now. After a few short years, when the Blackstone grew short of accommodations, the well known Port Edwards Hotel was built. The Blackstone was converted to a multi-family residence, and the Port Hotel prospered under the management of Charles Meyers, a former lumber camp cook from the Nash Lumber Co. In fact, the demand for accommodations, especially in the late 1920's due to several company expansion projects undertaken at that time, was so great that another building was built along side of the hotel just to the east of it. This building was called the Port Edwards Hotel Annex. At this time, the Port Edwards Hotel boasted of having 125 beds, not necessarily in private rooms and not with a bath.

Interior of the Port Edwards Hotel showing the white marble tables used for serving Nekoosa Edwards customers who visited the mills. Nekoosa Edwards operated a label printing shop in this area for many years after the hotel closed its doors to visitors.

Also included were a dining room, where no liquor was served, and an in-house barbershop.

The reputation of the Port Edwards Hotel probably received its best impetus from F. J. McGargle, who took over operation in 1921. McGargle, better known as Mac, had as many as 168 resident

The Port Edwards Hotel and annex with the "Barracks" on the extreme left. All three facilities were 'sold out' in the 1920's when this photo was taken. A prolonged strike at the mills brought in many single employees who resided in these buildings as well as a similar one at the Nekoosa mill.

boarders at one time or another. To accommodate that number of guests, an addition to the hotel called the annex was added, as well as a completely separate, but adjacent building, called the barracks.

Three bounteous meals were served daily to these men, in addition to non-resident boarders, so that Mac often prepared as many as 700 meals a day.

With McGargle as manager, the hotel was operated by six chambermaids and a cook. Fresh vegetables were on the menu almost daily in season, since Mac raised several of them himself in back of the hotel where the parking lot is now situated. They say the desserts were something to remember since Mac and his cook did all their own pastry baking. In fact, it was the policy of Nepco to provide the best food for its employees. To do this, the most modern and sanitary equipment was available to the chefs. Meals were served on marble top tables. So deluxe were meal accommodations at the hotel, that several dinner meetings, conventions, and conferences were held in the dining room there. The Nepco customers, flown to the mill on the Ford Trimotor plane, were housed in the "suites" on the second floor and were served their meals in the common dining room.

Mac liked to tell a story about the flood of 1911. Men working in the mill had their meals packed at the hotel and sent to them in the mill. Due to the flood conditions, hotel employees had to use a rowboat to take the meals to the mill from the hotel.

The Port Edwards Hotel operated for nine years after McGargle's retirement in 1944. It was then converted into the Nekoosa Papers print shop, photography studio, and file storage rooms.

Two other company operated boarding houses were built in 1919. Referred to as the barracks, one was located in Port Edwards on the site of the present Administration Building. The other was located in Nekoosa at a site midway between Market Street and the mill woodroom. These two buildings were erected in connection with the strike of 1919; their purpose being to provide rooms and meals for migrant workers brought in to operate the mills in spite of the striker's picket lines. After serving their purpose for about three years, the two facilities were closed in 1921, and the Port Edwards Hotel absorbed the residents in its accommodations. Both of the barracks operated their own dining rooms during their peak occupancy.

Upon closing in 1921, the Nekoosa barracks were dismantled. The Port Edwards building, however, was used for storage facilities, until 1941 when the shell of the building was converted into the famous Paper Inn. This popular restaurant, which was recommended by gourmet diner, Duncan Hines, also had available a lunch counter, six bowling lanes and a billiard room. The Paper Inn was operated by Nekoosa Papers Inc., until the mid-50's. At that time, it was leased to a private operator, and then finally torn down in 1961 when the Administration Building was erected on the same site.

The Paper Inn was formerly the Barracks that housed single employees of the Port Edwards mill. Even after this picture was taken, the second floor was still partitioned off into small rooms that formerly served as sleeping rooms. The walls between rooms were of wallboard construction.

Nepco operated smaller caravanserai, such as the temporary one at Nepco Lake during construction of the lake, and still another in Northern Wisconsin in conjunction with our reforestation operations.

On two occasions, this company launched a home building campaign providing homes for employees. The first venture was about 1900 when Nekoosa-Edwards built homes in Port Edwards. These houses were in the south portion of the village, one on each corner of the block, all painted white, and all of the same basic plan. It is easy to recognize these homes, even today, in spite of their remodelings. In 1920 some eighty homes were rented out by Nepco. All were sold during the 1930 depression in an effort to raise badly needed cash.

Following World War II, Nekoosa once more went

into the housing business by constructing a dozen new homes; and although not all the same color this time, all were of the same basic design. All have since been sold to private interests, as was an eight-unit apartment building built in Port Edwards following World War II.

In the 1920's one of Nepco's slogans was "Live where you work!" Although an attempt in the 1920's and again in the 1950's was made by Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company to make this a reality, the automobile won out, making commuting to and from work a daily reality.

The famous Paper Inn offered pool, bowling, billiards, soda fountain, and elegant dining. The facility was operated by Nekoosa Papers for a number of years and then leased to a private operator; finally being torn down after a new YMCA was built in Port Edwards.

With a goal of providing housing for employees as well as beautifying the village of Port Edwards, Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company built this eight unit apartment building. Named NEPCO Court, the property has since been sold to a private investor.

Chapter Twenty-One: Specify Natural

No one likes a war. Nevertheless, it affects everyone, and Nekoosa is no exception. During our business career, several military conflicts have involved our country and its people. Two, however, had a major influence on Nekoosa's daily operations. These were the conflicts that went into the history books under the title of World War I and II. As stated in the opening line of this chapter, nobody likes a war, so I will get the details of both conflicts out of the way in just one chapter. This is a logical thing to do since the conditions and situations affecting Nekoosa in World War I and World War II were quite similar. However, in the case of World War II the efforts put forth by Nekoosa and its employees were greatly magnified, just as the whole war was.

Let's start with the War Bond purchase effort. During World War I, each employee at Nepco was asked to sign a pledge card, which authorized a two dollar deduction to be made from his or her paycheck each payday, until such time as a fifty dollar war bond could be purchased. This war was not as expensive as the one which followed, when Nekoosa Papers' employees earned the United States Treasury Department's Minute Man flag for having 97.5% of the employees saying "yes" to a regular payroll deduction for war bonds. This time,

A victory flag and this small 2" x 4" aluminum plaque was presented to Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company for their support of the War Bond Drive between 1941 and 1945. Evidently the shortage of metal prohibited the awarding of a larger bronze plaque!

however, fifty dollars did not suffice. Instead, a regular payroll deduction was made for the entire four year duration of the war!

The war affected our business in several ways, two of which were the procurement of dyestuff and chlorine gas. Prior to World War I, most dyes were manufactured in Germany. With the outbreak of the war, the supply was terminated. Chlorine gas was also in short supply due to its use as a weapon. This prompted a directive from the Nepco sales department, wherein customers were advised that due to raw material shortages they should "specify natural shade." If they wanted white, it would be a two dollar a ton upcharge, and colored sheets would carry a fifteen dollar a ton upcharge over natural. During World War II, Sales Manager Adam Remley advised customers, "It's only reasonable to conclude that the color and brightness of our paper will be affected. We, of course, will keep as near our present standard as possible."

Price increases, however, did not cover the added costs of bleach and dye. Consequently, on January 22, 1918, all merchants were advised that Nepco was withdrawing all prices on all grades and would quote on inquiries only, and only in full carloads. The last stipulation was to conserve on railroad cars which were in short supply.

The shortage of chemicals during World War I resulted in one plus factor for Nepco. The lowly waste bark that for years had been burned or used for landfill now became valuable as a source of tannin. The biggest use of tannin was in the leather pro-

Neatly stacked piles of softwood bark dry in the sun at Port Edwards, prior to being loaded into railroad cars and sold as a source of tannin. Tannin was primarily used by leather tanneries. It provided an auxiliary cash receipt for NECPO during World War II.

cessing industry. Crews were engaged to hand peel the bark from the wood, stack it for drying, and then load it into rail cars. This practice continued well after World War I, through the depression years, and through World War II, providing an extra source of income to Nekoosa-Edwards.

Meanwhile, back on the home front, another effort was duplicated during both wars. During World War I, Nepco made available to employees plots of ground to be used for "war gardens." Twenty-five years later, Nekoosa's president, John Alexander, instituted a program which again made available to employees an eighth of an acre of land to be used for raising of food crops. Some of these plots were on the same land that had served in World War I! Nekoosa Papers plowed the eighth of an acre after first fertilizing it. To climax the annual "Victory Garden" harvest, Nekoosa sponsored a garden festival offering prizes for the choice garden specimens. Two hundred employees, including Nekoosa's first lady, Dorothy Alexander, wife of John Alexander, took advantage of the offer and raised their own crops.

Employees became involved in the war effort in other ways. One hundred and fifty employees took first aid and home nursing courses offered by the Department of Civilian and Industrial Defense. Through their unions they purchased two hundred dollars worth of bonds, contributed five dollars to the Red Cross, and purchased ten cartons of cigarettes to be sent to servicemen. It may sound small, but their heart was in the war effort, and their union coffers were not heavily endowed.

The employees' greatest contribution was leaving their job, community, and family to serve in the armed forces. The "NEPCO DIGESTER" reported the number of men leaving Nepco each month. For example, September, 1941 - 7; October, 1941 - 22; February, 1942 - 72. An illuminated victory sign was placed on the lawn outside each of the mills, and on these signs the names of the men and women in the service were inscribed. The proud claim is that 435 of approximately 1,400 employees entered the service. That's thirty-one percent! Their jobs were filled by housewives, who took their places until the veterans returned in 1945. Nekoosa president, John

A group of employees demonstrate their patriotism by supporting a blood drive in the mills. Employees generally had to go to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to give blood. Buses made routine trips to that city with donors.

This victory "V" was located on the lawn near the Main Office at Port Edwards. World War II service personnel were named on the sign. However, as the war went on longer than anticipated, the sign was too small and the reverse side had to be used. The Nekoosa plant had a similar sign for their service personnel.

Alexander, remembered these servicemen by writing letters to them and sending gifts of stationery and cigarettes at Christmas time.

Meanwhile, what was going on back at the mill? Well, it was obvious that there was a war on. In both conflicts notices were posted in the mills, "All Aliens Must Register." An indication that precautions were being taken was the installation of fences around mill property. Gates were kept locked and guards posted. This was an unheard of step to a family operated company in such a small community. As soon as the war was over in 1945, however, the fences were removed and guards retired.

The mills took a step toward cleanliness as old, obsolete equipment and machinery were dismantled and sold for scrap. The goal was to supply one thousand pounds of scrap metal for each of the 1,400 people employed, or a total of seven hundred tons. Thus, an old boiler and several pulpwood grinders found their way to the melting pot. Several old railroad cars from the Nepco Lake narrow gauge railroad were dismantled by local boy scouts, this author included, and sold as scrap, only to find that the cars were badly needed a few years later. The Port Edwards machine shop rebuilt the fleet.

While on the subject of machine shops, here is one group which really became involved in the war. Their lathes, drill presses, and manpower produced parts for submarines, aircraft, bombs, and torpedoes. From parts weighing a fraction of an ounce, to some that weighed in at two and a half tons, the Port Edwards and Nekoosa shops helped to outfit twenty-six submarines that were built in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. The Peto, Hammerhead, and Loggerhead were three of these craft that gained recognition during World War II, and Nekoosa-Edwards had a hand in their construction. All in all, over 27,000 man hours were spent in machining antennae masts, steering gear, hatch covers, valves, and door locks. It was a twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week operation. A far cry from papermaking, but it was a contribution to the war effort. It should be pointed out that the maintenance workload at the mills did not suffer because of this diversion of energy. With replacement equipment being almost impossible to secure, the maintenance crews were taxed to keep the operating equipment performing, and they did just that.

Papermaking is what we do best, and here too we went to war. Our mix of grades started to include some specialty sheets that were war related. Waterproof Map Paper, made for the army, would find a use after the war as outdoor billboard paper. Anti-Tarnish Paper, used for wrapping bombsight parts, would have a use after the war for packaging syringes and needles. Nepco Refrigerated Locker Paper assumed an entirely new role. It was found to be an ideal waterproof wrapper to be used for shipping aircraft engine parts to the South Pacific tropics, thereby preventing rusting. Cartridge Paper and Battery Paper were two of our grades that were discontinued after the war. And King William! It is documented that this old reliable meat packaging paper was used on one occasion to send a package to a fighting man in Italy, who then used the same piece of paper to return a gift to his mother. The same sheet of paper went to Italy and back, protecting its contents both ways.

When the war was over, Nekoosa-Edwards welcomed the men and women back by offering them their original jobs or similar ones. House construction, which had been curtailed for four years, was once more begun. To encourage employees to build a home, Nekoosa-Edwards inaugurated a home building incentive program. Three hundred dollars was made available to each employee who built a home for his own occupancy.

Servicemen signs were removed, fences came down, and the guards retired. The war was over. Why dwell on it any longer?

Chapter Twenty-Two: Damn Those Yankees

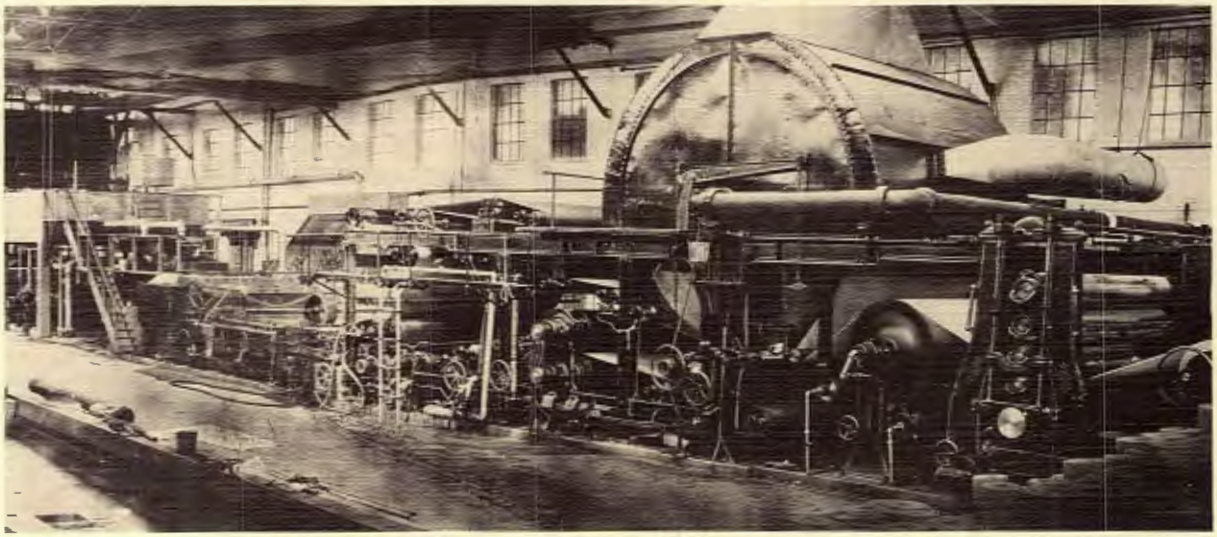
For thirty years Nekoosa-Edwards had made quality paper on six paper machines (eight between 1908-1912). They were the basic Fourdrinier "run of the mill" type paper machines, consisting of a wet section, press section, and a multitude of steam heated dryer drums for drying the paper.These conventional paper machines produced more grades of paper than there were dryers on the machine. Operations were going along quite smoothly—that is, up to early 1923. Then someone had an idea that Nepco's future was in MG (machine glazed) papers, and that Nekoosa-Edwards should invest in not just one, but two of those new style "Yankee" paper machines. The initial investment would not be great when compared with a conventional Fourdinier paper machine, and a greater spectrum of grades could be added to Nepco's product list.

Erecting Number Eight paper machine at the Port Edwards paper mill in 1923. The frame work for the Yankee machine is being put up. An entire wall of the mill building will be torn out in order to get the dryer section into the mill.

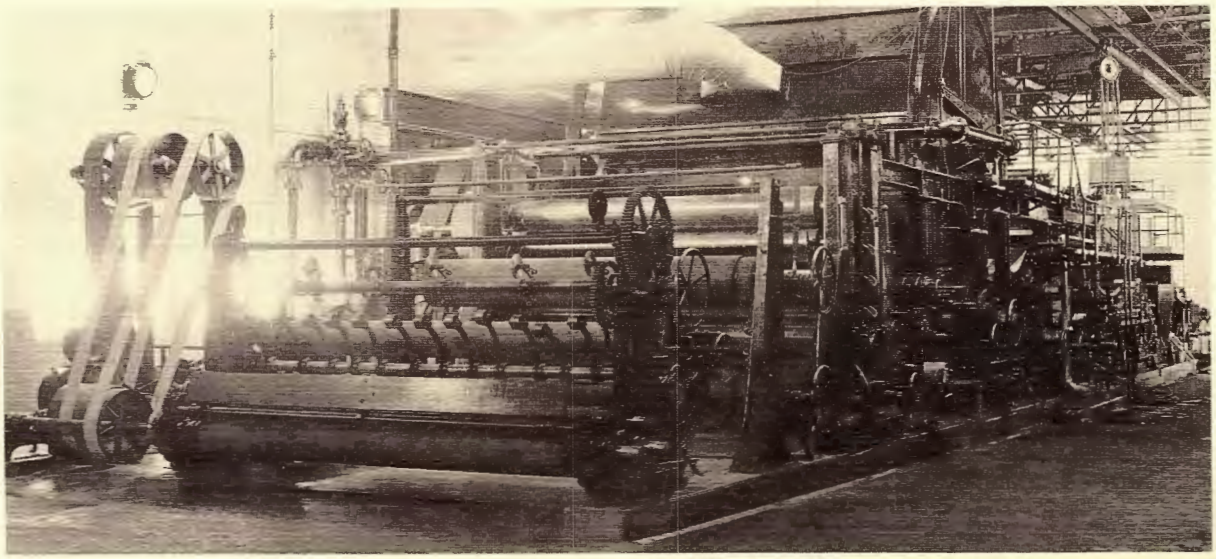
A Yankee paper machine differs from a Fourdrinier machine in one distinct area. Instead of twenty or thirty steam-heated drums for drying the paper, it has only one steam-heated drying drum. What a drum it was—twelve feet in diameter—the largest ever built to that date.

Since one side of the paper was in contact with the highly polished surface of this steel drum, it obtained a glazed surface. At the same time, the reverse side of the paper was in contact with a felt blanket, which resulted in a dull finish on that side.

Two of these machines were ordered from Beloit Iron Works and were ready to go into production in July of 1923, one at Port Edwards and the other at Nekoosa.

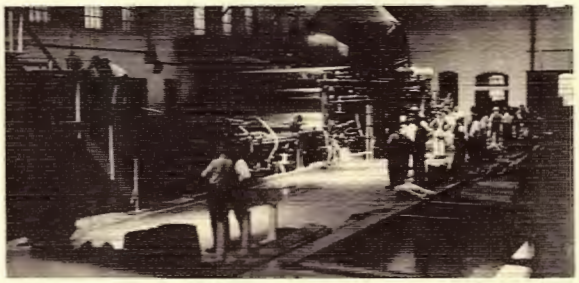


Number eight paper machine in the Port Edwards mill was making machine glazed wrapping papers when this photo was made about 1928. The machine still shows some of the ornate decoration and striping on its framework and the calender stack. In the lower left of the photo can be seen the wet end pit for Number seven paper machine which would be moved into this spot from the Nekoosa mill.



Sister paper machine Number Two at the Nekoosa mill is shown before having additional dryers added to the dryer section. This machine was sent to Potsdam, New York for our mill at that location. The steel dryer drums on these machines weighed 38 tons and were the largest ever built to that date.

In spite of the fact that they were boasted as being the most up-to-date paper machines in the state of Wisconsin (and that took in a lot of paper machines), the operating crews did not look with favor on them. They were not used to this newfangled way of drying paper. There was also another complication to operating these new machines. Instead of driving the paper machines by a good old reliable steam engine, these two new mechanical monsters were automated by steam turbines; the first ones to be used by Nepco. Maybe this is why the Oilschlager brothers, Walter, Ed and Oscar (all veteran machines tenders) referred to their charge as "those damn Yankees."



Startup time is that moment when the culmination of months of planning and effort plus thousands of dollars, is finally realized. The expectant crew stands by waiting to see the end result. It is interesting to note that two veteran papermakers, Art Sarver and 'Stoogie' Frisch had the distinction of being on the startup crew and the crew that made the last run of paper on the Yankees.

At Nekoosa, however, Mill Superintendent Len Smith and his assistant, C. Youngchild, had a brainstorm. Only a year or two after the machine was started, these men convinced Nepco management that performance and versatility could be improved if the machine only had more drying capacity. Accordingly, a bank of ten conventional dryers were added just after the Yankee drying drum.

Both machines operated on light weight grades. One of these grades was called box cover and was used for the outer covering of shoe boxes, candy boxes, etc. Another large volume grade was twisting stock used for braided paper rugs. The machine at Port Edwards made white tissue gift wrap, second sheets, carbonizing paper, and foil mounting paper. Since none of these grades are in the current Nekoosa Papers specification book, you may ask "Whatever happened to the twin Yankees?" Number two at Nekoosa was dismantled in 1958 and sent to the Potsdam, New York mill, which we operated then. Number eight at Port Edwards operated until 1965, when it was sold to a used equipment dealer. For all we know, it may still be turning out light weight papers in some third-world country. As for Nekoosa, both machines were replaced by new, larger machines, which were also numbered two and eight—and they were conventional Fourdrinier paper machines!

Chapter Twenty-Three: Forests Are Forever

Ponder, if you will, on the numbers that follow. Nekoosa's No. 63 paper machine produces about 600 tons of paper each day. A rule of thumb is that two tons of wood are required to produce a ton of paper. Thus, 1,200 tons of pulpwood are consumed each day in order to keep No. 63 paper machine running. That amounts to 22 railroad cars of wood needed to satisfy the daily appetite of just one of Nekoosa's giant paper machines.

With a demand like that being placed on our forests, it is no wonder that Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company became worried some years ago and decided that their major raw material might someday become depleted. It easily would have if we and other concerned parties had not been farsighted enough to reforest cut-over lands.

Since 1926 Nekoosa Papers has moved steadily toward the Utopian idea of "Forests Forever." Under our forest management plan, a plan which has become one of the largest in the country and a pattern for many others to follow, plus the efforts of other public and private forestry operations, there are now enough trees growing in our forests to meet Nekoosa's papermaking requirements indefinitely for some species. We are fortunate that our raw material is a replenishable one, and we are doing just that.

An early plantation of Nekoosa trees. Planted about 1929, this planting of trees has had at least two selective cuttings of mature timber taken from it.

It was not always this way. Before our reforestation program began, we were using many more trees than were being grown. Our Wisconsin forests were in bad shape. There was no planned forest control, no fire protection, and no concerted effort to prevent the trees from becoming victims of the ravages of insects and disease. Forests were either so thick that the trees died from sheer lack of space in which to grow—or they were desolate wastelands, destroyed by fire or the axe of man.

We introduced our reforestation program on January 1, 1926. It was the first forest conservation program in our section of the country and one of the very first programs of its kind in the United States. It came at a time when the common concep-

Nekoosa's pioneer Manager of Woodlands, George Kilp, is ready to cut a Norway Pine which he planted in the 1920's.

tion was that "the plow followed the axe." You cut down a forest, left the land barren, and moved on to the next stand of trees.

Nepco president, L. M. Alexander, is credited with motivating Nepco into perpetuating our forests. In 1925 he hired a young graduate forester, F. G. Kilp, and made him chief forester of the new forestry department. With a budget of $5,000 and a plot of land near Nepco Lake that was not much larger than a good-sized garden plot, about half an acre, Kilp started the first industrial nursery and reforestation program in the Lake States.

In the fall of 1926, as well as in the spring of 1927, 100 acres of cut-over land were restocked with young

No air view was necessary in 1930 to capture the overall view of the NEPCO Lake nursery. This is it. The building was the headquarters for the Woodlands operation. An adjacent building housed the tractor and truck used by the nursery in those formative years.

tree transplants obtained from a state of Wisconsin nursery. Subsequent transplants would come from Nepco's own seed beds. The first plantation of young trees was on a hill across the river from the Nekoosa mill, and coincidently, on the site where the city of Nekoosa was first plotted, but never developed.

Kilp and his crew planted 350,000 trees during the first two years of their efforts. This was done by hand using a planting bar and placing the trees in a furrow opened by a farm plow pulled by mules.

In 1928 a land acquisition program was initiated, and the land holdings were increased from 100 acres to 3,500 acres. Although Kilp's twelve-man crew planted as many as 30,000 trees in a nine-hour day, the hand planting technique was not sufficient to reforest all the available acreage. The Wisconsin planting season was too short to get the crop in. In 1930 a new Caterpillar tractor, nicknamed the "Monster 60," (60 horsepower) replaced the mule teams, thereby, enabling the planting crews to restock larger areas each year. A budget of $28,625 permitted the planting of five million trees in 1930. The modest beginning was growing, but as yet, no return on investment was being realized, nor would a return be seen for 30 or 40 years, the growing period for pine trees in the Wisconsin climate. During the financial depression of the 1930's, in the light of increasing expenses and no return on investment, John Alexander, general manager of Nepco, had a rough role to carry out in trying to convince directors and shareholders that we should continue and even expand our reforestation efforts. In his report to shareholders in 1931, Alexander stated,

> *"The forestry program is one of the most substantial developments this company has undertaken so far, and nothing should be done in any way to retard its progress."*

Alexander convinced his audience. By the early

1940's, we had 36,535 acres reforested with 46 million trees, and the program was gaining momentum.

In this photo, trees are lifted from transplant beds by hand. While one crew of men loosens the trees with a shovel, others pull the trees from the dirt. Today this is partially done by tractor pulled equipment.

Other steps were being taken to assure Nepco that there would be a return on investment someday. To protect the plantings and forest land, a fire fighting system was organized as early as 1926. The first equipment consisted of shovels and back-pack pumps. In cooperation with the state of Wisconsin, the state's fire tower network was enhanced by Nepco's own strategically placed fire towers. Several hundred miles of fire trails were built to provide quick access to any conflagration.

To supplement the Wisconsin state fire tower network for spotting fires, Nekoosa operated additional fire towers where they had exceptionally large holdings of timber lands. This early tower was near the present NEPCO Lake. It was an open air tower.

Nekoosa's Woodlands Department operated this fire truck which was designed for woodland fires. The truck was staffed by the nursery employees and was used for fires on Nekoosa property as well as on call to the Wisconsin State Conservation Department. (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources today.)

Even more destructive than fire, and more insidious because they cannot be readily detected, are the ravages of tree diseases and insects. As part of the Nekoosa-Edwards reforestation program, and in cooperation with the Wisconsin Conservation Department, we jointly pioneered a program of insect and disease control research and prevention. Cooperation with the state of Wisconsin was further exemplified when Nepco donated land on the shore of Nepco Lake for the purpose of building Griffith State Nursery.

Meanwhile, back at the half acre garden plot, things were also moving ahead. The half acre had grown, spreading almost up to the lake shore, and by the mid-1940's, no additional space was available for seed beds. Accordingly, a new nursery was opened a mile south of Nepco Lake and still another one in northern Wisconsin near Minocqua. In order that the trees might be planted at a faster pace, the nursery's master mechanic, Harry Liebig, developed several pieces of mechanical equipment to facilitate planting. Some of these inventions consisted of a two-row tree planter, capable of planting 25,000 trees in a day and a rough terrain planter, capable of planting 8,000 trees a day in rocky and hilly country. Still another of Liebig's developments was a five-row transplanter, capable of planting 100,000 seedlings a day.

It is interesting to note that several of the buildings currently in use at the nurseries in central Wisconsin and northern Wisconsin were salvaged from the Nepco Tri-City Airport, where they were originally built for use by the army and later as prisoner of war camps.

An early transplant machine developed by Nekoosa's nursery maintenanace personnel is shown. It planted one row at a time and required two men to operate it. Later modifications and improvements would make this a one-man operation and provide for a more compact piece of equipment.

When plantings became too thick, a thinning was made. The cut out trees were sold as Christmas trees. Two nursery employees are bundling trees in this photo, after which they were loaded onto trucks and shipped to dealers in large cities in the midwest.

Today, the Central Wisconsin Nursery encompasses 65 acres, Pine Lake Nursery in northern Wisconsin has 15 acres, while Nekoosa's reforestation land holdings have grown to 260,000 acres.

In 1966, Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company joined hands with several private wood lot owners and together launched the Nekoosa Tree Farm Family. Through this program, the independent woodland owner is offered free advice, assistance, and consultation on how to maximize the yield on his reforested lands. In exchange for these services, the landowner promises to give Nekoosa Papers Inc., a first option to purchase the pulpwood off those acres at the prevailing market price at the time of harvest. The Nekoosa Tree Farm Family is associated with the American Tree Farm System, which has members in all of the forested states.

With the efforts displayed by Nekoosa Papers Inc., and the cooperation of the private landowners, as well as the work of the Federal, State, and County governments, "Forests are Forever."

Chapter Twenty-Four: Teutonic Nerve and Russian Snuff Dreams

Has there ever been, in a free country, a corporation that has endured for over a hundred years without having a labor dispute? Wherever men and women come together as a group, they are sure to join hands toward a common cause. Thus labor unions were born.

Nekoosa's past has not been free of labor disputes. In fact, there is documentary evidence as far back as the summer of 1878, indicating that the John Edwards sawmill crew walked off the job. Edwards notes in his daily journal,

> *"There was a strike among the crew. The mill did not run. Several strikers left for Grand Rapids in afternoon. Seen in saloon."*

Edwards did not elaborate on just why his men deserted him, or how long they remained off the job. Maybe it was just a hot July day; and the men needed cooling off, some way or another.

Nekoosa Paper Company was only nine years old when its first labor dispute took place. It was in 1902 when laborers attempted to "unionize." Nekoosa's president, Tom Nash, would have nothing to do with it and wrote to L. M. Alexander, his counterpart at Port Edwards, that there were agitators all over the country, including in Nekoosa. He went on to state that the eastern paper mills, including Great Northern, were awaiting the outcome of events in Central Wisconsin before taking a position. Thus, sides were being taken for a major labor dispute that would affect many of the country's paper mills.

The Nekoosa mill employees had united and chosen the side of the United Brotherhood of Paperworkers. On the other side was management and owners of the Wisconsin paper mills.

In Grand Rapids, a church pastor rallied to the support of the would-be strikers, and spoke openly in favor of the union, and encouraged a strike to enable the employees to attain their goals. Frank Garrison, president of Centralia Water Power and Paper Company, wrote to L. M. Alexander, "Can't you muzzle the preacher in some way?" Alexander was an influential church supporter and obviously was expected to exert his influence on the minister.

On the evening of April 5, the employees met in Brooks Hall in Nekoosa. There in the city's "Opera House," by the light of kerosene lamps, the workers were informed that—

> *"Anyone leaving their work could never return as long as the same management was in power."*

That evening, the night shift did not report for work, nor did the morning crew of April 6. An orderly picket line walked the street outside the mill.

On that date there were already six Wisconsin mills out on strike, including the John Edwards Manufacturing Company and neighbor mill, Grand Rapids Pulp and Paper Company. Five hundred employees around Wisconsin were off the job, a third of them women. Before it was over, six more Wisconsin mills would shut down, affecting twelve hundred workers.

The important question is, "What was the issue?" Essentially, the employees were seeking shorter hours of work. It wasn't a money issue, since several strikers secured alternate work with the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, which was building track in the area. For $1.75 a day they shoveled sand, grading the right of way. This compared with $3.75 a day for work in the mill. Several strikers were quoted by the local newspaper as saying that mill work was easier than shoveling sand.

Management operated a single machine at Nekoosa, but the other three were idle. Tom Nash attempted to increase production by hiring some out-of-town machine tenders, who arrived in Nekoosa on the evening train. Nash met the train, as did a group

of strikers. In a flare of tempers, Nash wielded his revolver at the group. An observer reported, "It was a disgraceful affair that broke up in a row." But apparently Nash was convincing enough, for by April 24, all the machines were again running, and without union labor. The pickets were gone and the product was reported to be "as good as ever." The Grand Rapids Tribune reported that the strike had "fizzled," and that the "outcome was against the strikers." The mills were operating once more and with non-union help.

But the union movement was not dead. After a dormancy of 17 years, four of those being World War I years when it was considered unpatriotic to strike, the union sought certification as the bargaining unit for mill employees. This was a local issue affecting only Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company and its employees. The issues finally resolved down to two items: an eight-hour day and the recognition of the union as a bargaining agent.

Management refused to deal with an outside group (The National Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Mill Workers). Thus it happened once again. The mills were struck on June 21, 1919. At first it was mostly a verbal battle. Management said it was "teutonic nerve" for the union to tell their members that "victory was just around the corner." Management was resorting to left over patriotism from the recent war.

The unions spoke up and said that the Federal government was about to revoke the water power rights on the river and would be taking over or closing down the mill.

Management accused the unions of making promises to their members that were just "empty Russian snuff dreams." The union retorted that management was lying to employees. Now management capitalized on a piece of Civil War history, the carpet bagger's movement, when they stated that the strike "was a result of war time pro-German agitation, the strike being fostered by IWW socialists, Russian-Soviet advocates and human barnacles; men who lined their pockets with the hard-earned savings and pay of honest working men." A bomb threat to one of management's homes followed. Things were getting rougher.

The mills being down for one week, L. M. Alexander announced that he would rehire any employee who would return to work, Several did and now there were three sides: strikers, "scabs," and management.

At the end of a week the matter of wages and hours had been resolved; the only remaining issue being the recognition of the union. Alexander wanted an open shop. He did offer to form and bargain with an employee's committee, representing mill workers, but not a nationwide brotherhood. He added that the mills were going to restart, and they did on August 18, 1919. A threat by management to evict families of strikers from company owned homes, and single men from the company boarding house, no doubt encouraged some strikers to return to work.

A second strike vote on July 17 indicated the men were still supportive toward the strike (448 to 31). The strike continued.

Now the wives of the strikers became involved. Uniting, they called their group, Daughters of the Democracy. One of their goals was to change the name on the Nekoosa school from Alexander school to a name what would be more honorable to its student body.

The mills resorted to hiring new employees; sixty-five of them coming from Chicago on a special railroad car that was switched right into the mill yard. The train, just as in 1902, was met by strikers who stoned the train, injuring the engineer with a well-directed rock. The union chastised their members, later apologizing to the engineer for this violence. He was a union man!

Guards rode the train and remained inside the mill fence, protecting the replacement employees. Anyone leaving the confines of the mill property was threatened with a beating.

An additional 25 strike breakers, coming by train from Minneapolis, were met by strikers at Stevens Point, where they were changing trains. There they were convinced to reverse their travel and return to the Twin Cities.

On September 3, 1919, the mills announced to their customers that they were once again making news-

print on one machine, with all new employees. Additional machines were started as manpower became available; and in December of 1919, the mill boasted that they produced more paper that month than in January of the same year. Alexander went on to say, "The machines are humming and 60 basket lunches are sent into the mill each shift." (The picketers were ouside the mill fence, still enforcing their "beating-up policy.")

Alexander commended the non-striking office crew for remaining on the job, doing menial tasks such as working on the company farm, and unloading bricks and pulpwood. His year-end report, Dec. 24, 1919, climaxed with the announcement that the strike was over. The union which had dug in for the winter, counter announced from their bonfires outside the gates that "It's up to the union to say when it's over."

Alexander's personal, green Pierce Arrow touring car was nicknamed the Green Dragon and the Battle Wagon, as it transported strikers to and from their homes. On one trip it was reputed to have picked up 14 nails or tacks on a trip from Nekoosa to Port Edwards.

Management built a barracks at each mill, to accommodate their workers. Kitchens and dining halls were on the first floor, while the second floor provided rooms with bunk beds as sleeping accommodations. And all the while, armed guards patrolled the grounds. The city of Wisconsin Rapids warned that guards should, "Leave your guns in Port Edwards when coming to town."

And so the strike went on through the winter months. A Grand Rapids Tribune reporter wrote that his "inspection showed everything running well." But the winter was full of minor entanglements between management, strikers, and workers. Throughout the winter, the local newspaper reported assault and disorderly cases in the local court. The usual fine was one dollar—levied against both complainant and defendant.

On April 4, 1920, the union asked employees to not be a scab. They defined a scab as, "Someone that was made from the awful stuff that God had left over after creating the rattlesnake, toad, and vampire." It sounds humorous today, but it was serious in 1920.

With the arrival of Spring, 1920, the gardens needed planting, the homes needed painting, and other summer preoccupations relieved the tension. Mills were running at full capacity; and the strike gradually died, but not without hard feelings. Nobody wins in a strike! In this case, mill management had gotten their way. The union was not recognized, and the mill was still an open shop.

Forty-eight years would pass before there would be another work stoppage due to labor negotiations at a Nekoosa mill. In July of 1967, the papermakers' union rejected a company offer by an affirmative vote of "98% of members present" at the meeting, as reported by the union. The issue was a mere 4 cents per hour increase in wages. Nekoosa had offered 16 cents, and the union wanted 20. Four other operating unions not only accepted the company offer, but crossed the picket line and came to work during the walkout.

The strike began on July 19, 1967, and lasted ten days. Pulp production continued for a few days, and shipments from warehouse stock continued.

Several things semed to be against the union right from the start, including many of their own members. The Plover and Potsdam mills continued to operate since they were represented by different union chapters. Local businessmen threatened to deny credit to strikers. This was a real threat to the family that had become accustomed to living from one payday to another on credit.

But what really brought about the beginning of the end was a petition asking for another vote. If you recall, "98% of the members attending the meeting" called the strike. What was not publicized was the attendance number at the meeting. Nine members of a twelve-hundred member body **could** put the group on strike if only ten members attended the meeting!

Thus, an informational meeting called on July 29, saw a rally of members in attendance. A motion for a new vote, by secret ballot, was approved; and when the ballots were counted, it was 585 to 275 to accept the company offer which had been made ten days prior. Ten days of lost wages. Ten days of lost production and sales. Once more, no one won! Both sides lost.

Episode number four took place in 1980 when our Plover mill (Whiting Plover Paper Company) went on strike on August 11 of that year. Four days later, the mill announced it was ready to ship paper from its abundant inventory. Fifty-nine days later the union accepted, on a two-to-one ratio, the same company offer that they had rejected two months earlier. The issue had been money.

The union asked for a ten percent annual increase each year for two years; and the company offered eight percent each year. The union accepted the company's eight percent offer, but the company did not win the argument. They merely got their own way.

Finally, we come to the latest stand-off between management and labor; this one in 1983. It affected the two Wisconsin mills, and the issue resolved down to health insurance benefits. Nekoosa Papers Inc. asked for greater deductibles before paying benefits. The union objected and accordingly went on strike July 29, 1983.

Four days later the Nekoosa mill began operations, using supervisory help. Of 1,060 employees working in the two mills during the strike, 548 were non-union and 512 were union employees from four other unions which did not strike nor did they respect the picket line.

The entire Great Northern Nekoosa Corporation rallied to the call for workers that went out from Port Edwards and Nekoosa. From the Ashdown mill (not on strike), from the corporate offices, and from all the sister companies and subsidiaries men and women came to operate the mills. Working twelve hours a day for a ten-day period, these people managed to turn out an "excellent quality product."

Salesman became boiler operators, secretaries drove towmotors, visitor hosts became machine operators, and even one vice president did janitorial work!

A major air lift to get these people to and from Wisconsin, as well as a precisely scheduled ground transportation system operated flawlessly. Housing was provided at several local motels, and meals were served from a kitchen and dining area set up in the mill.

So successful was the counter-strike effort, that after the first month of the strike, Nekoosa reported having shipped 16,957 tons of paper, half of which had been manufactured during the strike, and the other half coming from inventory. In addition, Ashdown shipped 35,488 tons during the same period.

Just as union members rallied to their cause and showed their loyalty by walking the picket line in the hot August sun and the late summer showers, so did the company worker show a "esprit de corps" by giving their last tired muscle an extra push for the cause. This writer recalls seeing an eastern secretary get off the shuttle bus after 12 hours of work in a hot mill, kick off her safety shoes, and collapse almost in tears on the parking lot, resting her back against the building. But when asked if she wanted to go back to Stamford, her answer was, "Hell no, bring me a Coke and give me a night's rest; and I'll be ready for tomorrow." She carried on to the end.

On August 12, ten percent of the 1,400 members submitted a petition asking for a revote. It was defeated, as was another vote on August 29.

Now a group of union members threatened to file charges with the National Labor Relations Board, charging the union with not informing members of progress in negotiations and giving out misleading information. Their solidarity was starting to weaken, and on September 9, a vote of the members ended the strike. What was gained? An additional .05% wage increase! That's not a typographical error. It was .05%. The health insurance program was revamped as outlined by Nekoosa Papers Inc.

Two union members were quoted by the local newspaper as saying, "We were on strike against the wrong people. It should have been against medical costs." The other summed it up by saying, "We were beating a dead horse."

This has been a lengthy chapter. The stories, issues, arguments, and views of both sides in a strike issue could fill a book itself. Many of these points are still vivid memories of many readers of this book. The most remarkable observance is how both sides put aside their differences after a strike settlement and once more rally to one cause — "Doing the most and doing it best."

Chapter Twenty-Five: No Brats

Nekoosa-Edwards President, John E. Alexander and Vice President of Manufacturing, Charles Reese, enjoy a box lunch at NEPCO Lake. The occasion is the annual shareholders meeting which was conducted at the YMCA camp.

Whereas the preceding chapter discussed some of the occasions of dissension between labor and management, this chapter will review some instances when harmony and jocularity prevailed between these two groups. One way of accomplishing this goal was to have a picnic in the park.

The Nash Lumber Company, one of the Nekoosa founding companies, probably started it all with their annual employee blueberry picking outing. Families of employees boarded the train for a Sunday of berry picking and picnicking in a prime blueberry patch. However, since no one ever disclosed where they had found a "prime" blueberry patch, it is hard to believe that these Sunday expeditions could have been successful. They were a success in that they brought together management and labor, along with their families, for a day of relaxation—assuming that blueberry picking is relaxing.

As early as 1915, there is an account outlining the lighting of the village Christmas tree. Both the community and Nekoosa-Edwards sponsored the event, which was held on Christmas Eve in the school yard at Port Edwards. The mill was down for the holiday, and one hundred-fifty contributors, including the paper company, donated a total of seventy-five dollars to put on the celebration. The event consisted of turning on the lights of the forty-foot tree, distributing Cracker Jacks and apples to the children, singing Christmas carols in the schoolhouse, and finally closing with three reels of moving picture films entitled, "Joseph's Trials in Egypt." "Come and celebrate the Christmas spirit as can only be found in Port Edwards," announced the invitation.

No further record of corporate picnics, open houses, or parties can be found; that is, until 1921. That year witnessed an extravaganza that would be a credit

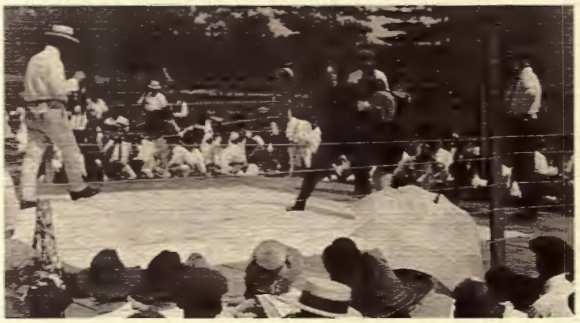
to any corporate personnel department.

It was June 20th in Nekoosa, Wisconsin. Nepco had weathered a strike only a year prior. Now things were pretty much back to normal in the mills, and L. M. Alexander, president of Nepco, decided to throw a picnic in the park. It was billed as the "First Annual Nepco Picnic."

The ever popular beer stand at a NEPCO picnic for employees on the shore of NEPCO Lake. Soft drinks would replace beer in subsequent events of this nature.

The day opened with a parade down Market Street in Nekoosa led by Parade Marshal, F. H. Rosebush, Director of Personnel, riding his horse. L. M. Alexander followed, riding in one of his five personal autos that had been selected for the parade.

The parade terminated on the river bank at Nekoosa, where a serving of ice cream, soda pop, and food was dispensed. A first aid tent, staffed by the two mill nurses, provided remedies for those who overindulged. No alcoholic beverages were served due to prohibition. Perhaps it was just as well, since the strike of 1919/1920 was still a vivid memory, not easily forgotten.



Boxing and wrestling were always popular competitions in early picnics. Perhaps it presented an opportunity to settle grudges between employees.

Sporting events, such as wrestling, boxing, log rolling, and racing, highlighted the day. The entire picnic was magically captured on moving picture film, which is still preserved in the Nekoosa Papers Archives. Quite a feat for 1921! The event was a grand success, until a violent wind and rain storm brought an end to the festivities late in the afternoon, sending families running for cover from the elements.

On one of the subsequent annual picnics, the feature of the day was a wrestling match between Ed Strangler Lewis, world wrestling champion, and his trainer. Naturally, the strangler won the match. Ed Strangler Lewis (Robert Frederich) was a native son of Nekoosa. It is reputed that a side of beef was barbecued over an open fire at one of these picnics.

The Good Ship Lollypop was a featured attraction at NEPCO employee picnics for many years. The scow was pulled by a motor boat and gave rides on the lake, sometimes to the accompaniment of an orchestra on board.

The employee picnics were "rained out" for several years, the rain being caused by the dark cloud of the depression years in the early 1930's. In 1935, however, a picnic was held at Nepco Lake. Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company was beginning to recover from the financial restraints imposed by the depression.

The Port Edwards mill challenged the Nekoosa mill to a softball match, the winning team to share the prize of four dollars. Not much by today's standards, but eight 5 cent beers for each player in 1935!

Subsequent picnics were held, but not on a regular basis. Some were at Nepco Lake and some at Lake Wazeecha County Park. During the World War II years, free bus service made the employee picnic easily accessible to those who were restricted in the use of their car due to gasoline rationing.

Nekoosa mill's gateway to their 1954 openhouse tour was through this tree lined path, past a display of woodlands equipment. The grass gave way to bare dirt by the end of the week long event.

Two open houses deserve mention. The first was in 1954, and was organized to commemorate the start-up of number nine paper machine at Nekoosa. The week long event attracted fifteen thousand guests who visited the mill, reviewed displays, and enjoyed refreshments; the latter being served at the Nekoosa school. Refreshments consisted of 18,027 servings of soft drinks, 1,200 pounds of cookies, and 14,028 servings of ice cream!

A second open house in 1984, held at both mills, attracted about four thousand employees, their families, and friends. Proud employees had an opportunity to show their spouse and children where they worked, what they did, and how it fit into the overall papermaking process. The ususal refreshment stand climaxed the tour, and a souvenir package of paper was distributed to all attendees.

Similar events have been conducted at Ashdown, the first being the dedication of the mill in 1968. Twenty-five hundred visitors saw a paper machine—many for the first time.

In reviewing all these employee picnics, open houses, and social outings, this writer failed to find any mention of bratwurst being served. How can you have a picnic if there are no "brats"?

A chow line at a supervisor's picnic at Nepco Lake. Chicken chowder was the usual entree. Note that some guests attended the picnic in white shirts and ties.