

ARTIFACTS

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SWCHC President Phil Brown:**My Friend, Paul**

I have always considered it a privilege to be warmly welcomed into a special fraternity of local historians here in the South Wood County area. I have learned so much local history from Dave Engel, Marshall Buehler and Paul Gross. "Uncle Dave" has documented our local history through his River Cities Memoirs series and *Artifacts*; Marshall has preserved the archives of the Nekoosa Port Edwards Paper Co.; and Paul Gross has made his historical video series.

These gentlemen have certain traits that are similar: all were born and raised in the South Wood County area; all share an uncanny ability to clearly remember growing up in our community; all are sticklers for accurate historic

details; and all possess a certain humbleness that has an, "aw shucks, it was nothing" attitude.

In 2009, when Paul and I were filming "The Paper Village," the history of the Village of Port Edwards and the Nekoosa Edwards Paper Co., Paul had about a dozen questions for Marshall. Marshall basically knew the answers, but did not want Paul to use them until he was 100% sure. Within a day or two, Marshall did his homework and had the answers for Paul.

When Paul wanted to do a series with longtime resident, John Billings, he needed somebody to conduct the interview with John while he recorded it with his video camera. Before we started recording the interview, Paul,



Photo by Mary Brazeeau Brown

Paul Gross and Phil at the Museum, early December, in front of the green screen used during the filming of his latest historical video. Phil: "After all these years, Paul learned a new technique, which is called 'chroma key compositing' or 'chroma keying' and I think it turned out pretty good."





Cover: Paul Gross, near Camp Murphy, Florida, 1943, possibly at "Tuckahoe," the Leach mansion. He says, "It was a Sunday afternoon. They took us down there in trucks and furnished the beer and everything and it was really nice. I thought this doorway looked pretty good and I had a guy take my picture."

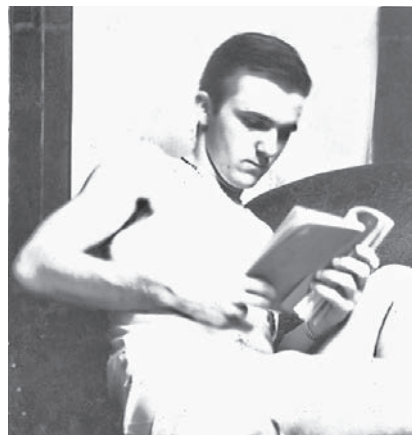
Uncle Dave, John and I outlined a number of questions. After about 30 minutes we would take a little break and review topics that were just covered and formulate some follow up questions.

This first interview with John was in 2003 and "A Conversation With John Billings" became Paul's 13th video in his local history series. This format was so successful that we did a second video with John the following year titled, "A Walk With John Billings." These first person accounts gave me a greater appreciation of the hard work and dedication it takes to get one of these videos out. I was impressed with how Paul wrote, produced and edited these videos for us and future generations to enjoy. Paul has just completed the 25th video in his local history series and I am proud to say I have been involved in every one of them since 2003.

In 2006 and 2007, Paul featured my historic postcard collection in two of his videos. One of my favorite features of these videos was that Paul would go to the exact location where the original postcard photos were taken, show the current location, and then fade into the postcard image taken many years ago.

Not only did Paul do all the filming of his videos, but he also wrote the script. In early videos, Bill Nobles narrated. Paul used 16mm film with no room for errors. In more recent videos, I was the on screen narrator. If you mispronounced a word or emphasized the wrong syllable, he would have you read it over again. Sometimes you would get so tongue-tied that you could barely pronounce your own name. Most of the recording was done on a tape recorder and Paul would dub the narration into the video, but when we were filmed before the video camera, Paul rigged up a teleprompter.

Even with the teleprompter, we still managed to blow our lines. We would be laughing so hard, we had to take a short break to compose



Paul in Kansas City, WWII

ourselves. With all the mistakes, I always felt we should have saved some of those bloopers. They would have made a very funny video in their own right, but Paul did not want to produce anything that might embarrass us or degrade the quality of his films.

Paul's interest in showing "moving pictures" goes back to his high school days. He recently told me about one of his first shows.

Paul was a freshman at Lincoln High School and his friend, Jerry Henry, was in the eighth grade at SS Peter & Paul. Paul and Jerry received permission from the nuns to show a full-length silent movie in the gymnasium at SS Peter & Paul. They would charge everybody a nickel and split the proceeds with the nuns. The showing went over so well with the students that they decided to offer a matinee for adults. When it was over, the nuns received around twenty-five dollars and so did Paul and Jerry. With Paul's half of the proceeds, he went out and purchased his first movie camera.

The South Wood County Historical Corp. has been sponsoring Paul's videos for many years and he has assured me that some day he wants the Museum to own the rights. We are honored to carry out his wishes, assuring Paul that we will continue to offer these wonderful videos for many generations.



Paul Gross:***The Ken Burns of River City History (Before Ken Burns was born!)****Interview with Uncle Dave, Part One**Tuesday, December 6, 2011**South Wood County Historical Museum, Wisconsin Rapids*

Uncle Dave: Your full name?

Paul: Paul Raymond Gross. My second name was after my Uncle Ray Love.

UD: Date of birth?

Paul: September 10, 1923.

UD: Where?

Paul: Right here, Rapids, never left town.

UD: In the hospital or on a kitchen table?

Paul: No, in the hospital. For many years though my parents, at least my mother, had me thinking that the doctor brought me in a suitcase and I jumped out.

UD: Where did your parents live at that time?

Paul: 940 1st Street North.

UD: That's the house you grew up in.

Paul: Right.

UD: Is it still under the same address?

Paul: Same address. Yeah, I'm not that old; it wasn't Water Street.

For two years I wasn't here. We moved to Milwaukee during my sophomore and junior years of high school. So I started out at Lincoln as a freshman and I graduated at Lincoln as a senior.

And I went to Lincoln in Milwaukee as a sophomore and junior. At that time it was about 80 percent Italian and 20 percent colored; and then there was me.

UD: Where did you live in Milwaukee?

Paul: 1929 Oakland Avenue.

UD: Why were you there?

Paul: My dad was working there. He had an electrical contract. An association of some kind. At the time I wasn't even enough interested to be able to tell you.

UD: What's your dad's name?

Paul: Chester. C.P. he was known as around town. Nobody ever called him by his name. He was one of those rare people that had a college education way back then. When he was here originally he was City Engineer and he was Superintendent of Water

and Light at the same time. Then I think 1930 or 31 they split the two jobs so he could have had either one. He chose the Water and Light department.

UD: From what college?

Paul: University of Wisconsin, I guess, and Stevens Point, because he was originally from Stevens Point. There he was in charge of Water Works and

Lighting, the same thing he did here. Before they moved here, they were in Reedsburg.

UD: That's when your family history begins here in Wisconsin Rapids.

Paul: Well yeah, three or four years before I was born.

Before they were in Reedsburg they were in Nebraska. Originally he was doing survey work for the United States Government.

I don't know how that worked but he was in

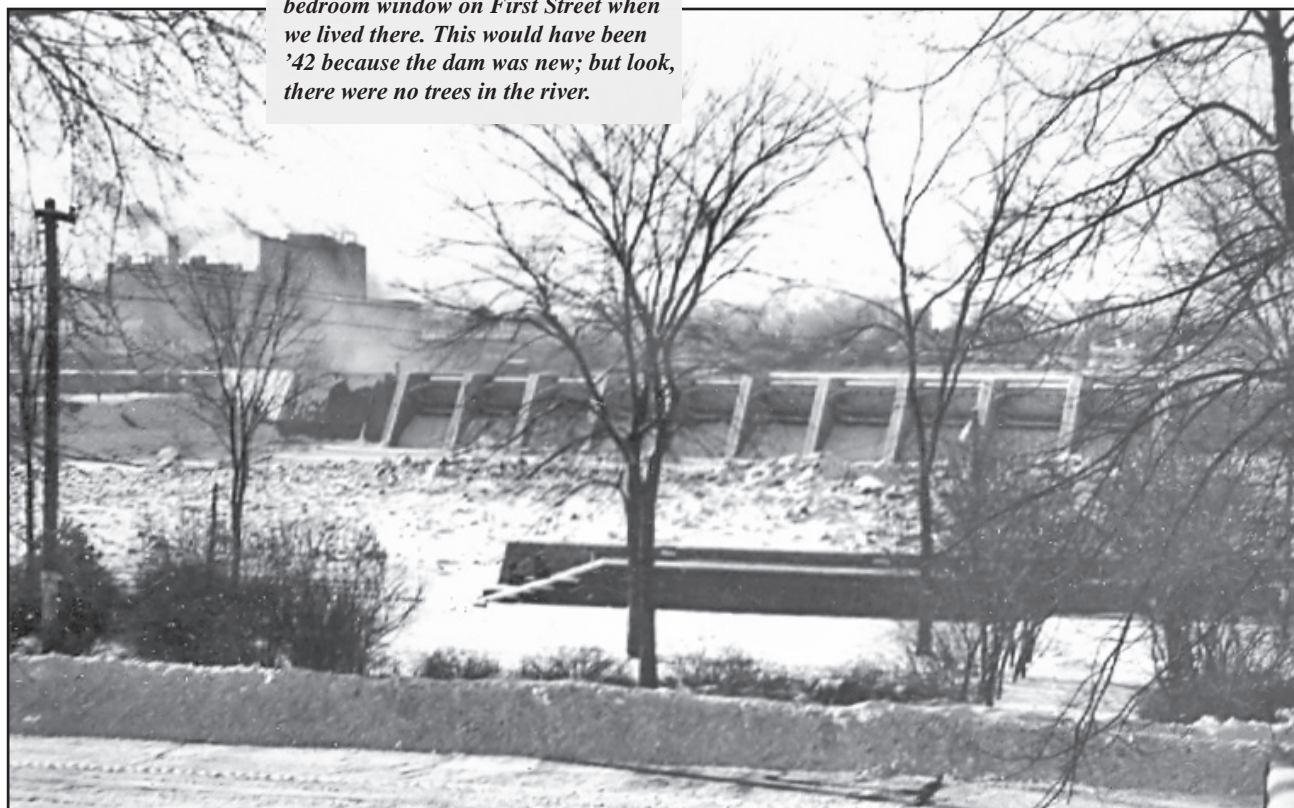


Paul

Photo by UD



Paul: These pictures I took out of my bedroom window on First Street when we lived there. This would have been '42 because the dam was new; but look, there were no trees in the river.



charge of a crew up in Rhinelander, surveying for the Federal Government. A lot of the lakes up there were named after guys from the crew. In fact, there's a Gross lake up there. I suppose that one was named after my dad.

When my dad lived in Stevens Point they were dirt poor. My Uncle Nick, my dad's brother, was a priest and he always told how they didn't live on the other side of the track, they lived between the tracks. They couldn't keep paint on the side of the house because when the boxcars are loaded improperly they lean a little and scrape the side of the house when they went through there, switching cars and stuff. That's supposed to be the gospel truth.

Carl Jacobs, the guy that started the Hardware Mutual, was some relation to my dad, a cousin or some damn thing. They used to play together and stuff like that.

UD: What about your mother?

Paul: She was more from this area.

UD: What was her name?

Paul: Slattery.

UD: What's the rest of your mother's name?

Paul: Theresa, I can't remember her middle name even. She never used it.

Old Pool

UD: Okay so you grew up on First Street North. We went down to the river one time, in your backyard, front yard.

Paul: Down to the river, the swimming pool was there. We used to go down there to the swimming pool, you know, fool around for a while and then go home then wander down there again. I'd change my suit about three times a day and it'd be soaking wet and cold.

UD: Now that's what we'd call the 'old pool' right?

Paul: Yeah. That new pool was nothing compared to the old pool. We had more fun in that pool.

UD: Yeah, but it was kind of odd wasn't it?

Paul: Odd?

UD: The old one, about the river water.

Paul: Well yeah, it was river water but it ran through a filter outfit that kept the fish and stuff out. In those days the river was very dirty but stuff floated on top and the pool was getting water from the bottom.

The River

My brother had a boat and he'd have it all painted and one trip in the river up the long island and your boat had a water line on it. It was absolutely brown and you couldn't get it off. The toilets and some



of the buildings downtown dumped right into the river. Nobody paid any attention to it.

We used to have those big floods every year before they built Du Bay and they were something. I think what was different about them was that the ice came through, big chunks and as a result nothing ever grew out there in the river like it is now.

It was usually getting close to Easter when Consolidated guys would go out on the ice out there and they'd blast the ice loose and send it through the gates. At St. Peter and Paul School, we'd look out the window and see and hear them blasting and couldn't wait to get out of school. We'd go over there and stand on the dam and across the gates they had big ropes hanging so if a guy got stranded on a loose piece of ice he could grab the rope before he went through the gates.

They blasted big chunks of ice and they'd come and they'd hit the dam. We thought that was really a thrill to stand on that dam and feel it shaking. Huge chunks of ice would go down over the rapids and shoot off any trees that tried to grow. So it was always open. Now today if somebody came to town they'd say "well where's the rapids" and you wouldn't be able to show them.

SSPP

UD: So you're Catholic?

Paul: Yeah. I used to be altar boy.

When they wanted to move Father Kunderer away, Monsignor Reding got up and he had Parkinson's and he'd hang on to the microphone and his hand would be banging on it and you'd hear that. He'd stand there and he'd actually start to cry when he had to say it that Father Kunderer was going to leave. At that time they had enough priests; we had three assistants besides Monsignor Reding.

He had a unique way of telling you that you did something wrong. One day my friend and I ended up getting into a fight and we wouldn't talk to each

other. He says, "Now you two boys are altar boys. You're mad at each other and I want that to stop. You cannot be at the altar serving mass and carry that kind of thoughts. I want you boys to make up."

So we shook hands and that was it, just like nothing happened.

One time I caught hell from one of the nuns and she told me to go sit in the clothes closet. Well there was another entrance to it too and Father Reding came walking through and there I was.

"Paul, what you doing there?"

"I talked out of turn Father."

"You take care of that," he said.

Then he went in and did whatever and then left.

I was in eighth grade and I said something the sister didn't like and she says, "That's for babies, you don't do that. Go down to first grade."

That was her favorite thing. Go down to first grade to sit with the kids, sit with the babies.

So, all right Sister, I went down to the first grade and sat on the floor and waited until school was out and then I went home. The next day oh was she waiting for me. She says "You disobeyed me yesterday."

"What did I do?"

"You didn't go down to first grade like I told you. Sister so-and-so said you never came in there."

I said, "No I didn't go in. I went down to first grade. That's what you told me to do."

She looked at me and I thought, now what the hell. She said, "You know, I kind of admire you. I hope all your life you interpret things as accurately as that."

UD: What about the school St. Peter and Paul at that time?

Paul: Well that was considered an extremely modern school compared to parish schools all around. You see when the school burned that time, the back portion didn't burn.

UD: Was that in your lifetime, the burning?

Paul: It was in my lifetime but I wouldn't have

1938 Milwaukee, Lake Michigan



known it. I would have been an infant. So then they built the new one and of course we had that nice gym. Very few of the grade schools had gyms and the end result was that some of the people were sending their kids there because they wanted to have that gym facility.

Father Reding let anybody use it because us kids wanted to go over there and play basketball at night we would go over to Father Reding and if nobody was using it he would give us the key and tell us to bring the key back when we are done.

Then I can remember they used to put plays on down there too. When we had Father Kunderling too he was quite the dramatic person and I remember every year he would put on the Passion play. He'd sell tickets. They'd fill the gym, even the balcony.

They had folding chairs. That's another thing, those folding chairs in those days, maybe you remember them, they were all wooden. Jesus those things were noisy.

UD: I can hear them being all clacked together when they are being put away, clack, clack, clack.

LHS

UD: Take us through high school and the military since we have so many pictures of that period. How did that all come about?

Paul: I graduated in '41 so...

UD: You must have been pretty upset when you had to move to Milwaukee to go to school or not?

Paul: I had mixed emotions.

UD: And then come back...

Paul: Oh it was a thrill to be coming back I'll tell you that. In Milwaukee in the high school there was no social life like we know it. The Italians stuck together and the colored stuck together and were shunned mostly in those days. So then there was me and you know it was hard to find friends.

UD: So did you come back to meet with your old friends again?

Paul: Oh sure yeah. Jerry Henry, I referred to him in that tape with the pinball business. He was my friend up until he died about a year ago or so.

Another friend, John, a short time after Christmas, my mother told me I could go over to

his house. I went over there and took my trucks and stuff to play and couldn't figure out how come Santa Claus brought him the same stuff he brought me. Our mothers had gone together and picked it out. We used to go to the cowboy shows together and...

UD: What theater?

Paul: Rapids Theater. On the way home we'd be running down the alley, like behind our store there, patten' ourselves on the back like we had a horse. Then at the corner of Baker and Market Street, by the courthouse was a great big willow tree. It must have been at least four foot in diameter. It was at an angle and leaned way over the sidewalk. We used to be able to run right up the side of that tree.

UD: There were horse troughs, water fountains.

Blacksmith

Paul: They used to be where the courthouse is. There was a blacksmith in there and there was a blacksmith across the river. I remember us kids watching him. He'd crank that thing and the fire and ash would come up.

After the war, Jerry and I used to get

down to Chicago. They used to have a lot of used stuff. So I bought this 35 mm movie camera, the theater size. I didn't pay a lot for it, maybe \$25.

It was a De Vry but an amateur model that you would normally wind up and shoot with.

At that time from Allied Radio and different places, they had all kinds of surplus things that you could buy. I had a lot of electric motors I bought, paid three, four dollars for and maybe cost the government fifty. I had this one electric motor and it was just right. I thought, "Oh my god, I could put that motor on the 35mm camera."

So I took the camera all apart. This little motor was about that big around and about three inches long and then I had to put a nice round hole in the side of the metal camera case which I took off of a sheet. How the heck am I going to get a hole in there that big?

I decided I would take it on down to that blacksmith I was just telling you about, figuring he's going to cut me a nice hole.



LHS graduation photo 1941



He says, "All right, you come back in an hour or so and I'll have it for you."

Jesus, I came back and what he did was he took a one-inch coal chisel and went around it. He made me a hole but it was a...well you put up with it, after all I turned it over to him. I got a piece of black velvet and put it in there. I put the motor on and the motor ran it. I guess I had a lantern battery to power it and then next day I thought now what the hell am I going to do with this thing.

I went down to Chicago again a few weeks later and took that along. Charlie Bass came on. He was the guy that was the head of the Bass Camera Co., they were big national.

Charlie Bass said, "What you got?"

I says, "Remember that 35mm camera you sold me?"

"Well I don't remember who I sold it to but I remember having it here."

I says, "Well I put an electric motor on it."

He says, "You didn't!"

He got all excited. Jesus, he bought it back from me.

Of course I took it out and traded it.

Summer of '41

UD: In '41 you graduated from high school. You went to work then didn't you, after you graduated?

Paul: Well, let's see, I started before I graduated. I got my first job at Johnson Hills selling shoes on Saturdays and maybe nights after school. I got 21.5 cents an hour. Imagine splitting a penny, punch that damn clock. Oh I hated that job selling shoes. I don't think I sold more than one pair the whole time I was there.

But I was there about, maybe three, four weeks and then Ron Desper and Mike Stewart, they were projectionists, came in and asked me if I wanted to work the booth at the theater. Holy Christ, I thought they were kidding. I would have paid them for the job. So anyway, I started in there. 40 cents an hour.

UD: Which theater?

Paul: Well actually I went to all three of them. But Wisconsin mostly. Ron Desper was a big union

man, in fact they darn near shut those theaters down, of course they were unionized. Then they required two men in the booths instead of only one. Which I guess I can understand in a way because there were no toilets in those booths.

Somebody had to be there. With the film running you couldn't walk out of the booth and leave it. It would have been cheaper to put the toilet in but anyway, so I got that job, 40 cents an hour. They got 80 cents an hour.

I was really honored to be working with the very latest and best equipment. So, then there was one catch. Any time that Desper would take off for a union meeting, then I had to work for nothing. That's what they told me so that's what I did. I

worked a lot of nights for nothing and I knew damn well there wasn't any union meeting.

UD: He was probably getting your pay.

Paul: I didn't give a darn. I enjoyed working. I used to like to work at the Palace. They had, they would dim the lights when it was time

for the show to start. A little showmanship you know. When I went to the cowboy show as kids, they had a curtain in front of the screen and just about the time the show was getting ready to start the usher had to run down the aisle and open the curtain. When we saw him going down we were all, "Oh there he goes! There he goes!"

While the cowboy show would be on the kids would have to go to the bathroom and Jesus, they'd come down that aisle buttoning up their pants. They didn't want to miss anything. It was really funny.

Consolidated

Paul: So yeah then I went to work for the theaters and then I got a job at Consolidated.

UD: That was Biron?

Paul: Everybody started out at the cleaners. I used to have to empty out the cuspidors and all that stuff. Boy, they have two on the back wall and you couldn't smoke. They had a regular wagon that you would fill with towels and take it downstairs and dump them and rinse them and then I got promoted



into the lab. I enjoyed the job in the lab.

UD: Who did you work with in the lab?

Paul: Bill Kohnen and Randall Weaver,

When I was in the lab there, they were experimenting with Consoweld. Randy and I were involved in that. They were trying to simulate plywood, and eventually replace it. So then they got this idea that the plywood, the grain goes one way and then the next sheet the grain goes another. So on the paper machines when the pulp is wet and running down the screen the screen is shaking to make the fibers intertwine for strength.

Somebody got the idea that, what if we didn't run the shaker? Then the fibers will all be in a straight line and then we will lay the papers alternately like they do with plywood. We were thinking about doing this and there was this guy in the lab that was head of the lab, Ken Krueger.

Ken would just write on a piece of paper something he might want to save. He had one of those old file boxes that looked like a book. They were about three inches thick and you could just throw stuff in there and snap the cover shut.

So anyway, they came up, probably [executives] Warren Beadle and Henry Baldwin. They wandered into the lab, "What if we did this with the machine and didn't run the shakers?"

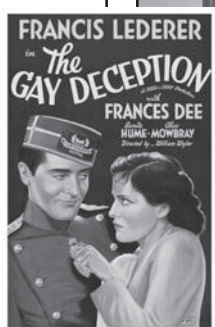
Ken is sitting back there at his desk leaning way back in a chair and spitting in a cuspidor and he says, "Well, we tried that here a number of years ago. I kind of remember that. I don't remember why we did but we did."

"We did?"

"Yeah I got it right here someplace."

He opens up his little outfit and all these little pieces of paper came out and he finally pulled out this pink piece of paper. Remember when meat wrapper was pink? Well that's what it was on. A meat wrapper from his lunch. There wasn't a straight side on that paper. It was torn up and he had it right there. "Yeah, here it is."

They found out that not shaking the paper didn't help any. So then they built the first Consoweld machine on the platform out on the dam out there in Biron. It was vertical, going up like this straight up and down.



In September 1942, actress Francis Dee and actor Edward Arnold visited Wisconsin Rapids for a war bond drive sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce. The sign in the back refers to "absent brothers" (soldiers) of the Elks Lodge. Behind Dee at left is Mrs. Henrietta Eckardt, the theater owner. Paul: "I remember when I took these photos, Edward Arnold got ticked off at me and says, "Christ do you have to have that thing flashing in my eyes all the time." I thought it was something to take a picture of a movie star.



Bill Kohnen, who worked with me on my shift, heck of a nice guy, and Bill was kind of upset because there was a guy there by the name of Bodette. Bill didn't think he had too much upstairs but I think he was one of those secretly smart people.

Anyway, when Bodette was appointed to be in charge of this machine, well Bill's nose was out of joint because he says, "That wasn't the right guy."

So, Bill had gone out there and asked Bodette about the machine, he came back and he says, "Damn it, they gave him that job! I've been out there and he couldn't even show me how to thread the paper. He didn't know which side of the rollers it went."

So he complained and complained. Eventually he did end up at Consoweld after it was established better, across the river. He was a good guy.

Paul: My brother-in-law, Bill Parker, was assistant purchasing agent over at Consolidated at the time. He took over after Bill Yeager left.

During the war, you couldn't get toys and stuff for kids and Bill Parker had a couple of kids, my niece and nephew. He saw these little circles that got cut out of the framework they made for the gliders at Consoweld. They were probably a third of an inch thick and round with a hole in the middle, maybe two, three inches in diameter.

He collected a bunch of them and they got some wood and they made toy cars with them. I don't know then if they gave them to the poor kids or what. He used a bunch of those cutouts from the glider frames to make toys.

Wisconsin Theater

UD: Where were you on Pearl Harbor day?

Paul: I didn't leave for service until January of '43. So I was still at the theater when Roosevelt made his speech. The day that will live in infamy. Well nobody wanted to miss that. It wasn't a case of wanting to see it on TV because there was no TV. The theater promptly advertised, President Roosevelt will be broadcast at the theater. We will pause the show.

They put the radio on in the booth and broadcast it through the sound system and the theater

was full. You couldn't run any movie that would fill the theater. The Wisconsin held 900 people. But when the newsreel came out showing Pearl Harbor, both shows were full. Any time you wanted to know what was going on with the war you had to see the newsreel.

Boardwalk

UD: How did it happen that you got drafted?

Paul: Oh everyone did. Your number came up you were gone. Everybody that was in that particular month went out of here. We went to Fort Sheridan, north of Chicago. That's where you got

your indoctrination. You had to take an I.Q. test. Got your uniform. They gave you your haircut. It took them about two minutes. Cut all your hair off, you know.

I finished my basic training and there were guys there from Rapids and all of a sudden they all got shipped out except for me because I had gotten way up on this mechanical test so I could pick what I wanted. I wanted to go to camera school and preferably the motion picture part of it.



Okay, so they put me down for that but it was full and busy. So I had to stay in Atlantic City.

All my buddies left, Ben Buckley, and all those guys. Now I'm getting kind of lonesome. So they gave me the job of "charge of quarters" at night.

That meant I had to stay up all night or most of it and then I could do anything all day long; I was free. That was pretty nice except that I'd have to wake the guys up in the morning for KP. To get them all awake and down there by 6:00 o'clock in the morning I had to start pretty early. I got hit with shoes and everything else. "Get the hell out of here!" Wham.

The rest of the night I'd have to run messages. I'd ride a bicycle down to the great big place that they hold the Miss America Pageant. That's huge. It's the first one that they ever played football inside of. It would be two o'clock in the morning and I would go into the convention hall and walk down this hallway to whatever office I was supposed to go to, pick up the message, come back and take it to our outfit. I might have to do that four or five times a night. Riding up and down Atlantic City on the boardwalk all alone, nobody there.

I always remember one office I'd walk by; they had a sign on the door that said "This office will be closed on the day of Hitler's funeral."

Kansas City

I got disgusted waiting for camera school and I said I'll go to radio school. Geez, I pick up the orders for all the men and there's my name on there.

We're going to Kansas City.

A nice detail. I wasn't allowed to say anything. On the train between Atlantic City and Kansas City these guys are all betting where we are going to go. I mean the stakes were pretty high. Money was pouring into the pool and I couldn't say a word and here I knew exactly where we were going. So I was being too honest. I could have made a fortune.

We ended up in Kansas City and we didn't have to be in a military arrangement. We had an apartment house. They had a cafeteria down where we would go for our meals. It was really nice. They had a place called the Kansas City Canteen for the G.I.s.

Up on top, they had these balconies with desks and fountain pens with the paper and envelopes for writing home. They just couldn't do enough for you.

Florida

Then from there we went to Florida, where it was like they hated to see you come in. The first time we went in the USO we had to pay for a sandwich. We looked at each other, "What the hell?" You only got \$21 a month.

So then I ended up in radar school. When radar got a little less secretive, we were moved to Drew Field, what ended up being Tampa International Airport. I got a part-time

job there working in the theaters and ended up being chief projectionist for five theaters.

POWs

I was the last guy left on the theaters because everyone was getting out. So we had to strip the other theaters down which was quite entertaining for me because a national theater service was located in Atlanta and they wanted all that

At Kansas City



equipment back. I suppose they were going to re-sell it to the theaters that opened up after the war. They brought in a bunch of German soldiers and I was in charge of them. We had to strip down theater number five, the one that I showed you. I took them all apart and those guys had to haul them out and ship them off to Atlanta. They enjoyed themselves.

UD: Did they speak English?

Paul: Some of them did, yeah. I remember sitting and visiting with that one guy and he said, "Don't worry about the Japanese. The ones you are going to have to worry about are the Russians." They had no time for the Russians and because the Russians hated their guts.

Last Theater

Theater number two was the last one left. I was operating it until three days before I was going to get discharged. I got orders to strip it and get it ready for Atlanta. I got the big cutters out and cut every wire I could in that damn thing.

Some big Lieutenant Major came over.

"Soldier I understand they want us to shut this theater down and that ain't going to happen because we have people here entitled to the entertainment and I'm getting the order changed."

I said, "I'm sorry we've gotten the order and I've cut everything loose."

"Well put it back."

I wouldn't know how to begin. I never wired a theater and they were going to have to use 16mm. He didn't want 16mm; he wanted 35.

I said, "Well sir, I just don't know what to do." I said, "I'm getting discharged in about three days."

I was afraid they were going to tie me up and make me stay and run the damn thing. So anyway, it was one time that I got it over on the big boys.

I don't know what they did and I could care less.

In that theater I had fun. There was nothing to do all day but putz around there so I made all these logos of the different production companies like 20th Century, MGM, Lion and 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers. I put that on this wall as a display and I had all that glittery stuff stuck on them and

they looked like a million bucks, so good they took a picture and ran it in the base newspaper.

Outdoor

UD: When was that - that you were showing those films?

Paul: That was after the war. I left Consolidated to do that, can you imagine? It would have been, I got out in '46 that would have been the summer of '47. I ran them six nights a week all around the little towns. I didn't cover Rudolph because the first night I went there, ran the movie and all the merchants were supposed to chip in three, four bucks and they got in a big argument with each other. I said, "I'm not putting up with that crap." So I never ran them in Rudolph. I ran

them every place else, even Bancroft.

I used to run them up there on the corner of Baker Street and there used to be a little root beer stand there. Where the grocery store is now out there on Baker. It would be packed solid with cars. There was a root beer stand up there.

UD: Well it's about half way through your life story so we're going to end at the end of this tape for today. There's plenty more for the next time isn't there?

Paul: Yeah.

Paul, top, in Florida



Paul: Then there was a beach down there and you could go in the ocean. This was a guy [bottom, above] that I knew. He was really a clown. Where I'm standing there in that doorway is at the same place.





Drew Field Theater 5

Below: Barracks at Camp Murphy, Florida, a secret radar facility opened in 1942 as the home of the Southern Signal Corps School.



Paul at Camp Murphy, 1943



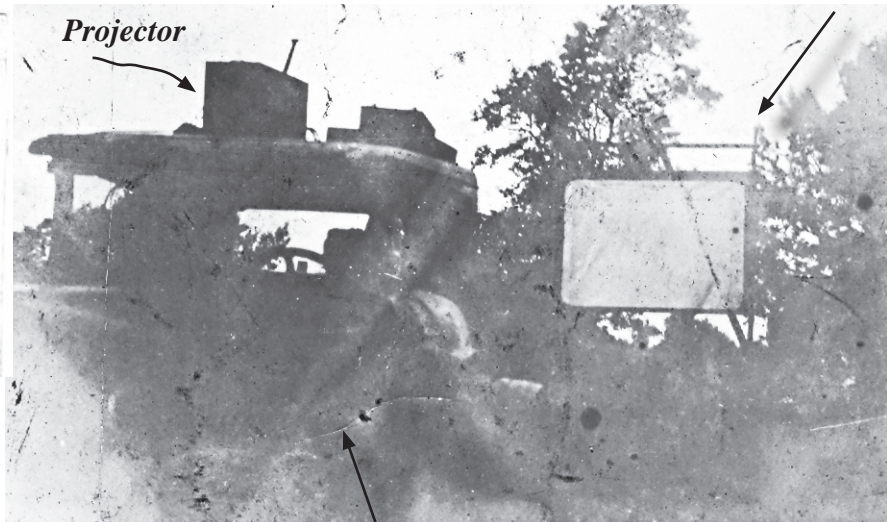
Below: Enhanced but still not good. Rare photo of movie being shown in local outdoor location.

Screen

Original scan



Projector



Truck

Paul: This is the one that I really wish there was a way to make it show.

UD: Let me see.

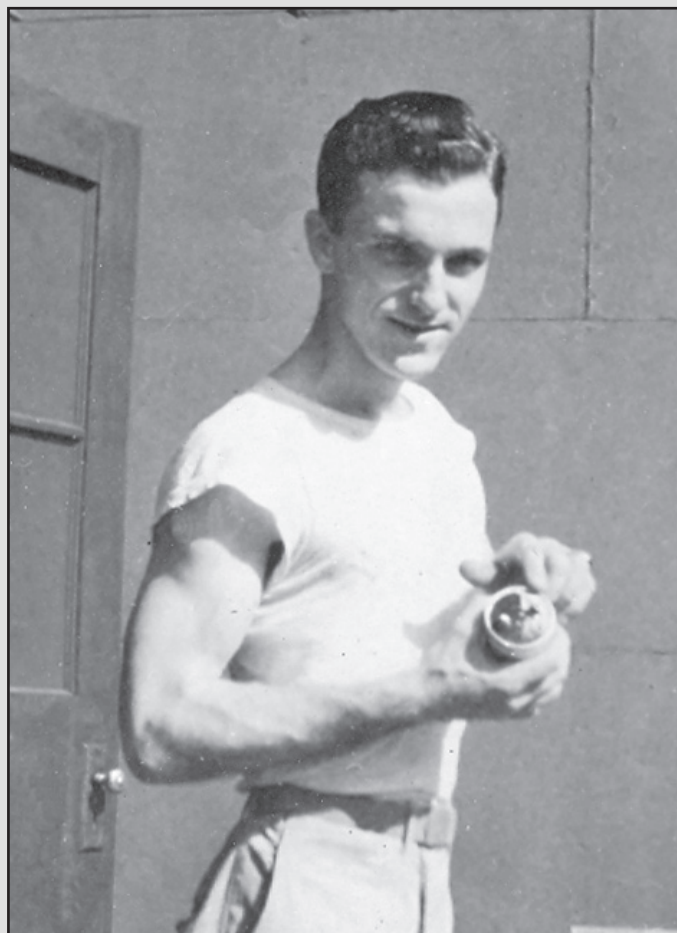
Paul: That's when I ran the outdoor movies.

UD: Oh, it is kind of bad.

Paul: There's the screen, this is my truck, there's a projector up on top.

UD: I'll give it a shot.



It was the condenser...

Paul: Yeah I blew out a condenser. That big condenser from the sound system. You know how I did it?

One night, we had a movie called "Isle of the Dead." It was a gal walking on this island and he set her loose and then he was going to trap her. So the girl's walking through the woods and it's at night and everything. She thought she heard something and she stopped and a hand came behind her like that and grabbed her and she lets a scream out of her.

I knew when that was coming because I had already seen the show so I thought, I'm going to have some fun. When that scream comes I'm going to knock it out of the bayou.

So the scream came and I never gave it a thought that I could wreck the sound system. As soon as she was going to scream I went like this! Holy God it nearly drove them out of the theater.

Then the sound came back on and when I put it on normal volume it was terrible. It ruined the amplifier. You have two amplifiers in case one goes dead because you had tubes. So I switched to the emergency amplifier and then we put it on test and found that the big condenser had blown.



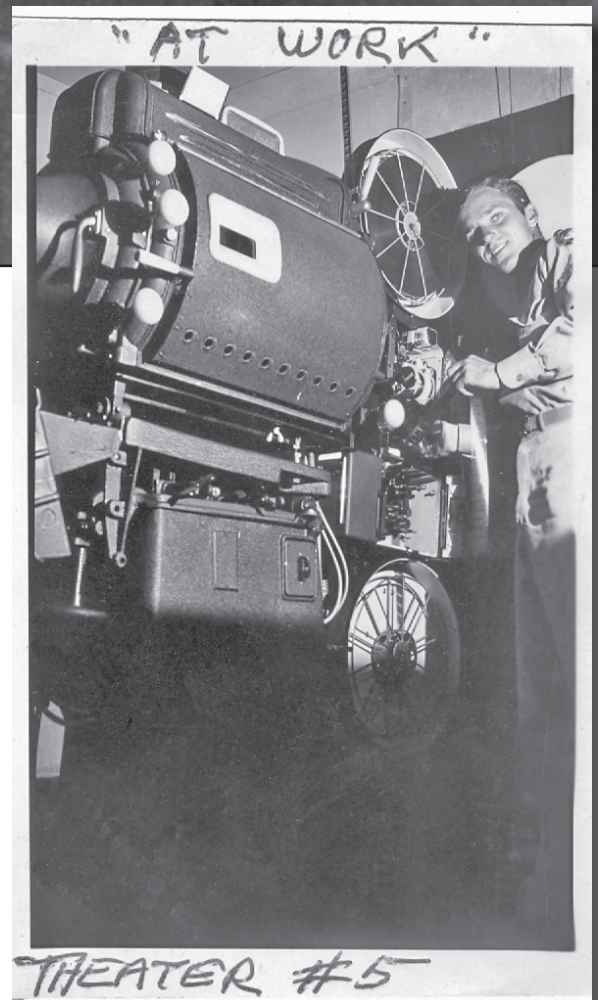


Boris Karloff

Paul: And here's a picture I took with that on the screen. I started the picture and ran down and knew when it started how long it would be on. So this is really a time exposure. It says "starts tomorrow" and that was in theater number five.

UD: It says three on it though.

Paul: Where does it say three? Oh yeah I guess it is.



Drew Field

**Paul's life story is
continued on page 28.**





Jessie Viola Farrish, Lillian Gaskell, Royal A. Farrish



Florence Maurine Thompson, Estella Haley, Bessie Ellen Farrish, Catherine E. Farrish

A lot better with I.D.

By Lori Brost, Museum Administrator

It's one of those things you think of and you always know someone who is so good about it; but then there are those of us who are not (me included!) who don't do it at all. Labeling your photos. Documenting the picture with who, what, where and why. It's like a lost art.

We receive donations of photos on a regular basis that have no information and the person donating them has no idea who are in the pictures either: whether they are family or friends or even how they came about having the photograph in their possession.

This is very unfortunate because photos make our history. They tell us about our ancestors, who we look like, where we got our hair color, or eyes or even our smiles. They show us the houses we may have spent time in as a small child or our parent's childhood home. They give us a window to the businesses or professions of those we have heard about but never met.

I knew we at the Museum were very fortunate to receive a recent donation of family photos from John Farrish and Sandy Farrish Sullivan, son and daughter of Don and Marion and grandchildren of Estella Haley Farrish, a founder of the SWCHC. I didn't realize how lucky we were until I realized the large number of them that were labeled.

Deciding how to label photos is difficult and depends on the age of the photograph and the type of paper it's printed on. Older photos printed on paper which is a little coarser are actually easier to label. A pencil works fine without doing any damage. Newer, glossier photo paper is more difficult. Markers can smudge or smear onto other photos, pencil

doesn't always display well on the back or can "show through" if too sharp a pencil is used. Archival pens are available for labeling, but one is always advised to 'test' prior to using. Paste-on labels can also be applied to snapshots.

In this age of 'digital photography' labeling is also an issue. The majority of these photos are never actually printed and therefore, not labeled. However, information can still be saved within the file name or another system such as numbering the photographs and creating an index for a



*Grace (12 years 11 months)
and Edith Farrish (7 years 9 months)*

particular group of photos.

The obvious reason for making sure that persons or events and dates are recorded on photos is to preserve that portion of family history. Another big reason is that photos that cannot be tied to a person within a family or how they are known to the family are less likely to be taken care of and more likely to be lost in transition between generations.



Irving Newton Brazeau (lower right), Clarence Searles (upper right), Royal Andrew Farrish (upper left), Simon Bailly (lower left)

Because they were identified and labeled these photos found their way to you.



Pansy Geneva, John Walton, Catherine Edna, Royal Andrew Farrish



Cora Vaughn, Mamie Daly, Nellie Ward, Grace Huntington, Pansy Farrish

Left: Charles Shorry or Shorey and Roy Farrish just returned from St. Louis World Fair

Right: Grace Pratt, Nellie Baker, Clara Ottman, Catherine Farrish, Ella Baker

Be sure to identify your own photos.



Changing Tide of Humanity Has Passed Through Doors of Former Farrish Home

(Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles describing homes of unusual background and interest in this area. Readers are invited to suggest other homes which have newsworthy histories.)

BY JANE JACKSON

A comparative infant on the list of old homes in Wisconsin Rapids, the John Farrish home, now the Episcopal Parish house on Fourth street north, has nevertheless seen a changing tide of humanity pass through its door for the past 57 years.

It was in 1888 that the huge 19-room house was completed for John Farrish and his family after the home in which they formerly lived burned down. Excavation for the new home had begun June 9, 1886. During the building of the new home, the Farrishes lived in the Naylor home, now located on Sixth street but then situated on a 6-lot site between Third and Fourth streets.

Mr. Farrish was well known in this community as a prominent lumberman. As a young man he worked on log drives on Mill creek and the Wisconsin river and in the summertime engaged in rafting lumber as far south as St. Louis. The last full fleet of lumber sawed at the Byron mills and run down the Wisconsin river in 1888 was owned by Mr. Farrish. In addition, he operated a grocery and hardware store, a retail lumber yard in Wisconsin Rapids and a logging camp on Bear creek. In 1889, with John Daly and Henry A. Sampson, he helped form the Grand Rapids Lumber company. He later gave his attention to the sale of cutover lands in Wood and Marathon counties.

A man by the name of Mercer from Wausau was responsible for the architectural planning of the Farrish home and the completed structure faced Third or what was then known as High street.

All Woodwork Hand Rubbed

Many different types of woods went into the building. What was then the south parlor, the hall and the dining room are all trimmed with white oak, and the north parlor of birch with a red birch fireplace. A downstairs bedroom was of white oak, the front bedrooms upstairs of birch and the back bedrooms of pine. All of the woodwork was hand rubbed and it took some five months for workmen to complete this one feature of the large structure. Colored glass may still be seen at the tops of the windows.

Five fire places were built into the house. They were so well constructed that, in time of necessity, the house could be kept warm and comfortable by the heat from these fire places.

Came in Handy

How useful they really were was proven when they became the main sources of heat during part of a winter when the furnace was out of commission. Inopportunistly, when the entire family was quarantined with small pox.

It is thought to be the first home in Wisconsin Rapids to have bathrooms and electric lights. Steam and hot air heated the home, the wood furnace being located near the rear of the property.

forced hot air up through the house for warmth.

The house itself, facing west, straddled two lots of the square block and the property was surrounded by a white picket fence. Back of the house stood the barns and chicken houses. Lilacs grew in profusion in the south corner of the front yard.

Witter Buys Property

When John Farrish died in 1923, the home was occupied by his family until the following year. After a time of standing idle, what is now the church and parish property was purchased by I. P. Witter in April 1926 and in May of the same year was deeded by Mr. Witter to the trustees of the diocese of Fond du Lac.

After the sale of the Farrish property, the building was subsequently moved around to face Fourth street when work on the new St. John's Episcopal church began.

After moving the house, the steps were shifted to the side of the long porch so as not to interfere with traffic on the new sidewalk.

Now taken over by the Episcopal church to serve as the Parish house, the building has been put to many uses. Church organizations now hold their meetings there, and members of Girl Scout troops traverse the long halls to their patrol gatherings. Used as USO Center

In 1943, the Red Cross Canteen corps was granted the use of the



Tribune Photo

PARISH HOUSE—A view from Fourth street of the present Episcopal church Parish house, formerly the family residence of John Farrish, shows the building to be a typical example of the architecture of the 80's during which time the house was built. The home formerly faced Third or High street before being moved to its present location.

and busy life and has changed somewhat of course from its original structure. Time has seen the carefully hand rubbed woodwork varnished over and paint has been applied to the various woods in the home. Of such strong construction, however, but one wall was cracked when the difficult move was made to swing the house around to its present position.

The present Parish house, a familiar landmark in the city of Wisconsin Rapids, is a typical example of the architecture of the 80's.

Two Fined at Point For Traffic Violations

Stevens Point—William E. Bartels, Route 2, Wisconsin Rapids, paid a \$1 fine and \$3.70 costs for double-parking on Strongs avenue in Stevens Point during the Labor

2 State Men Named To Ag Department

Washington—(AP)—W. F. Katterhenry and G. W. Gunderson, both of Madison, Wis., were appointed yesterday by the new production and marketing administration of the department of agriculture to carry out future farm production and marketing programs in Wisconsin.

Katterhenry, who is state AAA chairman, will continue to use that title and will be responsible for those operations relating chiefly to production. Gunderson was designated as the state marketing officer responsible for marketing activities. Separate offices for production and marketing will be continued.

QUAINT WEDDING CUSTOM

Union May Buy Village Of Greendale

Milwaukee — (P) — Preliminary discussions for the purchase of the model government village of Greendale, southwest of Milwaukee, by the Milwaukee county industrial union council (CIO) for development as a workers' community were revealed yesterday by Meyer Adelman, council secretary.

Walter Koening, federal manager of Greendale, said the discussions were in progress but no definite offers or commitments had been made.

Members First

Adelman said the council planned to expand the present 600 dwelling units to 6,000 with union members being given the first opportunity to buy or rent homes in the village, which would be administered by a corporation or company.

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Back Home Again

By the Associated Press

More than 5,000 servicemen en route home from Europe are scheduled to arrive at east coast ports today aboard 11 troop-carrying vessels.

Eight ships are due to dock at New York and three at Newport News, Va. No arrivals are scheduled for Boston.

Army units and troop designations include:

At New York:

(Aboard Sea Scamp) 3,000 troops including the First mobile rubber replacement detachment; Fourth

take care of its churches like it does its police and fire departments and other phases of community life. World

photo technical squadron; headquarters and headquarters detachment of 13th replacement battalion; 227th medical dispensary, aviation; 314th quartermaster battalion; 480th, 483rd, 448th, 485th aviation squadrons; 807th medical air evacuation squadron; 935th signal battalion, aviation; 1402nd, 1407th, 1408th quartermaster depot companies; 359th port battalion; 400th, 401st, 402nd replacement battalions; 1702nd engineer platoon and a group for separation. (Aboard La Grande victory) 1,943 troops including air corps and reassignment troops and 65 men for separation. (Aboard Zane Grey) 107 troops for reassignment or discharge. (Aboard Cape Boyer) 23 troops, mostly for separation. (Aboard Quachita Victory) 25 troops, rotational and miscellaneous. (Aboard Alex Clay) 8 troops for separation. (Aboard George F. Patten,) 26 miscellaneous troops. (Aboard Ariel) 44 troops, undesignated units.

undesignated units. (Aboard S. A. Douglas) 419 troops, undesignated units. (Aboard P. Seam) 14 troops, undesignated units.

APPOINTED BY TRUMAN

Washington — (P) — President Truman today appointed Adlai E. Stevenson of Chicago as deputy U. S. representative of the preparatory commission of the United Nations.

Bring Your Car In for a Thorough

Lubrication Job!

DEEP ROCK

Farrish collection - unidentified!

Deliberately Dashing . . . Our Fall Silhouettes!

Towering trends . . . jeweled accents . . . high style tempered with good taste . . . interpreted in fine felts. Your perfect suit escorts.

Choose Your Budget Hat — From

\$2 to \$15

NO GREATER COMFORT!

New life for tired feet. Come in and see how the patented air-cushion and arch-lift will help you enjoy foot-comfort.



There's Real Foot Comfort in
Weyenberg Work Oxfords! 4.95

Union Made — In Brown and Black

Airplane Stamp Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 in

Book No 3 are now valid.



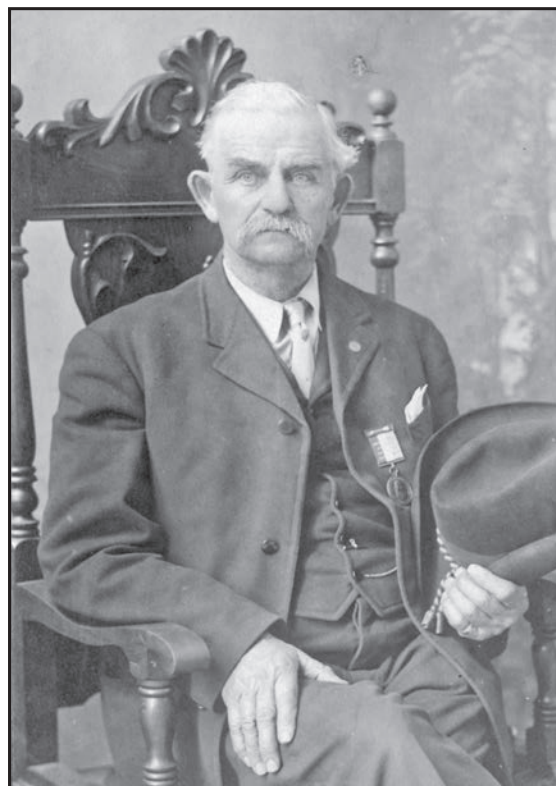
Catherine Farrish



*Donald Haley Farrish (6 months)
and Alyce Marguerite McConkle (3
years two months)*



John Walton Farrish



M.S. Pratt at 75, 1915



Alice Haley McConkle, Etta Michaels, Estella Haley Farrish, Nellie Duff, Maybelle Haley



Ethel Kelly, Nellie Ward, Mamie Daly, Pansy Farrish

For donation of these photos, thanks to Sandy Sullivan and John Farrish, and to John Steiner, Wisconsin Rapids, who helped with the process. And kudos to the anonymous persons who added names to the faces.

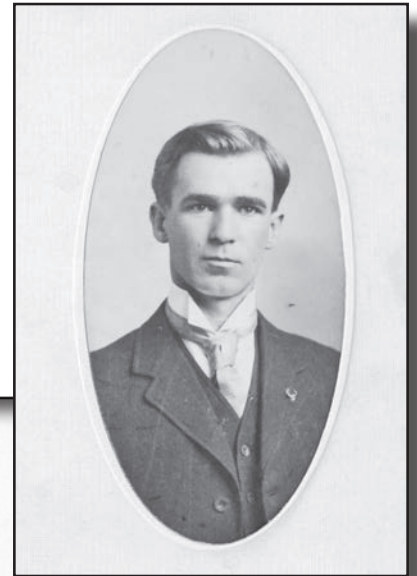


Among the photos donated by the heirs of Donald and Marion Farrish (and a generation removed, the heirs of Estella Haley Farrish, one of the founders of the South Wood County Historical Corp.) is this photo of the second bridge over the Wisconsin connecting Centralia and Grand Rapids. It replaced a wooden toll bridge and was replaced by the arched concrete structure that provided a European look to the Wisconsin Rapids of mid-20th Century. After 1900, the bridges at this location became known as the Grand Avenue Bridge.



Genevieve, Cora & Grace Pratt

Royal Andrew Farrish



James Canning house, Bessie Ellen, Jessie Viola and Catherine Farrish, Philip (baby) and Cassie Canning



Ethel Sutherland Farrish

*Donald H. Farrish 3 1/2 years
(that's what it says!)*



More soldier biographies wanted!

Reporting from the Civil War Front

By Holly Knoll, SWCHC

Our volunteers have been hard at work the past month digging up facts about some of the local Civil War boys. Their contributions give a story to a name and bring the war closer to home.

If you would like to read more stories like the one below, make sure to come over to the South Wood County Historical Museum when we open May 27, 2012. Included in the Civil War display will be more soldier biographies, which tell about the war and about life in Central Wisconsin during the mid 1800s.

If you are interested in researching a soldier, please contact Holly Knoll at holly@swch-museum.com or 715-423-1580. ASAP.

This biography was written by volunteer Diantha Neinfeldt. She is an active member of the Heart O' Wisconsin Genealogical Society.

Oliver Woolcott Pitts, Civil War Veteran

By Diantha Neinfeldt

Oliver Pitts was born January 10, 1831 in Springfield township, Bradford county, Penn., the oldest son of Luke and Louisa Pitts. After his marriage to Freeloze Chase in 1856, he decided to look for better land in the West. He had heard of the thousands of square miles of timberland in central Wisconsin, said to be free for the taking.

Oliver built a small log cabin on the banks of the Yellow River and built a mill, calling the place Pitts Mill Landing. His daughter Susie [1860 census lists "Emily"] is credited for being first white girl born in the area. When his father and the rest of the family arrived in 1858, they greatly enlarged the cabin and all lived together. After a time, their home was used by travelers as a stop off place.

By 1860, the first store in the village was established and a second daughter, Ida, was born to Oliver and Freeloze.

Oliver was 30 years old when he decided to enlist in the Civil War and joined with the 18th Wisconsin Regulars, Company G. He returned home in 1865 and found his father aging and his two little girls' strangers to him.

By 1867 Oliver and Luke Pitts Jr. resumed the operation of the family shingle mill, and continued in a partnership for eight years. Oliver's brother, Thomas, ran the store, Thomas and Luke the hotel and Oliver the family farm.

Oliver died March 12, 1879, in Eau Claire, Wis., only 48 years old. He had been working at Pond's Silver Mine on the west side of the city, and just gotten off work. He came out of the mine at the end of his shift, collapsed and died. An inquiry was held the next day, and it was decided that he died of a heart condition. A telegram was sent to his brother in Pittsville [Pitts Mill], and he was taken home by train the next night.

Oliver and his father, Luke, mother, Louisa, and Oliver's brother Thomas's wife, Susie, are buried in Founders Cemetery, Pittsville, Wis.

Oliver's daughter, Ida, married Joseph Robinson, like Oliver, a Civil War soldier. Daughter Isabella married G.D. Farmer, employed as a helper by Isabella's mother, Freeloze, after Oliver's sudden death. Susie E. married Levi Niles and at Ida's death in 1938 was living in Seattle, Wash.



Photo by Uncle Dave

Shiloh Battlefield, Tennessee, 2003

From the Roster of 18th Regiment Infantry, Company G

What happened to our boys at Shiloh:

Killed, wounded or taken prisoner

From Grand Rapids

Killed: Capt. John H. Compton; Died: Andrew Delamand.

Wounded and/or taken prisoner: Joseph Bullock; Edward W. Durkee (leg amputated); Joseph Gill (died in prison); William Granger (died); Orville A. Hall.

Taken prisoner: Robert M. Hill; Maxime Le Breche; Dennis Murphy (deserted); John J. Quick; Stephen H. Snyder; Peter T. Whitman (died); Dudley Wilcox.

From Centralia

Taken prisoner: Henry W. Jackson (died); Augustus Otto.

From Dexterville:

Anthony Jentesse, prisoner; Lucius Vaughn, wounded, deserted.

Co. G members not killed, wounded or captured at Shiloh

Grand Rapids

Frank B. Case; Joseph L. Cotey; James R. Scott; John Snyder; Benjamin Buck; James L. Grundy; Samuel A Hingley, died Keokuk, Iowa, 1862; Michael W. Huff; Thomas Hunneybum; Peter Johnson; Andrew J. Loomis; John Mahoney; Edwin Mahoney; Matthew McRaith Jr., disability; Charles F. Miller; William M Smith, deserted; Henry E. Snyder; Andrew Strand; Zenas A. Streeter; Sydney Verbeck, deserted.

Centralia:

Franklin H. Moshier; Ira B. Parkhurst; Paul View, died 1862.

Dexterville:

Samuel Gilson, Dexterville (died of disease); Oliver W. Pitts; Thomas W. Pitts; John S. Vaughn.

Gross: natural-born showman

Show tonight!

The youngest theater owner pulls his coaster wagon through the neighborhood, hawking his repertoire; clips of locals taken with his dad's camera; an educational strip; comics to be run forward and then backward when a double feature is wanted.

It is January 1938. The theater that 13-year-old Paul Gross has set up consists of a homemade stage and 25 folding chairs in the cellar of his parents' home. A promising start for the young man who is to become, through a series of movies and videotapes, the pre-eminent pictorial chronicler of River City.

A few years after his beginnings in the movie game, Gross was hating his first "real job," peddling shoes at Johnson Hill's department store, when Ron Desper and Mike Stewart sat down as if they were customers. They wanted to know if Gross was interested in becoming an apprentice at the Wisconsin theater, where they worked as projectionists. "My God, I thought I died and went to Heaven," Gross said in a 2002 interview.

The owner of the theater, Mrs. Harriet [Henrietta] Eckhardt, "hated Ron," said Gross. "Because when the Wisconsin got built, these guys waited until it all got in motion and then they went on strike to be unionized, meaning each of the three theaters had to have two projectionists. That raised heck with their budget. Unions were so strong that, during the strike, attendance at the three theaters dropped right off."

Gross said the Palace, a building that now houses the Central Wisconsin Cultural Center, 240 Johnson St., was

the favorite of the projectionists. The theater had an intriguing Spanish motif. House lights dimmed artfully, a "cloud machine" moved shapes across the ceiling and lights on the ceiling resembled stars.

Mrs. Eckhardt and her husband also had remodeled the Ideal Theater, said Gross, and changed the name to "Rapids." The actual Ideal/Rapids structure was owned by the Stark family and later by Tom Poulos of the Sugar Bowl restaurant. It is now Rogers Cinema, 220 E. Grand Ave.

After his 1941 graduation from Lincoln High School, Gross stayed at the theaters until he was called to Consolidated's Biron paper mill lab. "The war had started. They were hiring like crazy and paying real good."

In 1943, Gross left Biron to enter military service. The year after the war's end, he returned to the lab.

"I wanted to go out on dates and all this kind of stuff. I thought, boy would it be good to have a day job, so I asked to get transferred to the office at Biron. That was the most boring job I ever had in my life, sitting there making out payroll checks and all that stuff all day long. So I quit and went to Alaska for a little while."

In the summer of 1947, Gross returned from Alaska and tried the freelance movie game. The first show site was downtown Rudolph. But when Main Street merchants bickered about who should pay and how much, Gross decided once there was enough.

The usual Monday show was sponsored by Rose and Roy's root beer stand at a field on the north side of Baker Street in the vicinity of the present Quality Foods IGA. "We used to get over 500 people jammed

in there. Made about 35 bucks for a night. That was a lot of money then."

Other locations for free shows included the corner of Griffith and 8th Street; the village of Bancroft; the Vesper bandstand; the Port Edwards School; and the Biron community hall on a screen painted on the wall. "There was no TV in those days," he said. "It was amazing what we'd go look at."

Exclusively viewed in black-and-white were previews, cartoons and feature films, "same as in the theater, but they were older ones."

After attending a Michigan watchmaker school on the GI bill, Gross, in 1948, apprenticed under jeweler Earl Larson at Johnson Hill's, "the only air-conditioned store in town." It was also the only building with a public elevator.

Johnson Hill's was a full-service, high quality department store on four levels. In the basement: meat, groceries and hardware. Clothes and shoes on the first floor. Offices and a restaurant on the mezzanine. "We all used to congregate up there before the store opened."

Sport shop. Beauty parlor. Bakery. Tailor. One-stop shopping. A "tube system" transported payments and receipts. Gross said at least one office gal sent a watch to him for repair via the tube.

He noted many employees had been with the firm for many years. "At five o'clock," Larson told him, "it looked like the old folks home letting out."

When Johnson Hill's was built, Gross said, it was called "the Marshall Field's of the north" and much of the stock was obtained through the Chicago firm. Gross said Johnson Hill's owner Ray Johnson prided



Originally published 2002

himself on copying what friends at Prange's department store of Green Bay did. "He'd have store meetings and tell how you did this and that and he tried to run a fine store."

The day in 1951 that Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln won the state basketball tournament, Gross was preparing for his watchmaker's license exam to be held the following Monday in Milwaukee. On Sunday, when the team came back from Madison and "half the town" went out to meet the victors at Smoky Joe's Corners, Gross was still studying. He told his wife to go to the celebration without him. "Tomorrow, we're leaving for Milwaukee. I just gotta keep practicing."

When he had worked at the Biron lab, Gross said, workers took the company bus to stand in line at the Daly drug, jewelry and liquor store. On payday, the banks closed, and they wanted to cash their checks.

Later, watchmaker license in hand, Gross left Johnson Hill's and moved to Daly's, an east side riverbank landmark, where he operated the jewelry department for three years.

He recalled a Christmas contest in which a small black-and-white television was to be the prize. When he left on a Friday night to go home for supper, the store was empty of customers. When he came back, Gross could hardly squeeze behind the counter, he said, there was such a crowd, because everyone had qualified for the prize.

"So much for me running a contest," he said, "Pick a winner out of a hat."

In another promotion, girls, upon high school graduation were allowed to pick out a free silver spoon to begin a set. The purpose was defeated when

one girl chose a pattern and enlisted a flock of other graduates to pick up free spoons to match.

When jeweler Larson left Johnson Hill's, circa 1955, Gross took his place in the jewelry department.

The store was under new management. When owner Ray Johnson considered selling the store, said Gross, accountants Chester Bell and Irving Moberg, "came up here to study the books and get it all organized, so that Johnson would know how much to charge." Instead, said Gross, Bell and Moberg bought the store in 1952.

"Then Bell and Moberg wanted to get their buying power up by buying more stores. They went over to Marshfield and bought two stores there, one on each end of the town. Then they closed one of them. They also affiliated with a store in Beaver Dam. They got wind of a store in Iowa and they were going to buy that, so they sent a guy down to Iowa to pretend he was a shopper, kind of a spy.

"Apparently, he went out at night and had a few snorts and made the mistake of telling people what he was down there for. The word got back to the management and he blew the whole thing."

Gross recalled Rapids' Ridkalas Daze. "In the first few years, it was really good because merchants weren't going out and buying merchandise for it. That was stuff they really wanted to unload, their white elephants."

Johnson Hill's brought out "stuff from the attic."

"I didn't even know they had an attic," he said, "Maybe it was just a term. They were selling dresses they had up there for 35 cents."

Gross recalled fondly that Ed Bredow, a Johnson Hill's clothing salesman, had a reputation for pranks. He hooked up a phone to the men's dressing room and sent customers in to try on a pair of pants. About the time the guy got the pants on, Ed would ring the phone in the dressing room. Then he'd say, "By God, those look good."

"When they built the YMCA, it was John Alexander's pride and joy. They said the room where you first came in was an extension of his house so he could throw parties when it was closed.

"Ed Bredow went down to the Y for the grand opening. He dressed up like a hobo. He even had a small cigar with a toothpick in it. He had whiskers and old ragged clothes. He's sitting there paging through all the magazines and nobody knew who he was so they didn't want to throw him out."

In 1958, Gross sold the Johnson Hill's shop to Bill Johns and went to Florida for six months. He returned to this area via the Denis drug store in Nekoosa, where he operated the jewelry and repair department. After a year, the Daly's jewelry department opened up again and Gross stayed there until he started his own store in 1978.

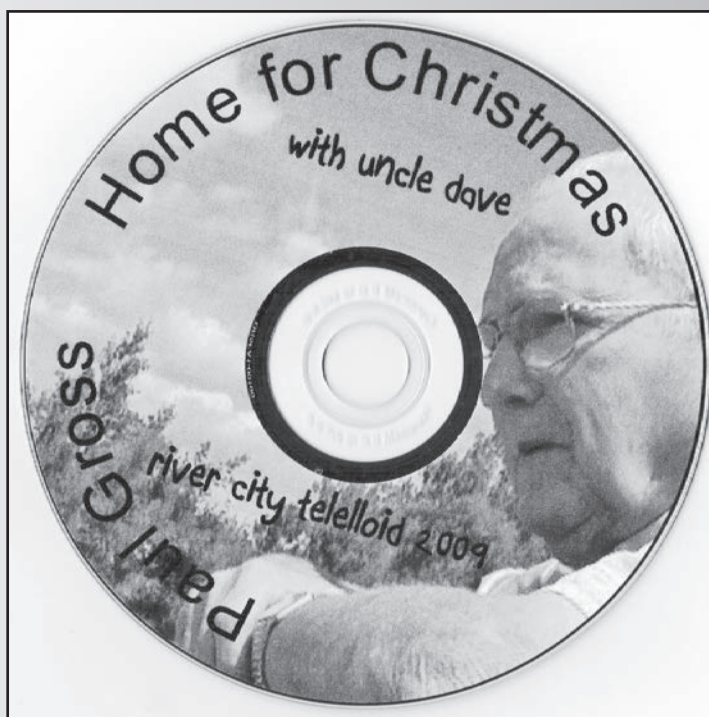
A couple of years later, on a snowy day in the spring of the year, he recalls, as part of an ongoing riverbank beautification project, the Daly's building was razed, along with the Sugar Bowl, Penney's and the rest of the riverbank block.

Paul Gross didn't put it this way but somebody might. That when Daly's went down, it was kind of like a big chunk of the '50s tumbled into the river and floated away.



Gross Telelloid partners with SWCHC

One of the most productive historians to work in Wisconsin Rapids, former jeweler Paul Gross has accepted an invitation to move his movie production studio into the SWCHC Museum. Gross, a long time supporter of SWCHC and this publication, will continue to research, direct and produce historical videos while occupying first floor office space overlooking the Wisconsin river. In connection with this venture, he has contributed many valuable DVDs and archival photographs to the Museum collection.



Dr. Documento meets Movie Mogul

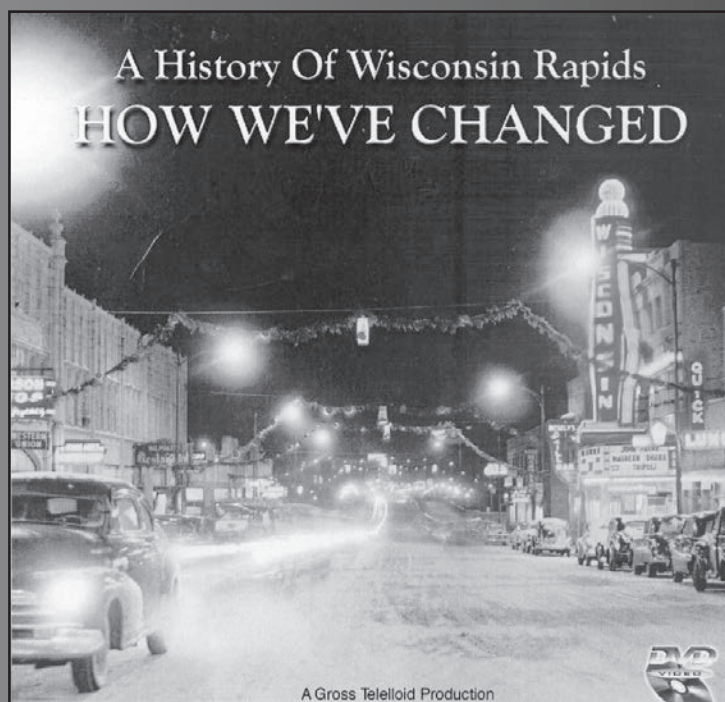
Turning the tables on the distinguished videographer in 2009, Uncle Dave put on his "Dr. Documento" hat, dusted off his Panasonic camcorder and compiled footage of Paul Gross himself. The video interview proceed from Paul's boyhood home on First Street North to the Clock Tower and Barmuda Triangle to McMillan Memorial Library and, finally, to old Lincoln High School. Entitled "Home for Christmas," the DVD can be purchased for \$12 by request postpaid from the Museum.





Gift that Keeps on Giving

Paul Gross videos have been popular Christmas presents but they're just as good all year round. Thanks to Paul for playing historical Santa Claus all these years.



The following videos on A HISTORY OF CENTRAL WISCONSIN are available on DVD at PAUL GROSS JEWELERS and at the SO. WOOD COUNTY HISTORICAL CORP.

Available from the Museum: 540 Third Street South, 715-423-1580

The cost of the following DVDs \$25.00 Tax included. If purchased as a set (A thru F), \$125.00

- | | |
|---|---|
| A: HOW IT WAS - WISCONSIN RAPIDS 1930 (1965) | D: THE EAST SIDE PART TWO (1974) |
| B: THE EAST SIDE PART ONE (1972) | E: THE RAILROADS AND INDUSTRY (1975) |
| C: THE WEST SIDE (1973) | F: TOM TAYLOR'S DAYS (1976) |

The Following DVDs are priced at \$20.00 Tax included

- G:** AFTER THE WAR PART ONE - THE WEST SIDE (1998)
H: PART TWO - THE EAST SIDE (1999) **I:** PART THREE - OUR RECENT PAST (2000)
J: FROM LUMBER TO PAPER - THE NEKOOSA PORT EDWARDS STORY (2000)
K: HISTORY BY REQUEST - VOLUME ONE (2001) **L:** VOLUME TWO (2002)
M: A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN BILLINGS (2003)
N: HISTORY BY REQUEST - VOLUME THREE (2003) **O:** A WALK WITH JOHN BILLINGS (2004)
P: HISTORY BY REQUEST - VOLUME FOUR (2004) **Q:** VOLUME FIVE - OUR INDUSTRIAL PAST (2005)
R: OUR PICTURE POSTCARD PAST - PART ONE (2006) **S:** ONCE UPON A TRUCK (2007)
T: OUR PICTURE POSTCARD PAST - PART TWO (2007)
U: WISCONSIN RAPIDS - A BIRD'S EYE VIEW (2008) **V:** THE PAPER VILLAGE (2009)
W: LEGACY (2010) **X:** THE GOOD OLD DAYS (2011) **Y:** HOW WE'VE CHANGED (2011)

ALL OF THE ABOVE MAY BE PURCHASED AS A SET (23 DVDs) @ \$435.00
 FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION - PAUL GROSS @ (715) 421-0446



South Wood County Historical Corp.
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Wisconsin Rapids WI 54494

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

